

GENDERING THE LITERACY CLASSROOM: TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICE

Tennisha Morris*

The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus

Abstract: *This paper examines the way in which teachers' beliefs about gender emerge in the literacy classroom, and how these beliefs inform their teaching practices. The paper provides an entry point into exploring and understanding the messages, perceptions and practices that inform unspoken gender rules and the implications these have on literacy learners. The study on which this paper is based was conducted over a period of 21 months with 11 teachers in a primary school in Barbados. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and observations and analysed through a socio-cultural lens. Data was presented through descriptive prose. The findings show that teachers' beliefs about gender influence how they think about literacy and the practices they employ in the literacy classroom. The findings also indicate that teachers believe that boys and girls learn differently but that this belief was not considered during formal literacy lessons. The study contributes a new perspective in the investigation of gender in the literacy classroom. It moves beyond a comparison of the test scores of boys and girls and examines how beliefs about gender emerge and influence what happens in the literacy classroom.*

Keywords: *gender ideologies, literacy development, teaching practices*

*Corresponding Author (tennisha.morris@gmail.com)

ISSN 1727-5512

Copyright © School of Education, The University of the West Indies Cave Hill (2022)

REFERENCES

- Bailey, B. (2000). *Issues of gender and education in Jamaica: What about the boys?* UNESCO.
- Bausch, L. S. (2014). *Boys will be boys? Bridging the great gendered literacy divide*. Sense.
- Bristol, T. J. (2015). Teaching boys: Towards a theory of gender-relevant pedagogy. *Gender and Education*, 27(1), 53-68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2014.986067>
- Brozo, W. (2019). *Engaging boys in active literacy: Evidence and practice*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108654111>
- Delamont, S. (2012). *Sex roles and the school*. Routledge.
- Dennis, D. (2015, September 15). Teachers to be trained to improve the way boys learn. <http://jis.gov.jm/teachers-to-be-trained-to-improve-the-way-boys-learn/>
- Dutro, E. (2002). But that's a girls' book! Exploring gender boundaries in children's reading practices. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(4), 376-384.
- Dutro, E. (2003). Us boys like to read football and boy stuff: Reading masculinities, performing boyhood. *Journal of Literacy Research* 34(4), 465-500. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15548430jlr3404_4
- Evans, H. (1999). *Gender and achievement in secondary education in Jamaica*. Policy Development Unit, Planning Institute of Jamaica.
- Evans, H. (2001). *Inside Jamaican schools*. University of the West Indies Press.
- Figueroa, M. (1997, November 26-28). *Gender differentials in educational achievement in Jamaica and other Caribbean territories* [Conference Presentation]. Conference on "Intervention Strategies to Address Male Underperformance in Primary and Secondary Education", Port of Spain, Trinidad.
- Figueroa, M. (2004). Male privileging and male "academic underperformance" in Jamaica. In R. Reddock (Ed.), *Interrogating Caribbean masculinities: Theoretical and empirical analyses* (pp.137-166). University of West Indies Press.

- Garcia, A., & Slesaransky-Poe, G. (2010). The heteronormative classroom: Questioning and liberating practices. *Teacher Education*, 45(4), 244-256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730.2010.508271>
- Gilbert, R., & Gilbert, P. (1998). *Masculinity goes to school*. Routledge.
- Graff, J. M. (2009). Girls as struggling readers: Delineating the sociopolitical and sociocultural terrains of books and reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44(4), 357-359.
- Gurian, M., & Stevens, K. (2005). *The minds of boys: Saving our sons from falling behind in school and life*. Jossey-Bass.
- Gurian, M., Henley, P., Stevens, K., & Truman, T. (2001). *Boys and girls learn differently: A guide for teachers and parents*. Jossey-Bass.
- Hammett, R., & Sanford, K. (2008). *Boys, girls and the myth of literacies and learning*. Canadian Scholars Press.
- James, A. N. (2007). *Teaching the male brain: How boys think, feel, and learn in school*. Corwin.
- Kehler, M. (2010). Boys, books and homophobia: Exploring the practices and policies of masculinities in school. *McGill Journal of Education*, 45(3), 351-370. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1003567ar>
- Kimmel, M. (2010). *Boys and school: A background paper on the "boy crisis"*. Fritze.
- Lever-Chain, J. (2008). Turning boys off? Listening to what five-year-olds say about reading. *Literacy*, 42(2), 83-91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4369.2008.00488.x>
- Martino, W., & Berrill, D. (2003). Boys, schooling, and masculinities: Interrogating the 'right' way to educate boys. *Educational Review*, 55(2), 99-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910303260>
- McGeown, S., Goodwin, H., Henderson, N., & Wright, P. (2012). Gender differences in reading motivation: Does sex or gender identity provide a better account? *Journal of Research in Reading*, 35(3), 328-336. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1467-9817.2010.01481.X>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

- Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (2002). *The qualitative researcher's companion*. SAGE.
- Millard, E. (1997). *Differently literate*. Falmer Press.
- Miller, E. (1991). *Men at risk*. Jamaica Publishing House.
- Miller, E. (1994). *Marginalization of the black male: Insights from the development of the teaching profession*. Canoe Press.
- Myhill, D., & Jones, S. (2006). She doesn't shout at no girls: Pupils' perceptions of gender equity in the classroom. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(1), 99-113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640500491054>
- Newkirk, T. (2002). *Misreading masculinity: Boys, literacy and popular culture*. Heinemann.
- Newman, D. (2012). *Sociology: Exploring the architecture of everyday life*. SAGE.
- Parry, O. (2000). *Male underachievement in high school education: Jamaica, Barbados and St. Vincent and the Grenadines*. Canoe Press.
- Parry, O. (2004). Masculinities, myths, and educational underachievement: Jamaica, Barbados, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In R. Reddock (Ed.), *Interrogating Caribbean masculinities: Theoretical and empirical analyses* (pp. 167-184). University of West Indies Press.
- Pressley, M., & Allington, R. L. (2014). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching* (4th ed.). Guilford.
- Rivers, C., & Barnett, R. C. (2013). *The truth about girls and boys: Challenging toxic stereotypes about our children*. Columbia University Press.
- Rowan, L., Knobel, M., Bigum, C., & Lankshear, C. (2002). *Boys, literacies, and schooling: The dangerous territories of gender-based literacy reform*. Open University Press.
- Rubie-Davies, C. M., Flint, A., & McDonald, L. G. (2012). Teacher beliefs, teacher characteristics and school contextual factors: What are the relationships? *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82(2), 270-288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.2011.02025.x>

Gendering the Literacy Classroom

- Sadker, D. (2000). Gender equity: Still knocking at the classroom door. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 33(1), 80-83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1066568000330112>
- Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (2010). *Failing at fairness: How America's schools cheat girls*. Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Sax, L. (2007). The boy problem: Many boys think school is stupid and reading stinks. Is there a remedy? *School Library Journal*, 53(9), 40-43.
- Sax, L. (2010). Sex differences in hearing: Implications for best practice in the classroom. *Advances in Gender and Education*, 2, 13-21.
- Senn, N. (2012). Effective approaches to motivate and engage reluctant boys in literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(3), 211-220.
- She, H. C. (2000). The interplay of a biology teacher's beliefs, teaching practices and gender-based student-teacher classroom interaction. *Educational Research*, 42(1), 100-111. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/001318800363953>
- Sommers, C. H. (2013). *The war against boys: How misguided policies are harming our young men*. Simon & Schuster.
- Stanchfield, J. M. (1973). *Sex differences in learning to read*. Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.
- Sullivan, M. (2004). Why Johnny won't read: Schools often dismiss what boys like. No wonder they're not wild about reading. *School Library Journal*, 50(8), 36-39.
- Sullivan, M. (2009). Book groups the way boys like 'em: How to appeal to a notoriously elusive audience. *American Libraries*, 40(5), 46-48.
- Tiedemann, J. (2002). Teachers' gender stereotypes as determinants of teacher perceptions in elementary school mathematics. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 50(1), 49-62. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1020518104346>
- Warrican, S. J. (2005). *Hard words: The challenge of reading and writing for Caribbean students and their teachers*. Ian Randle.

Weaver-Hightower, M. (2003). The "boy turn" in research on gender and education. *Review of Educational Research*, 73(4), 471-498.

<https://doi.org/10.3102%2F00346543073004471>

Worthy, J., Moorman, M., & Turner, M. (1999). What Johnny likes to read is hard to find in school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34(1), 12-27.

Wray, D., & Medwell, J. (2013). *Literacy and language in the primary years*. Routledge.