KIDS ARE GOING TO THINK GIRLS CAN'T BE SUPER HEROES:
USING PRAXIS TO CHALLENGE THE GENDERED ATTITUDES AND
BEHAVIOURS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

by

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Feminists and academics concerned with the inequities between the education that a boy gets at school and that of a girl, have examined the role the education system and, in particular, teachers, have played in creating and maintaining those inequities. These researchers have produced a wealth of advice that teachers can draw on to make changes in their own classroom practise. Unfortunately, this advice tends to take a fix-the-teacher approach, ignoring the implications and effects on classroom practise of the gendered behaviours and attitudes that children learn and have reinforced throughout their lives outside of school as well as within. To effectively initiate change in the gender inequities in classrooms, teachers need to collaborate with their students both to identify and understand the behaviours and attitudes that constrain equity in order to decide on a course of action to take to address that inequity.

I argue that to implement significant and enduring changes to the gendered behaviour and attitudes of both themselves and their students, teachers need to be involved in the highly collaborative process of praxis research. Further, I contend that, in the course of completing my Master's of Arts degree in Education, I conducted a multilayered praxis research project involving my elementary school students and myself in one layer and myself and my university professors in another. The success of the praxis lies in the effective collaboration that I experienced in both layers. Inherent in praxis research is a never-ending and overlapping cycle of action and reflection continually working towards the illumination of forms of social injustice. Once the researcher understands the inner workings of that injustice they can take critical action to relieve the injustice. Finally they assess the action taken
and then redefine the problem on which they will base the next round of research.

This thesis chronicles the four research cycles that I went through as I investigated my concerns about gender inequity and illustrates, using personal examples, the nature of the collaborative roles of my students and my professors. The personal examples include both accounts of what I did in the classroom and how the children responded and citations from papers that I wrote for the university courses that I was taking. As I progressed through cycles one to four, I redefined the problem from one of how to fix-the-teacher to one of how to involve the children explicitly in addressing the issue of sexism in the classroom. Each cycle moved forward both my understanding and the students understanding of what was happening in our classroom and enabled us not only to initiate some satisfactory changes to our gendered behaviours and attitudes but also to critically assess some less than satisfactory results.

This thesis contributes to the literature on gender equity in the elementary school classroom by rejecting the popular notion that teachers alone are responsible for the sexism in schools. The “fix-the-teacher” approach neither acknowledges that the children as well as their teachers come to school with gendered baggage nor recognises the complex gendered social web that baggage creates in any classroom. While I demonstrate that teachers and students collaborating for gender equity most certainly can address inequity, I also conclude that they cannot definitively resolve the issue.
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Although, in the body of this thesis, I argue that two layers of praxis mutually informed this research, in fact, my family formed a third layer in the research. Long before I wrote them down, my family listened to, laughed at, commented on and commiserated with me over the classroom stories I recount. Their comments helped me to see my research from different angles and to try new approaches; and their reflections on my achievements enabled me to celebrate my successes.

Without the children in my classes at Westridge and Morley elementary schools there would be no thesis. They are the heart and soul of the research and it is their stories that make the research come alive.
This thesis chronicles the praxis research I conducted over five years while I worked towards my Master of Arts degree in Education. It is a didactic piece. In it I use personal examples to support my argument that to implement significant and enduring changes to the gendered behaviour and attitudes of both themselves and their students, teachers need to be involved in the highly collaborative process of praxis research. Praxis research is openly committed to collaboration between the researchers and the researched as they work for a more just social order. In part this thesis addresses the concern Kathleen Weiler (1988) expressed that "particularly lacking are ethnographic and qualitative studies investigating the impact of feminist ideas on teachers and students" (p.2). The thesis is situated, however, in my personal account of what happened from the Fall of 1991 to the Summer of 1996 between the children and me in my classrooms in Burnaby and between my professors and me at the University of British Columbia. As such it responds to the hope stated by Thomas Barone "for the kind of meaningful educational reform that empowers school people to tell their own critical stories to themselves and to us all" (p.146). However, unlike Barone, whose chief concern is that critical storytelling "make palpable and comprehensible the pain and cruelty of isolation inflicted on ... students, teachers and administrators enmeshed in our institutions of education" (p.146), my focus is on making palpable the support, encouragement and pleasure I got from collaborating with my students and my university professors.

This thesis contributes to the literature on gender equity in the elementary school classroom by rejecting the popular notion that teachers alone are responsible for the sexism in schools. This "fix-the-teacher" approach neither acknowledges that the
children as well as their teachers come to school with gendered baggage nor recognises the complex gendered social web that baggage creates in any classroom. While I demonstrate that teachers and students collaborating for gender equity most certainly can address inequity, I conclude that they cannot definitively resolve the issue.
In the Fall of 1991, as I was beginning my fifth year of teaching, a brief interaction with one of my pupils had a profound and what has become a lasting affect on my classroom practise. The dismissal bell had rung several minutes earlier and the children in my grade four class were all busy putting on their coats and getting organised to go home for the day. Charlotte came to tell me that she would be able to continue to live with her mother because her paternal grandparents had lost the custody dispute. Although I was able to respond to her in a manner that satisfied her, I was stunned - not by Charlotte's news - but by the realisation that if she had not approached me with this wonderful news, I would not have spoken to her, much less thought about her for the entire day. Upon careful reflection, I realised that this happened far too frequently, not just with Charlotte, but with all the girls in my class. In a paper I wrote in December, 1993, for Dr. Linda Peterat, I stated that after this incident in a "context of isolation without collaboration ...I began my research". I was wrong. I had, in fact, just begun the more formal and highly collaborative stage of a complicated and multi-layered praxis research process which involved the students and myself in one layer, and my university professors and the course work I was doing in another layer. Without the collaboration of one or another of these layers praxis would not have happened.

Inherent in praxis research is a never-ending and overlapping process of action and reflection continually working towards the illumination of forms of social injustice; understanding of the inner workings of that injustice and finally through the

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1 With the exception of the two pupils whose names were published in the newspaper, each of the children quoted in this thesis are identified by pseudonyms.
illumination and understanding, critical action to relieve the injustice (Brieschke, 1992; Carson, 1990; Freire, 1995; Lather, 1986; McCutcheon & Jung, 1990). Each dimension of my research process drove the praxis in different but complementary ways. One aspect was never distinct from another but rather they merged together to feed one another. The children in my classes and our gendered relationships and behaviours were always the focus. Not only did I reflect about and with the children in different ways but it was in the classroom itself that the critical action phases of my research took place.

Interweaving with the critical action that I did in the classroom was the critical reflection that I did at the university in weekly class discussions about our readings and in writing course papers. I related the weekly course readings and seminar discussions directly to what was happening in my classroom. Comments or questions by a professor or fellow graduate student often triggered changes to my practise. I looked forward to the weekly classes. When fellow teachers commented on the amount of extra work doing this degree must be adding to my load, I responded that I loved attending classes because they provided time (a rarity in our profession) to talk critically about what I was doing in my classroom. Not only did this help me to clarify what I understood was “happening” in my classroom and thus in my research but it also enhanced my enjoyment of the day-to-day teaching routine which, in fact, became less routine. Moreover, my professors accepted papers discussing the progress and state of my research as it related to the focus of their course. In turn, each offered insights into what I was doing. In doing so they valued and encouraged the research process that I had undertaken.

Praxis is a form of research which evolved from the broader field of action research.
More specifically, praxis is a subset of the area of action research designated as critical action research. To understand the nature of praxis, we must first know what is intended by the terms "action research" and "critical action research". Action research originated with Kurt Lewin in the 1930's and 1940's, as he “tried to make social science knowledge more responsive to significant social problems” (Carson, 1992, p.ii). Dale Ripley and Charles Hart (1992) neatly summarise the notions embedded in action research:

As opposed to more traditional forms of research, action research requires that the researcher become actively involved in the research, not simply as a passive observer, but as an active participant in what is going on with the research. It is the objective of action research projects to make something better. Therefore, the focus of any action research project must be upon reflective action, upon the doing, as opposed to simply observing and learning. (p.31)

Translated to an education setting, action research in education is research which involves academics and practitioners collaborating to identify, research, reflect upon, discuss and report on a question they have about teaching practise or theory. It often, though not necessarily, takes place in a school classroom. The researchers may be trying to explain what causes certain outcomes - a positivist view; they may be conducting research to understand what is happening in a given situation - an interpretivist view; or they may be doing praxis research with the goal of changing practise to work towards a more equitable social order - a critical view (Lather, 1986; McCutcheon and Jung, 1990). The intent of action research is to bridge the "gap" between theory and practise so that both will be enriched.

In any of its forms or "shifts" (Carson, 1992, p.iii), action research follows a pattern of reflecting, planning, acting, reflecting, and replanning that is known as the spiral cycle (Tripp, 1990, p.159). This cycle involves identifying a problem (reflecting),
deciding what action to take about that problem (planning), implementing the action (acting), assessing the results of the action (reflecting), and finally, deciding how to modify the action based on the assessment (replanning). This process is conducted collaboratively between practitioners who are well-versed in and directly dealing with the problems facing educators today and academics who are informed on current educational theory.

The purpose of critical action research or praxis is to “uncover and understand what constrains equity and supports hegemony... and to change practise toward more equity” (McCutcheon and Jung, 1990, p.47). Patti Lather (1986) defines praxis research as a “research approach openly committed to a more just social order” (p.258). She considers the goal of research as praxis is, on the one hand, to provide the researched with the opportunity to understand, question, and change their social environment while, on the other hand, the “praxis-oriented inquirers both begin to grasp the necessary conditions for people to engage in ideological critique and transformative action” (p.268). Liz Stanley (1990) adds a collaborative dimension to this definition by stating that in praxis research “the researcher/theorist is grounded as an actual person in a concrete setting” (p.12). To further implicate the researcher in the inquiry process, Charlene Eldridge Wheeler (1989) argues that “praxis is values made visible through deliberate action” (p.2). Praxis, she continues, happens when “we are living our values” (p.2). The goal of critical action research in education is “a new kind of school and a new society” (Carson, 1990, p.168).

Five years ago, when I first started to examine closely how I treated boys and girls in my class, I was convinced that if only I could change my daily practice by eliminating my own sexist behaviours and attitudes, there would be no distinctions
between the education that boys and girls received in my classroom. Available literature on the subject of addressing sexism in the classroom supported my conviction. This literature contains a host of alarming statistics outlining the discrepancies between a "boys education" and a "girls education". Teachers interact at least three times more frequently with their male students than with their female students (Gaskell, McLaren & Novogrodsky, 1989; Sadker & Sadker, 1989); teachers accord much more positive attention to boys than to girls (Stanworth, 1981 as cited in Spender, 1989); teachers acknowledge and encourage divergent thinking from boys and discourage it from girls (Walkerdine, 1989); teachers use the available children's literature which contains up to five times as many male characters as female characters (Steinem, 1992) and tends to validate the traditional male/female dichotomy of our society; teachers watch their male students take up more physical space in the classroom and on the playground than their female students (Spender, 1989); teachers respect boys who ask questions and challenge them but discourage similar behaviour from girls (Spender, 1989). In her book, The Unfinished Revolution (1991), Doris Anderson, sums up the prevailing wisdom: We must root out - once and for all - sex stereotyping and sexist attitudes on the part of teachers in schools, where it still flourishes... (p.281).

I quickly discovered that other feminists, researchers and teachers, concerned by the serious shortcomings of girls' education, have produced a wealth of advice and recommendations that practising teachers can draw on to reduce sexism in the classroom. By the Fall of 1992, however, I had concluded that these suggestions for change in teachers' practise fall into two contradictory approaches which are both difficult to reconcile and to realise in a classroom - gender neutrality and gender difference (Acker, 1988; Gaskell, McLaren & Novogrodsky, 1989; Spender, 1989).
In the former case proponents of a gender neutral classroom argue that teachers who are sensitive to their own biases and those of society in general should be able to create a classroom in which boys and girls have the same experiences. In the latter case, supporters of teaching practises based on gender differences contend that girls think and learn differently from boys. Because teachers generally employ methods suited to boys’ learning, girls lose out, particularly in those academic subjects, such as science and math, in which they appear to be less successful than boys. If teachers recognise these differences and teach accordingly, then girls will have as satisfactory a time in school as do boys.

Each camp argues compellingly in favour of choosing its approach over the other. In gender neutral classrooms teachers would directly address the discrepancies between a boy’s education and a girl’s education which were outlined above. They would make sure that they interact as many times with boys as with girls; give as much positive attention to girls as to boys; acknowledge divergent thinking from girls as well as boys; read as many stories with female main characters as male main characters; read stories with non-stereotypical characters; and encourage girls to ask probing questions. Furthermore teachers concerned with gender neutrality would ensure that girls and boys have equal opportunity to join service clubs so that boys feel comfortable working as an office monitor or supervising the younger students at lunch time while girls run school traffic patrol and help with audiovisual equipment. Gender neutral teachers would also eliminate the separateness of the two sexes by eliminating single sex groups, partnerships and lines. As the authors of the British Columbia Primary Program policy document so blandly advise, by “inviting and encouraging all children to participate in all activities, teachers [will] provide equal access to education for both boys and girls” (British Columbia Ministry
Notions embedded in the concept of gender differences are more complicated and multi-faceted than those of gender neutrality. Although unable to conclude whether the differences between boys and girls are biological or environmental, supporters of this theory are convinced that, when they arrive at school, boys and girls are different and that those differences will persist. Schools must not only recognise those differences but also act on them to change teaching practices. The actions teachers should take depend on which model of the gender differences theory they subscribe to. The least appealing is the deficit model which argues that girls lack what it takes to participate fully in school life. This theory blames the girls for somehow creating the inequality in the first place. According to this model, the teacher must give girls extra help so that they learn the skills they need to become full, active members of a class. Further, teachers should introduce adult role models to girls so that they witness their own potential. In their research Jim Gaskell and Arlene McLaren (1995) found how crucial it is that these role models be presented to the students. One teenage girl commented to them that “in all the textbooks and stuff all you see is guys...a lot in math and sciences. That’s all you really see. You start thinking, ‘Oh maybe it’s because females can’t really do that’...” (p.148).

In another version of the gender differences theory, proponents argue that girls do lack the inquisitive characteristics associated with active learning but that it is not their fault. Jane Butler Kahle (1990) claims that in this instance it is their life experience in a sexist society that creates the differences. She points out that girls tend not to have the opportunity to play with as many manipulative toys such as blocks, tools, or lego as do boys. While parents, teachers and other care givers give
positive reinforcement for passive behaviour in girls such as playing, reading or working quietly, such people give positive reinforcement for active behaviour to boys, such as chasing after balls on the playground, climbing trees to look in bird’s nests or looking at slugs under a hand lens. Thus “boys’ experiences provide them with backgrounds, interests and attitudes that are important for later achievement” (Kahle, 1990, p.55). Kahle (1990) further suggests that, to overcome these differences, teachers “need to provide girls with the extra time and opportunities to do science in order to get the same level of performance that teachers anticipate and encourage from boys” (p.57). Inherent in this version of the gender differences theory is the understanding that the girls need to make up for lost time and opportunities. Furthermore it sets the male standard as the norm that females must attain.

Yet another approach to gender differences moves a step further in claiming that schools need to be made “girl friendly”. This approach is premised in the notion that girls both think and learn differently from boys and that teachers must address this female style of thinking and learning. In Women’s Ways of Knowing, Belenky,Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) argue that because “our major educational institutions...were originally founded by men for the education of men ... relatively little attention has been given to modes of learning, knowing, and valuing that may be specific to, or at least common in, women”(p.6). Belenky et al conclude this very influential and oft cited study that women - and, one can infer, girls - develop best from teaching that is “connected” not “separate”. In classrooms where teaching is “separate”, the teacher imparts truth to the students who are viewed as repositories waiting to be filled with knowledge. “Connected” teaching not only “emphasises understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration
over debate" but also respects "the knowledge that emerges from first hand experience" and instead of "imposing expectations and arbitrary requirements [it] encourages students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are pursuing" (Belenky et al, 1986, p.229).

For about a year I struggled to balance these differing approaches to find practical ways to make changes in my own sexist practise. For two compelling reasons most of the changes that I made came under the gender-neutral approach. First, those suggestions for change identified by the proponents of gender neutrality seemed deceptively easy to implement: I made a conscious effort to call on girls more often; although I had never had boys and girls lines I did need to encourage children to work in mixed sex groups; and I chose more books to read aloud that had female lead characters. Second, the "different ways of knowing" advocated by Belenky et al was apparently addressed in the current popular philosophy in elementary education which claims that children are natural learners who come to school with a wealth of experience, knowledge, understanding and curiosity about the world. Thus they only need guidance in structuring their independent search for understanding. This philosophy permeates the British Columbia Primary Program policy document. Its rationale states that: "Children are intellectual beings. They are curious and enthusiastic learners, who want to know about the world around them" (p.3). The opening lines to the section on science reads: "It is instinctive for the primary child to search out, describe and explain patterns of events experienced in the natural and physical world" (Primary Program, Foundation Document, 1990, p.4).

Implicit in the theory that children are natural learners is the idea that teaching will be child-centred. That is, children should both initiate their own learning based on
their interest in a topic and then follow through by learning about that topic in a way that may not follow traditional rote-learning patterns. The teacher as "facilitator" provides an environment which allows children the freedom to pursue their education in the manner of their devising, not of the teachers.

In my classroom child-centred learning in practice meant that when they were working on projects, I let the children research those topics that interested them not me; I allowed them to set criteria for assessment of those research projects and then to assess their own and each others work. In science I encouraged them to tell me how they reached the conclusions that they drew in science experiments and valued those conclusions more than the "truth". In language arts I wanted their interpretations of stories we were reading not their answers to concrete questions on the text.

However, despite all my efforts, I did not feel that I was making any significant headway in reducing the sexism in my classroom - the behaviours and attitudes of the children had not changed significantly. Furthermore, I had begun reading Valerie Walkerdine's (1986) disturbing analysis of child-centred learning. She argues that although child-centred learning is supposed to ensure that children have equal opportunity to learn in a style that suits them best, in fact, it has serious but largely unnoticed repercussions on girls' education. In Walkerdine's view the child-centred approach does not really move away from teacher control over children's learning. Rather it is a shift away from overt control of that learning to covert control which, in turn, subtly reinforces traditional notions of both teachers and children that girls are more naturally rote learners while boys are more naturally explorational learners. She explains that one aspect of this covert control is that as
"natural learners" any evidence that children show of learning by rote is “taken to be success for the wrong reason” (p.37). Unfortunately, those patterns of learning that girls adopt and have success at as a result of conditioning at and away from school, tend to be traditional. They become rule followers and adept rote learners. Moreover, Walkerdine points out that “those explanations which allow girls any success at all say that it is based on low-level rule following, rote learning... not on proper understanding” (p.26). She uses math to illustrate her argument: "girls may be able to do mathematics but good performance is not to be equated with proper reasoning” (p.26). Thus “girls' good performance is downplayed, while boys' often relatively poor attainment is taken as evidence of real understanding... girls' attainment itself is not seen as a reliable indicator” (p.26). These conclusions are supported by the results Gaalen Erickson and Sandra Farkas (1991) drew from a study they made of high school students and science achievement. They found that to answer questions on a test “the evidence seems to suggest that females are more likely to resort to the techniques that they learned in school than are the boys” (p.237). The boys, argue Erickson and Farkas, were able to draw on “their prior everyday or 'informal' experiences' -- contexts that typically did not seem to be accessible to the females” in the study (p.236). Moreover, they also point out that the apparently gullible, rule-following, rote-learning girls “endeavoured to draw on previous school experiences [to answer test questions] -- experiences which did not make much sense to them at the time when taught, let alone now” (p.236).

Implicit in both gender neutral and gender difference approaches is the notion that the problems of equity in the classroom rest with the teacher; the teacher needs to be "fixed". If the teacher is fixed then the gender imbalances in the classroom can be effectively addressed. This fix-the-teacher concept which drove my research for
well over a year proved to be very problematic.
CHAPTER TWO
From Practice to Praxis

RESEARCH CYCLE #1
The increasing frustration that I felt in trying to initiate effective and enduring change in the sexist practise in my classroom focusing exclusively on the teacher is chronicled in the papers that I wrote for two courses that I was taking and is particularly evident in a video ethnography piece I made as an assignment in a third course. In a paper that I wrote in December of 1991 for Dr. Bob Carlisle on informal education, I argued that much child-centred informal learning can take place in the traditionally formal classroom setting. To support this argument I told the story of my then grade four student, Alan, who by his own motivation had taken reference books out of the school library about outer space and wrote a booklet from the information that he gathered. I wrote: He then decided, still without referring to me, to share his research with his peers and myself during our journal reading sessions. As part of this informal learning process he has demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the far reaching effects a single event can have. When he told us that comets may have caused the demise of the dinosaurs I asked how this could have occurred. In response he explained that dust clouds created by a severe meteor shower on earth blocked the sun. As a result the plants which the plant eating dinosaurs ate died leading to the death of those herbivores. Their deaths in turn left the meat-eating dinosaurs without a food source. Hence the extinction of the dinosaurs. In this case a “formal” classroom setting became a fine environment for a profound informal learning experience.

Although later in that paper I used this as an example of my own exercise of the
covert discipline that Walkerdine identifies, it was not until nearly a year later when I was writing the second of two papers for Dr. Jim Gaskell that I understood or recognised the full implications of the covert disciplining I was using. In the Carlisle paper I had concluded by stating: *When Alan explained the reason for the extinction of the dinosaurs, I was most impressed with the way in which he made connections and drew logical conclusions. However, if I had taught the concepts of food-chains and the importance of the sun in those chains, I would not have been as impressed by a girl who was able to regurgitate the concept to me no matter how well and in how many different contexts. That girl would only be demonstrating her ability to complete an assigned task neatly and well but not including any divergent thinking. It is Alan’s initiative and subsequent reasoning which I value.*

When I told the same story in the Gaskell paper I had the advantage of both some new insights and some distance from that particular group of children. I wrote: *Although I wholeheartedly supported the philosophy of education of the Primary Program which I saw as legitimating my own approach to teaching, the grade four class I taught last year forced me to reexamine my teaching practises. Of the sixteen boys and nine girls, school authorities had diagnosed three boys with severe behaviour disorders, five boys and one girl with severe learning disabilities, and one boy with a severe attention disorder. As the boys demanded and received much of my attention, I unconsciously relied on the girls to behave in a traditional fashion, that is to cooperate and do as I asked without fuss or bother. Towards the end of the year, I asked the children to talk about being boys and girls in our class. One of the boys pointed out that I was much gentler with the girls than with the boys. Although I had been completely unaware of this behaviour, I immediately recognised it to be true. I realised that in being gentle I wanted my few contacts with*
the girls to be positive so that they would know that I valued both their presence and their rule following in this class of difficult boys.

Given the passive, do-as-you-are-asked behaviour I was encouraging in the girls it is highly unlikely that any of them would have become the natural learner of the sort that Alan, one of my "good" boys proved to be. Early in the school year, he began to do research on outer space during his free time. He used resources that he found around the classroom and those he took out from the library. I encouraged him to report his findings to us on a regular basis during our daily journal reading time. Further to reinforce him as a role-model to his peers and to show him how he had impressed me with his initiative, I read aloud to the class an excerpt of a paper I had written on the merits of informal learning in which I had used Alan as an example. However, Alan's report itself was not very high quality. Had I asked for reports on space which my rule-following girls would dutifully have written, I would not have been as impressed by their perhaps more comprehensive effort as I was with Alan's. Thus I covertly placed the girls in a "no win" position; I expected them to conform to traditional patterns of behaviour at the same time as I emphasised how much I valued non-conformity by flattering Alan repeatedly.

Some of the understanding that I gained between the writing of the Carlisle paper and the Gaskell paper came from making a video ethnography piece for Dr. Ricki Goldman-Segall in the spring of 1992. I set out to use this piece to simply document the different behaviours of the two sexes; to prove in video form what I understood to be true. However, Goldman-Segall encouraged me to go beyond my own conclusions and to talk to the children about their perceptions of the gender relations in our classroom. I must admit that I did so reluctantly. At that time I was still
very much immersed in fix-the-teacher literature and did not think that the students would have anything valid to contribute because they were but innocent victims of my sexist practices.

However, it was from the discussions that I had with the children in making this piece that I learned that the children themselves recognised the gender differences. For this assignment, I first separated the girls and boys to have them reflect on video tape whether there were gender differences in the classroom and if they could identify them. Second, I asked them to reflect together on the same issue. Not only did Bruno identify that I was "more gentler with the girls than with the boys" but also in response to my question "who does the teacher help more?" a group of girls chorused "Boys!". On the video tape, these children also clearly demonstrated that they were not unaware of other aspects of the gendered nature of a classroom.

Charlotte: ...the boys are loud and the girls are quieter and they listen more.

Simon: The girls are better behaved.

Cora: They [the boys] always fool around and they never listen and by the time their supposed to do it they don't know how to do it.

Craig: The girls are more responsibiller (sic).

These students clearly identified some of the fundamental behaviour differences that researchers have studied for years. More succinctly, Jane Gaskell, Arlene McLaren and Myra Novogrodsky (1989) state that "males tend to clog the air waves" (p.57).

At the end of the 1991-92 school year I transferred from Morley Elementary School
to Westridge Elementary School. For two important reasons the change was to be a fairly dramatic one for me. First the size and composition of the two schools was quite different. Morley is a large dual-track school whose regular English and French Immersion programs total population was between 475 and 500 students. Although a small core of children attended Morley for the whole of their time in elementary school, the English sector population tended to be very transient and some of the pupils lived in poverty. Many of the children that I taught in that very difficult grade four class my last year at Morley had already attended two or three other schools and had all the problems attendant with transience; below average achievement; behaviour problems; and parents who were not able to help their children at school and struggled to make ends meet at home. Westridge, a school of 350 students, has a relatively stable working class population. The parents are able to be involved and concerned about their children’s progress and development both at home and at school. Thus the students I taught there generally had a greater chance to be successful.

Second, I moved from an intermediate grade four class at Morley to a primary position at Westridge School, teaching a combined grade two and three class. Morley was organised around what teachers commonly refer to as “straight” grades not split classes - that is, to teach a grade four class not a grade three and four class. This meant that at Morley I never taught the same children for more than one year. At Westridge, the primary teachers were very committed both to creating combined grade classes and to teaching the same children for two years The continuity of having the same pupils for two years was to have significant impact on my research. Both the children and I were able to “grow” with the results of our praxis activities in one year and to flesh them out over time the following year - a luxury not available
when children are herded onto the next teacher after ten months.

It was in this new teaching environment that I began to consider the role that the children themselves play in maintaining the inequality in the classroom. Gaskell built on Goldman-Segall's advice to involve the students more in the process of trying to change my sexist behaviours. In his comments to my first paper for him, in which I argued that the "Primary Program" was only paying lip-service to the issue of gender inequality, Gaskell said *In the end, your suggestions of minor changes in the classroom do not really seem to address the critique you had just made. The changes are based on a concept of gender neutrality - that if we treat both girls and boys the same they will have equal experiences - as you argued previously, however, this is not so. As you argue, the issues of gender must be taken up directly and the unequal experiences acknowledged. This leads more to a concept of a gender sensitive curriculum than a gender neutral curriculum.*

Gaskell also referred me to an article by Bronwyn Davies and Chas Banks (1992) in which they conclude that to achieve any significant change in the attitudes of boys and girls, we must help children to "understand how they have taken up the various discourses [on gender] as their own"(p.22). Davies and Banks discovered that simply reading aloud stories with characters in non-traditional roles did not necessarily mean children will envision a new reality for themselves. They argue that children's theories of gender are too strongly held to be challenged by non-sexist stories and the like (p.23). Children, they continue, have "preferred storylines" which they integrate into their "real" lives to make sense of their lives. In their study of preschool aged children, Davies and Banks found that the children often either rewrite a story or interpret the actions of the main characters to suit those "preferred
I decided to check first if the children I was teaching were holding to preferred storylines as strongly as those preschool children that Banks and Davies had studied. In their investigation of this hypothesis, these researchers read so-called “alternate” fairy tales, The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch and Princess Smartypants by Babette Cole, to the children. In my assessment I simply asked the children to retell The Paper Bag Princess, a story with which they were very familiar. Elizabeth, the paper bag princess, rescued her fiance, Prince Ronald from a fire breathing dragon only to be told by him that she “is a mess”. She replied that he was a toad and they didn’t get married after all. The final picture in the book shows her joyfully skipping off into the sunset.

Rather than recognising the wider life options that these stories presented, the boys and girls in the Davies and Banks study rationalised the actions of the characters to match their own framework for gender-specific actions. Thus one boy decided that Elizabeth “tricked the dragon because she wants to get her prince back” (p.7). Because the prince is a nice person who does not like Elizabeth to be so messy he rightfully demanded that she clean herself up before presenting herself to him. One girl concluded that Princess Smartypants should “have married a prince and done the things that her mother and father did” (p.12). My students, however, seemed less bound by their gendered outlook. I had asked them to retell the key parts of the story using pictures and text. Of the eighteen written samples that I collected from them, only four of the students rewrote the ending to suit the traditional happily-ever-after ending. Elinor very accurately summarised the ending thus, the “princess said you are a toad and didn’t marry him”. Steven liberally interpreted the ending with his
As I gradually identified more incidents and situations of inequality that I did not yet control, I turned to the theories and suggestions I was studying to find the cause of my difficulties. Thus, it was in the second paper that I wrote for Gaskell that I first clearly articulated the discrepancies between gender neutral and gender difference approaches. I argued that because the two approaches were premised on contradictory notions, it was very difficult for classroom teachers to decide which is the responsible and ethically correct route to take. I concluded that my own successes and difficulties in working towards a balance indicate that choosing between a gender-neutral approach and a gender differences approach is not realistic. Classroom dynamics dictate that neither one nor the other is more effective. Only if teachers “embrace the paradox” and use methods from both schools of thought will we address the reality of a “girl’s education”.

Gaskell’s response to my dilemma was also reflected in an article by Joan W. Scott (1990) that I read around the same time. Both rejected this binary opposition as the basis for initiating change. Gaskell wrote: Does the concept of gender sensitivity as an approach encompass both gender neutrality and gender difference? If you are “sensitive” you can take on issues of neutrality and difference as they seem important. You can also deal in a flexible, open way with differences within gender and the interaction of ethnicity and gender. The “paradox” does not need to be embraced since it dissolves into the particular of a given context.

In her deconstruction of the binary opposition, Scott (1990), argues that equal-versus-difference is an intellectual trap for feminists which “hides the multiple play of
differences [within each category] and maintains their irrelevance and invisibility" (p.144). She wrote:

Placing equality and difference in antithetical relationship has, then, a double effect. It denies the way in which difference has long figured in political notions of equality and it suggests that sameness is the only ground on which equality can be claimed. It thus puts feminists in an impossible position, for as long as we argue with the terms of a discourse set up by this opposition we grant the current conservative premise that because women cannot be identical to men in all respects, we cannot expect to be equal to them. (p.144)

In short Gaskell and Scott acknowledged that such situations as I faced in my classroom were difficult but both also suggested that they could not be reduced to simple definitions; they had to be looked at from a more complex theoretical perspective which would illuminate the nature of sexism in the classroom more effectively.

However, despite the evidence that was mounting to the contrary, I was unconvinced that involving the children in the process would have any significant effect. I wrote in my second paper for Gaskell: Although I was initially very skeptical that talking to the children about the notion of gender equity would either be possible or effective, I decided nonetheless to give it a try. My efforts clearly indicate that I was still focussing on “fixing” my own sexist patterns not on understanding the role the children themselves were playing in the sexist atmosphere of the classroom. First, to highlight my reading aloud stories with female leads and leading characters of either sex in non-traditional roles, I began a class graph on which we kept track of the number of stories with male main characters and female main characters. I described the results to Gaskell: A graph we are keeping in our classroom indicates that I have read aloud as many stories with main characters who are
female as those who are male. However, the graph does not reflect the difficulty I have had in finding "good" books with interesting female leads. Nor does it show that although I read all the other stories in one sitting, two with male leads were novels which took several weeks of daily sessions to complete.

Second, I initiated a tally-keeping activity to assess whether, in my heightened awareness of the discrepancies that often exist between the number of interactions a teacher has with her male students and female students, I was below the norm. Instead of asking another teacher to come in to do the tally, I had the children take turns keeping track on a class list of the number of times I spoke to each child. I explained to the children not only what I was doing but also why I was doing it. I wrote: I began by explaining that teachers generally interact at least twice as often with their male students as with their female students and that I had been trying to reduce this discrepancy in our classroom. Although I am encouraged by the results of this tally which indicates that I interacted an average of ten times with my male students and eight times with my female students, I consider it very significant that the least number of interactions I had with a boy was four while the least I had with a girl was none.

Finally, I spoke to the children directly about the gender relations in our class. In introducing the tally, rather than simply asking them to keep track for me, I had explained why. When I started the graph, I talked about the importance of being fair and reading as many stories about girls as boys. We have also discussed whether or not I treat girls differently from boys. The children insist that I do not and even with prompting have found no differences. Like the students McLaren and Gaskell (1995) interviewed, my pupils had difficulty identifying gender inequities and
perceived their school experiences as gender neutral.

As I commented in the same paper, the results of all these efforts were very enlightening for me: I was delighted to discover the other day that at least one girl is now able to recognise one aspect of the issue. Anna was reading aloud to me a story about hot air balloons which kept referring to "the men" who did this and "the men" who did that. After reading a page of this I asked Anna if she thought anything was missing from the story. She reflected for a moment before answering "the women". She then suggested that every time the story said "the men" that she would read "the men and women".

Now, not only did I have personal proof of the value of including the children in the process but I was also forced to rethink my own interpretation of my role in it by Gaskell's final comments to this second paper. He said: It seems to me that what is most important in your class is the discussion you have with the children about what you are doing and why. This creates a legitimacy for a discussion of and sensitivity to, gender issues which might not otherwise be there. You give students another way of looking at the world and space to try it out. You lend your authority explicitly to the goal of achieving gender equality - acknowledging in the process that equality does not exist. Thus, in the terms that Patricia Brieschke (1992) outlined for praxis research, collaboration in the form of paper writing and the responses I was receiving to those papers had forced me to consider that the research I was doing should be "multi-directional...reciprocal and mutual, moving back and forth from self to other" (p.174). In December of 1992, and after more than a year of classroom research, I was primed to take into account the children's role in creating the inequality in the classroom and to begin to involve them in the process of change.
This point also marked the completion of my first turn on the spiral cycle that is distinct to action research. I had identified the problem - sexist practises of the teacher; made a plan to change my own sexist practises based on the reading I had done; tried strategies from both the gender neutral approach and gender differences approach in the classroom; and analysed the results critically with the collaboration of my university professors. I had reached the next phase which was to redefine the problem based on the new theories and ideas I had begun to reflect upon.

RESEARCH CYCLE #2
As I explored new approaches and looked for new theories to enlighten my research the nature of my collaboration with my university professors underwent a subtle shift in style. In the papers that I wrote for Carlisle and Gaskell and in the video piece for Goldman-Segall, I expressed frustration with the limiting nature of the theories and concepts surrounding the issue of sexist teaching practise. As I came to write papers for Dr. Gaalen Erickson and Dr. Linda Peterat I was reading theorists who offered new avenues of approach to my dilemma and which enabled me to develop new theories as to why sexism existed in my classroom. McCutcheon and Jung (1990) argue that without personal theories of practise, teachers would never be "able to choose the route to follow in the doing of the research, nor would the teacher ...[be] able to make sense of the data collected and be able to generate at least a temporary ameliorative action within the teaching situation" (p.144). Carlisle, Gaskell and Goldman-Segall had led me to understand and articulate my personal theories of sexist practise. In turn, Erickson and Peterat encouraged me to push beyond that stage and test those theories further in the classroom.
Over the first few months of 1993, I tentatively explored both how to involve the students more fully in the research and the role the students, themselves played in creating the sexism in the classroom. By the time I wrote a paper for Erickson in April of 1993, I understood that teachers' attitudes and expectations of their students' behaviour were enmeshed in the gendered behaviour and attitudes of their students that were in turn embedded in the very gendered school environment. I had also begun to think of the classroom as a dynamic social web. I concluded that even those of us who consider ourselves aware and are actively trying to ensure that the curriculum is gender sensitive can have considerable trouble overcoming bias. Educators must acknowledge that children's wealth of prior experience, knowledge and understanding comes from their lives in a heavily gendered society. The gender specific roles that result do not simply disappear in a so-called egalitarian classroom. The remedies for a sexist classroom which tend to be "fix-the-teacher" solutions overlook the very complex implications and effects of the gendered behaviours of the children on the dynamic social web that exists in any classroom.

The social web that I identified has been much discussed and analysed in praxis literature in the context of defining the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Post-positivist or post-modern theory, in which praxis research is based, postulates that, because of the interpretive basis of truth and reality, it is virtually impossible to come to any definitive conclusions about the relationship between the self and other in social structures (Apple 1992; Grumet, 1987; Lather, 1992). That is, truth and reality are different for everyone because of the unique social constructs each person brings to determining that truth or reality. Michael Apple (1992) cleverly opines "Reality doesn't stalk around with a label" (p.4). In her analysis of the concepts of post-structuralist theory most useful to feminists, Joan
Scott (1990) identifies language and discourse as key terms. According to Scott, post-structuralists "insist that words and texts have no fixed or intrinsic meanings, that there is no transparent or self-evident relationship between them and either ideas or things, no basic or ultimate correspondence between language and the world"(p.135). Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Scott defines discourse as "a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs"(p.135). The "discursive fields overlap and compete with one another" (p.136) to establish their "truth" which Scott points out only offers a contextually specific construction of social meanings.

Patricia Brieschke (1992) argues that "post-modern research values ...[are] based upon a sense of connectedness that recognises the interdependent construction of both self and other through different ways of knowing"(p.174). Lous Heshusius (1994) contends that we need to replace "concerns about truth and degrees of interpretation... by posing a transformative process of merging which results in rethinking the boundaries of self and other in the knowledge of their permeability"(p.18). Reality then, she continues, "is no longer understood as truth to be interpreted but as mutually evolving"(p.18). To begin to make changes to the gendered attitudes and behaviours in my classroom, I had to adopt the values of post-modern research that these scholars espouse and to recognise the interdependence of myself and the children in creating and sustaining those attitudes and behaviours.

That I was beginning to incorporate post-positivist theory into my interpretation of the events in my classroom is evidence by the slightly different accounts I gave of the tally keeping activity in my second paper for Gaskell written in December, 1992,
and in the paper I wrote for Erickson in April, 1993. In discussing it in the Gaskell paper I described a problem I had encountered: *The tally keeping activity itself served to illustrate very well the different behaviour patterns of girls and boys.* At this point in the Erickson paper I added the short phrase *and the very problematic situations that arise for teachers as a result.* In both papers I went on to say: *Three of my boys decided to see who could get the most check marks beside their name over the course of the morning. After I noticed the “game”, I was at a loss to know what to do. Would the results of the tally be more accurate if I ignored the often irrelevant and unnecessary questions they were asking me simply to get a check mark by their name? Or would the tally be more accurate if I answered all their questions? I finally decided that I would answer all the questions, reasoning that this was not the only class activity we do which might encourage this behaviour.* Without the added phrase the story serves only as an example of the gendered behaviour that teachers encounter. When the phrase is included it suggests that the gendered behaviours are far more complex than can be easily resolved and that I have come to understand that.

Interestingly enough both Gaskell and Erickson commented on this particular story. Gaskell suggested that *I stop and comment on the boys’ strategy and ask why the boys, once again, are making this into a competition.* This would have challenged the boys and girls dominant discourses and forced them to be, at the very least, aware that I knew what they were doing. Erickson suggested that *what might be interesting to do is to get someone else ... to do this tally when you and the students are not aware of it.* The Erickson comment addressed the unwritten concern that because of the behaviours of the boys, I really had no accurate notion of the number of interactions I had with the boys and girls in the class.
The practical upshot of my reading of post-positivist literature was that I designed some further classroom activities with the express intention of challenging the children's preconceived gendered notions. As what follows makes clear, each activity illustrated and supported the argument I came to articulate in my April, 1993 paper for Erickson, namely that because the experience, knowledge and understanding of the world that the children bring to school is heavily gender-biased, girls and boys actually experience education differently. And that as a result very problematic issues ... arise for a practising teacher.

The difficulty which was to plague me throughout this phase of research was to find an effective medium to use so that seven and eight year olds could participate effectively in initiating change. Initially, I drew on the research of Phillip Seely Brown, Allan Collins and Paul Duguid (1989) on situated cognition. They point out that "from a very early age and throughout their lives, people, consciously or unconsciously, adopt the behaviour and belief systems of new social groups" (p.34). One of the most powerful means our society uses to introduce young children to the belief systems of our social group and thus to gender-specific behaviour and attitudes is story-telling. Pam Gilbert (1992) argues that "it is through stories that we position ourselves in relation to others, and are ourselves positioned by the stories of our culture" (p.186). From my earlier research I knew that, in her analysis of the data on children's literature, Gloria Steinem (1992) found that "a little girl is subject to more boy centred than girl centred stories by a ratio of five to two, to folk and fantasy tales with four times more male characters..."(p.120). Gaskell, McLaren and Novogrodsky (1989), note that sex-role stereotyping prevails in all these stories (p.37). This supported what I had learned earlier from Davies and Banks (1992), who argue that "those children who have been interpellated (sic) into the social
world via the dominant discourses of gender, which serve to keep the male/female
dualism intact, have taken on those discourses as their own" (p. 23).

In consequence, I tried a deliberate and open attempt to expose the students to the
very gendered nature of many of the stories that they read. I read aloud two fairy
tales - one traditional and one alternate. The White Snake by the Brothers Grimm
tells the story of a prince who eats a piece of enchanted cake which enables him to
speak with animals. In the course of his travels he saves several animals from
certain death. They in turn help him to accomplish the three impossible tasks
necessary to win the hand of a beautiful princess. Atalanta by Betty Miles is a
modern rewrite of a tale about a princess who studies astronomy, invents things and
loves to run. When her father calls for a foot race to find Atalanta a husband, she
persuades him to allow her to run in the race too. If she wins she can choose her
own future. Because Atalanta and her worthy competitor, Young John, cross the
finish line together the King awards "the prize" to Young John. After he and Atalanta
take the opportunity to talk, they decide that they do not wish to marry. Each goes off
happily to explore the world alone. The story ends with the comment that perhaps
they will marry someday and perhaps they will not but in any case they are both very
happy. The students and I then compared and contrasted the roles of the prince and
princess in each story focusing very closely on the positive models in Atalanta.
Nonetheless, half of the girls still chose the traditional princess as the character they
admired most because "she is a beautiful Princess". Furthermore, although all the
boys with one exception chose Young John, most indicated that they admired him
simply because "he is a fast runner".

After this mixed success with the story telling I thought it might help if we clarified
some of the preconceived ideas held by the children. So we brainstormed what ended up being two rather eclectic lists of jobs for men and for women. For men the class noted the following jobs: longshoremen, welders, glass cutters, road cleaners, fishers, builders, wrestlers, cabinet makers, and hockey players. Elinor added that "actually they can do any job. They can even do girl jobs like to be a secretary". For women they noted: models, zoo keepers, mums, cooks, teachers, skating teachers, waitresses, barbers, and mathematicians. I conducted an informal but revealing poll after brainstorming these lists. All the children felt that men could do all the jobs they had assigned to women with the single exception of being mums. Men could, however, be dads who did the work of mums. Leaving aside the job of hockey player which I will address at greater length later, all the girls felt that they could do all the jobs assigned to men. Although all the boys felt that women could be fishers and glass cutters about half stated that women could not do the other jobs on the list of jobs for men. In the paper that I wrote for Erickson I concluded from this discussion that although boys may be redefining their own roles they are not necessarily accepting similar role changes for girls .... the boys in the class are more resistant to conceptualising new roles for men and women than the girls.

The discussion the students had about whether women could be hockey players demonstrated forcibly that even in the primary grades role models play the important part in broadening children's horizons that Gaskell, McLaren and Novogrodsky (1989) identify. They state that not only must "the experiences of women ... be incorporated into the curriculum" but also that alternate female role models be discussed so that girls know that their career options are not limited (p.41). When hockey player was first mentioned in the brainstorming activity on the jobs for men list, one of the boys stated that actually women could be hockey players
too. When most of the other students challenged him, Jacob reminded his classmates of the news item about Manon Rheaume, goalie for the Tampa Bay Lightnings’ farm team in Atlanta, that we had talked about the previous fall. Later when I polled the students on whether women could be hockey players, only one boy and one girl decided that they could not. I said in the Erickson paper that *had both the boys and the girls not witnessed Manon Rheaume playing in the NHL, I am convinced the results would have been quite different.*

Erickson’s response to this paper reflects Thomas E. Barone’s (1992a) call to educational scholars to become critical storytellers who “adopt an openly political stance”. Barone (1992a) states that the role of these storytellers is “to prick the consciences of readers by inviting a reexamination of the values and interests undergirding certain discourses, practices, and institutional arrangements found in today’s schools” (p.143). In doing so Barone hopes that the resulting text will “invite and enable the reader to locate the beating and, yes, the aching of other human hearts... within a debilitating sociopolitical milieu” (p.145). In a complementary article that he published in the same year, Barone (1992b) recommends “that as educational inquirers we no longer talk about research texts as being objective or subjective but about texts that are more or less useful or, in varying degrees and ways persuasive” (p.26). Barone’s (1992a) chief concern is that “if we can make these stories sufficiently compelling, there may even be hope for the kind of meaningful educational reform that empowers school people to tell their own critical stories to themselves and to us all” (p.146).

In legitimating the critical storyteller in academe and calling for “school people” to also tell their stories, Barone opens up a new avenue for those of us doing school-
based research. However, in addition to encouraging school-based researchers to tell their stories it is imperative that after reading those texts that the academics ensure that the storytellers know if their texts are more or less useful; whether it is worth continuing in this approach. This is what Erickson did for me when, in his comments on my paper, he first acknowledged the usefulness of my argument: You have argued persuasively that the issues transcend those that can be easily addressed in our schools; yet I think you make a good case for beginning the process of alerting both teachers and children to the issues very early in their educational careers. I agree entirely with this strategy....He then validated telling the story of my classroom experiences as a form of critical analysis: ...I hope you continue to discuss your efforts and those of others (that you cite) with your colleagues. Even small changes will only occur when there is a concerted effort to challenge the dominant messages from the print and visual media that influence our students in subtle but effective ways. I liked the way you integrated your own experiences and your analysis of it with the research literature.

As I completed Erickson's course, I was moving out of a practical action phase in my research and into a much needed reflection phase in which I assessed and analysed the results of my classroom actions. The conclusions that I drew at the end of this reflection period directed the course of the research through the next phase. In the fall of 1993, I took Dr. Linda Peterat's course on action research. There I first formally recognised the type of research I was doing as praxis and self-consciously examined the implications of doing praxis research in a primary classroom. I became particularly concerned with the interaction between collaboration and relations of power in praxis research specifically as they pertained to working with children. Implicit in praxis research is a shift in power relations between the
researcher and the researched which empowers the researched and reduces the subject/object dichotomy. This shift will grow out of a formal collaboration process between the two which is designed to reduce the “gap”. McKernan (1988) contends that effective collaboration happens when the researcher and the researched each “contribute unique skills and expertise in a collective process” which involves them sharing “in the planning, implementing, analysing and reporting the research” (p.180). Patti Lather (1986) claims that, in collaborating, the roles of researcher and researched must be intertwined so that both are responsible for determining the interpretation and meaning of the data collected. In collaborating they will “build emancipatory theory” (Lather, 1986, p.272). Stephen Smith (1989) points out that to derive theory, indeed even simply to draw conclusions from collaborative research, involves employing a “language of real dialogue and collaboration” which is “a language of silences, of listenings, of being open and receptive to the play of our differences” (p.136). This “real dialogue” allows the collaborators “the possibility of recognising shared commitments, in spite of the fact that such commitments may be spoken of in quite different ways” (p.136).

By the time I wrote the second of three papers for Peterat, I was convinced that without collaborating openly with my students I would not be able to initiate significant changes in the interplay of our ingrained gendered attitudes and pattern of behaviour. I interpreted collaboration with my students as providing them with a “safe “environment to explore and understand our society in a different way, thereby not only raising the awareness of my students to the issue of gender inequality but also offering them reasonable alternatives and expectations. This notion was one that I culled directly from Gaskell’s comments to my paper a year earlier and had by then adopted as my own.
However, I was very concerned about how the power relationship that existed between my students and myself would affect our collaboration. Not only did I explore this concern in class discussions but I also reflected on it in all three papers that I wrote for Peterat. In a critical review of Patti Lather’s 1986 article “Research as Praxis”, I examined the emancipatory role Lather identifies for the researcher — a role in which I very much saw myself with the children. I stated Lather would have us accept that the differences in style between research as praxis and traditional research are considerable. I am not convinced by this article that Lather’s model is any less patronising in approach than traditional research to which she very harshly refers, quoting Reinharz, as the “rape model of research” (p.261). The goal of research as praxis is to provide the researched with the opportunity to understand, question, and change their social environment while the “praxis-oriented” inquirers both begin to grasp the necessary conditions for people to engage in ideological critique and transformative social action” (p.268). The presumption of the researcher that those people participating in the research need to be emancipated and can somehow be assisted in the process does not reduce the gap between the researcher and the researched. On the contrary, it places the researcher in the very powerful role of emancipator. The dilemma this raised for me was whether I could make a fundamental shift in the power relations between myself and the children since I clearly did see them in need of emancipation from their gendered attitudes and behaviours. Yet if I did not challenge the power relations was I really conducting praxis research?

By the time I wrote the second and third papers for Peterat, I had reached the conclusion that I was indeed conducting praxis research but that the issue of power
relations was problematic and would remain so. In the second paper I stated As a teacher collaborating with young children I am very aware both of the power and responsibility I have over them. I do not claim, therefore, that in the action research I am conducting that I have fundamentally altered the power relations in my classroom. Because I do deeply respect their intellectual and political capacities despite their young age, I do provide, however, a venue in which my students not only freely comment and listen to discussion on gender issues but also have both the time and opportunity to reflect on those issues. I am not necessarily emancipating them from myself but rather from the societal constraints that bind them. I offer them alternative frameworks from both the gender neutral and gender differences approaches so that they may make effective changes for themselves. And in the final short essay I add this further clarification of my position: In his discussion of collaboration, McKernan (1988) states that “all those with a stake and an interest in the problem have a right to be involved jointly in the search for a solution” (p.188). Certainly my students have a stake and an interest in the issue of gender thus they have a right to be involved. However, because of their age, their involvement is not as comprehensive as an adult’s would be. Furthermore, I do not believe that I would ever be able to eliminate the power relationship between us. Nor would it be appropriate for me to do so as a professional responsible for their education. So, I continue to wrestle with this concept.

Like Erickson, Peterat encouraged me to continue to tell my research story. In keeping with Ebbut’s (1985) contention that “if action research is to be considered legitimately as research then participants in it must...be prepared to produce written reports of their activities” (p.157), Peterat suggested several journals to which I might consider submitting articles publishing my findings. She also invited me to speak
twice about my research to her other students. In doing so she has offered me a venue both to state clearly the nature and process of my research and to subject it to a public critique. These public critiques impacted significantly my interpretation of events and how I might change the praxis process the next time around.

As I finished Peterat's course in December of 1993, I had completed another turn on the spiral cycle. I had redefined the issue of sexist teaching practises to include the children in the dynamic social web of gendered attitudes and behaviours in the classroom; I had planned and tried some strategies which involved the children in looking directly at sexism; and I had analysed the results once again in papers I wrote for courses. I now redefined the problem as how to explicitly involve the children in the process of both understanding and changing our gendered attitudes and behaviours.
CHAPTER THREE
Praxis Does Not Make Perfect

RESEARCH CYCLE #3
The group of children I was working with in January of 1994 included many grade three children that I had taught the year before when they were in grade two. They had worked through all of the initial efforts I had made to involve the children in the process of change. Because they had been involved, they also had the beginnings of a conceptual framework about sexism on which to hang some of the new ideas and activities I was about to introduce. Furthermore, they were able to help the “new kids” in grade two to assimilate these concepts.

After much deliberation and planning I decided to focus once again on the very gendered nature of stories in our society and to vary the activities from those we had done the previous Spring. This time we would not only look at the written stories but also the televised ones that are so prevalent in the children's lives. For the first time since I had begun studying gender in the classroom, I began this phase of my work with the clear intent to conduct praxis research. I was convinced that it was the only effective and honest way to work with young children to address this issue. Ethically it would be irresponsible and ineffective to continue with my hidden agenda of changing their behaviours and attitudes without the children's understanding as well as their active participation. The process we went through examining these stories during that Spring of 1994 and the results that ensued were to prove to be one of the most profound experiences of my teaching career.

Since the beginning of the school year, we had kept a class graph of the number of
stories that I read aloud with male and female main characters. I reflected that although I made sure that I read stories with active and positive female main characters, I had never told the children that I did this. Before telling them I had to clarify for them the difference between active and passive characters. So I read to them two books which illustrated these two character types very well, *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch and *Many Moons* by James Thurber. The proactive role that Elizabeth took on in defeating the dragon who steals her fiance away provided a fine contrast to the very passive role that Princess Lenore played in *Many Moons*. Lenore falls ill one day and retires to her bed saying that only having the moon will cure her. The greater part of the story is spent on the inability of her father's wise men and wizards to get the moon for her. Finally the Court Jester, after a brief discussion with Lenore, solves the problem by making her a gold pendant in the shape of the moon to hang around her neck. According to the definition that the children made from these two stories, active characters make decisions for themselves, solve the problem in the story and run; passive characters are told what to do, allow others to solve the problem in the story and lie around. As we read more stories over the next few weeks the children identified and defined a third category, active/passive characters, who make some decisions for themselves, solve the problem in the story with some help and do things.

After clarifying these definitions, the students, working first in pairs and then individually, read stories of their choosing from our class library. Using a form that I created for them and which we referred to as our "book analysis sheets", they identified the problem in the story, the main character, another important character and the sex of the characters (see appendix #1). From this information, they decided whether the two characters that they had identified played active, passive
or active/passive roles in that story. As a class we graphed the results. Despite the fact that I made sure that our class collection of stories had many books with active female characters, of those we examined the children found there were: 14 active males, 6 active females; 6 active/passive males, 6 active/passive females; 1 passive male, 0 passive females for a total of 21 males and 13 females. Employing the book analysis sheets again, we went through the same process with the television shows that the children watched on a regular basis. The results there were even more imbalanced than those from the book survey. Of the fifty-one characters the children identified from the television shows they watched, forty three were males and only eight were females.

In critical action research or praxis, collaboration implies an emancipatory process of conducting research which works towards changing the power relationship between those initiating the research and those participating in the research so that there is equity amongst those involved (Elliott, 1989; Lather, 1986; McKernan, 1988; Winter & Burroughs, 1989). Further it is “premised on a deep respect for the intellectual and political capacities” of those being researched (Lather, 1986, p.262). In my role as teacher, I am very aware of both the power and responsibility that I have over the children that I teach. I am also under no illusion that the praxis that I was conducting then fundamentally altered the power relations in my classroom. However, as I was preparing the children to research the television shows, an interesting development occurred which illustrates well that some of the traditional power constraints were being altered.

One day we discussed a television show that they all watched every day, “The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers”. I had never watched it and assumed that the
children were misinterpreting the show when they informed me that "The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" had lots of active female main characters. Because I wanted to understand why they thought this I asked them who the main characters were. With much back and forth amongst themselves they finally established the initial list of Jason (male), Trini (female), Zack (male), Kimberly (female), Billy (male) and Reeda (female) whom, the children argued very compellingly using examples from the show to support their contention, were all active characters. Thinking that this show was too good to be true I then pushed them to complete the list with all the characters in the show. We used this list as we analysed the show using male, female, active, passive, good, bad as our criteria. (see appendix #2) Although when all the incidental characters were included there were 11 males and only 3 females, it was clear that the females did play significant active roles.

Using a tally of the number of times each of the main characters spoke, we then tried to figure out if one character of the six main characters dominated the show. The children took home a sheet listing the six main characters of "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers". While watching one episode of the show the children recorded each time a character spoke. We then compiled a class tally of the results which showed that five Power Rangers and the dastardly villain of the piece all talked about the same amount of time and that there was little difference between the females and males in terms of actions that they performed. Crucial to this development was the fact that the children engaged me in a discussion and were able not only to prove their point but also convince me of their solid understanding of what we were working on. Thus because we were beginning to collaborate effectively the discussions we had were "open and receptive to difference [so] that what we hear from others becomes occasion for deliberation, for deferral, for
Although I had found ways to "encourage [my] students to speak from their particular perspectives as well as to examine the positions from which they speak" (Miller, 1989, p.91), I thought that I had not found a way to give the students a voice in interpreting these discoveries about gender in our classroom. However, several incidents lead me to think that I actually had given them a voice. As we finished the graphing exercises on books and television shows, I had asked them what they thought about all that we had discovered. They told me that it was unfair to girls and that there should be more girls in television shows. When I asked them to elaborate Jacob said "kids are going to think girls can't be super heroes!". It also became very evident to me that they felt comfortable voicing their concerns about gender issues in the classroom when I unwittingly incurred their wrath one day. I was trying to fit a discussion of gender and elementary school children into a paper I was writing on environmental education and had written up an attitude survey to give to my class and a control class (see appendix #3). I had deliberately included some statements to assess the difference between my students' sensitivity to gender issues and those of the control class who had had no exposure to the gender issues. My class began to grumble about the sexist nature of such statements as: "Women care more for the environment than men." and "Boys take better care of the environment than girls." They became incensed and a couple of them said they shouldn't have to respond when confronted with the statement "Jobs that men do hurt the environment more than jobs that women do". They argued that I had some nerve even posing this to them after we had just spent all this time figuring out that there were not roles unique to men or to women. I must admit that I persuaded them to respond by explaining that in this attitude survey if they responded "no" to statements on men's jobs, I
would understand that they disagreed with the statement - 19 children did put no while 5 checked the yes box.

That the children themselves felt that they had not been given a voice came up as I tried to wind up the unit. Spring Break was upon us and I told the children that they now understood the issues and so we were finished the unit on gender and would begin something new after the holiday. They were surprised that I thought we were done and asked if we weren't going to do anything about the gender imbalances we had discovered in the television shows. I told them that I did not think that there was anything they could do - they were just children after all! Recalling that the year before I had encouraged them to write to then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney about their concerns about an oil spill that had happened off the British Columbia coast, the grade three students wondered if the class could write letters to people to tell them what we had found out. I, too, vividly recalled that letter writing episode from the year before and could only think of how difficult a task it had been for so many of them to write those letters. I was very reluctant to initiate another letter writing campaign. Fortunately, Spring Break intervened, and by the time we returned to school a week later, I had realised that if I did not let them write these letters, I would not be respecting their political capacities and would be unravelling the empowerment process we had begun.

Rita Benmayor (1991) argues that action research “creates a social space and a dynamic of reciprocity that give participants the power to make meaningful contributions to their community” (p.172). The letter writing campaign that my students took on in the Spring of 1994 gave them not only the opportunity to give public voice to their concerns but also enabled them to make “meaningful
contributions to their community" which were recognised in a variety of very public ways. The first response that we had was to a letter Aly Khan and Tim had written to the editor of The Province newspaper (see appendix #4). The reporter who interviewed the two of them and me wrote a short article about what we were doing in class which included the fact that several other students were writing to the Prime Minister about changing words in the National Anthem from 'True patriot love in all thy sons command' to 'True patriot love in all of us command'. The Member of Parliament for the riding the school is in, Svend Robinson, wrote a congratulatory and supportive letter to Aly Khan and Tim after reading the article and the follow-up one written by Jeani Read (see appendices #5&6). Because Robinson offered to meet with the boys "to discuss these issues further", I arranged for him to visit the school. After listening carefully to the presentation all the children made to him explaining the research we had done and our results, he announced that he was very impressed with what we were doing and was going to dedicate a Private Member's Bill to us. On June 21, 1994 as Robinson introduced "The National Anthem Act" he made this statement in the House of Commons:

In introducing this bill I would like to pay tribute to a group of students at Westridge school in my constituency, in particular Tim Wood and Aly Khan Virani and their teacher Emily Sutherland, who have worked very hard to document and help change the unequal representation of females in the media and elsewhere in Canadian society.

I congratulate these young students and their teacher on their leadership in promoting equality for all Canadians including girls and women in Canadian society.

(see appendix #7)

Needless to say both the students and I felt very empowered by this recognition.
The responses from the various television stations merit some closer examination. I think that it is significant that neither The Fox network nor YTV responded to the children’s letters. Many of the students favourite shows including "Power Rangers" were produced by the Fox Network. YTV holds itself up as the station for children. However the CBC response was most intriguing and ironically served in the end to reinforce the gendered stereotypes one of my female students, Kae, presented to them in her letter. It would help this discussion and story to know who Kae is. She transferred into grade two in my class in the late Fall of 1992 from a French school in Montreal. She had come from Mainland China two years earlier with her parents so that her father could study at McGill. The family had left Kae’s twin brother, Gwei, in China with the children’s grandparents. I quickly learned not only how determined Kae was but also how gifted; she arrived in my classroom speaking only Mandarin and some French. Although I was willing to speak with her in French as she became adjusted to the class, after about a week she put a stop to that by responding to me in English. Within several months she was speaking English fluently, even using colloquial idioms correctly. It was in her second year with me that we began the letter writing campaign. Unlike many of the other children in the class, she had had no difficulty understanding that she needed to give her readers some background information about our research process and the results before expressing her concerns. Furthermore, after she and I were satisfied with her first letter which was to Tony Parsons of CTV, she printed it, mailed it and then, making good use of the computer, simply changed the header and sent the same letter off to Gillian Dusting of the CBC (see appendix #8). She continued in this manner writing to a variety of places until we stopped writing letters.

Ms. Dusting acknowledged the letter on the last day of school that June. However,
an ironic further spin off from this letter came in September after Kae had moved into a grade four class with another teacher. A producer of the then new CBC show “In the Company of Women” called me and asked if she could interview me and Kae about what we had been doing. The CBC seems to intend this show to be a relaxed feminist forum dealing with issues of particular concern to women. In the process of getting the background material for the interview the producer came to the school and asked Kae to reenact the research and letter writing process on video tape. As we came to the point of showing the letter writing both Kae and I turned to go to the computer room but the producer stopped us. She told us that they wanted Kae to write the letter by hand because it was easier to film. Even after I explained that, in figuring out how to use the computer to its best advantage Kae had debunked the myth about girls being much less adept on technology than boys, the producer still insisted that Kae hand write the letter for this sequence. When CBC aired the segment on Kae it included an interview between Kae and the hosts of the show. The hosts' emphasis was on the “cuteness” of having a nine year “feminist” on their show. This patronising attitude devalued all that Kae had done.

We worked on this unit between January and June of 1994. Over part of this time I took a course with Dr. Pamela Courtenay-Hall on the philosophy of environmental education. The following autumn, I enrolled a new class and, at the same time, I took Dr. Kieran Egan’s class which focused on the scheme of education that he has devised and outlined in a number of books. The papers I wrote for both Courtenay-Hall and Egan served as intellectual exercises in which I both further clarified my understanding of what was “happening” in my classroom and applied the concepts we were discussing in class to that understanding. As I had done for all previous

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2 I use “scheme” instead of philosophy, as this is the term Egan himself used to replace the term philosophy in a paper I wrote for him.
classes, I incorporated examples from my own classroom experiences.

Because I was working through the first stage of the praxis unit on gendered stories that I outlined at length above while I was taking her course, the paper that I wrote for Courtenay-Hall sheds some interesting insights into other concerns I had at the time. In an effort to see if the children could make connections from the work we were doing on gendered stories to other topics and issues, I gave my class the environmental questionnaire designed specifically to include the very gender biased statements that I mentioned earlier. In addition to provoking the children to voice their annoyance with me at posing such sexist statements, this questionnaire served to confirm that my class had indeed internalised some of our work on gender. In summarising the results of the tally of the written responses of the two classes to the same questionnaire, I concluded for Courtenay-Hall that my class responded significantly differently to the questions that had a strongly gendered dimension. While in the control class the girls feel that females are better environmental caretakers than males and the boys feel similarly about their sex, most of the boys and girls in my class do not distinguish one sex as “better” than the other in caring for the environment. The reactions of some of the students in both classes to the posing of question 10 illustrate very well the differing points of view in the two classes. One boy in the control class turned to his teacher when answering whether jobs that men do hurt the environment more than jobs that women do and said “of course they do. Only men are loggers!” In my classroom the students became quite indignant when I read that question aloud. They pointed out that we had just spent all this time figuring out that there were not jobs just for women or just for men so I had some nerve even posing this to them! I concluded this paper with the comment that it is encouraging, however, that, with consistent effort, the dualism which exists
between boys and girls can be reduced as children become sensitive to the nature of gender issues in our society and are taught to recognise discrepancies and inequalities.

When I wrote the paper for Courtenay-Hall, we were just finishing the study of the stories but had not yet begun the letter writing campaign. I wrote: *Until recently I felt that, although I had raised my students awareness of specific aspects of gender issues, I had not fundamentally changed their attitudes. Several significant incidents have occurred over the past few weeks which show that I am having mixed success.* First, independently of one another, both the gym teacher and the music teacher who work with my class have commented to me that mine was the only class that they taught in the school which was not “hung up on that boy/girl thing”. On the other hand, however, as a class we recently discussed the different types of courses that boys and girls take in high school. The boys explained that boys take science and math courses and girls take make-up, fashion and shopping. Obviously boys still hold fast to traditional concepts of female interests.

Courtenay-Hall’s remark to this account—*Did the girls’ comments not reflect a corresponding bias. Please tell us!*—and my response took me back to my concerns over the differing amount of time that I spent interacting with the boys and girls in my class. Reflecting on Courtenay-Hall’s comment, I identified this discussion on high school courses as one in which I had shut out the girls and allowed the boys not only to dominate the discussion but to also set the agenda for it. I was mortified to acknowledge to myself that the girls’ bias did not have a chance to come out because I was so intrigued and dismayed by the boys’ comments that I did not allow the girls’ time to outline their views. I had decided to challenge the
boys perceptions and so lectured them on the fact that girls had much broader interests than those they identified. I only asked that my compliant, agreeable and rule-following girls contribute briefly in support of this statement for me - which they did of course!

This discouraging reflection was to have long term implications on the praxis I conducted as I took Egan's class. At the beginning of this school year, I became trapped again in the fix-the-teacher mode and addressed only my personal behaviour in allowing the boys to express their ideas first and then being so caught up in those ideas that I ignored the girls. My frustration with my sexist behaviour is very clearly spelled out in the final paper that I wrote for Egan in which I explored the implications of girls limited oral involvement in school on his education "scheme" which calls for the use of oral language as the "intellectual tool" for early childhood education. Consistently, in my experience, while the boys point out to the teacher when they feel that they are receiving less attention, the girls do not. We keep a graph in the classroom which records the sex of the main characters of stories that I read aloud to the children throughout the year. Last year at one point the male main characters on this graph outnumbered the female main characters by about five or six. No child commented on this at all. I went to the library and searched out as many books with positive female leads as I could find and proceeded to read them until I ran out. When the graph showed that we had read three more books with female main characters, one of the boys noticed this and pointed out that this was not fair. If girls do not participate fully in the classroom discussions with teachers like me who are actively promoting their involvement, it is very unlikely that in classrooms where the focus on education is based on the "generic intellectual tool" of oral language, girls will become even less involved, while boys will excel even
more than they do already.

Because I was looking at my own practises, my focus on evening the number of interactions I had with my male and female students became a hidden agenda which caused some frustration for both the students and myself. Thus I analysed another event in the same paper for Egan around that theme. ...Teachers tend to interact with their male students at least three times more often than with their female students. This reflects a complex and neither easily understood nor easily altered relationship between students and teachers and in particular between male students and teachers. In Invisible Women: The Schooling Scandal, Dale Spender (1989) notes that “in the classrooms where teachers were trying to allocate their time equally their efforts did not go unnoticed by the students, and despite the fact that the teachers...were able to spend only slightly more than one third of their time with the girls many of the boys protested that ...they were missing out on their rightful share of teacher attention. “She always asks the girls all the questions,’ said one boy in a classroom where 34% of the teacher’s time had been allocated to girls (p.56-57).....

Although I have been working to change my own interaction patterns with my students and have been actively involving them in this change through discussion, the boys in my class reacted precisely as described by Dale Spender above. We were having a discussion about a game we had played in gym. The game called “The Endangered Hoppitt”, was supposed to help the children understand the implications of their actions on the environment and thus on animals....After a discussion we had had earlier in the day, I had realised that I had then fallen into the trap of responding only to the boys so in this hoppitt discussion I was redressing the balance and was taking answers as much as possible from the girls. Matthew, who
had his hand up for the duration, became frustrated that I was asking only girls and shouted out to anyone who would listen “Aaagh! She’s only asking girls! It’s not fair!” I immediately felt guilty believing that I had perhaps been over-compensating in the girls’ favour and asked for his idea. Interestingly and typically enough not one girl had made a similar comment in the earlier discussion. However, in this later discussion one boy did manage to deflect the attention away from the girls and back to the boys. In reflecting on both situations after school, my own reaction was similar to Matthew’s in the discussion - aagh!

Writing about this incident with Matthew served to highlight him for me. In the research journal I kept between April and June of 1995 I not only refer to him once as my biggest male challenge but also note several times that he is either dominating a discussion or controlling his video-making group. Aware that he commanded much of my attention, I did a tally of the number of times all the children spoke during a half hour book talk that the school librarian led in my classroom early in the 1995. Matthew spoke more than 50 times. The two children nearest to him were both boys and they spoke less than 30 times each. When I showed this tally to the other primary teachers during our regular weekly collaboration time, they encouraged me to talk directly to Matthew about his behaviour. Magda Lewis (1990) would identify this as using a strategy in the classroom that “required that [boys] in the class own their social location by exploring the parameters for their own privilege rather than the limits on women of their oppression” (p.486). Confronting Matthew with the evidence of his domination of discussion in class, I hoped, like Lewis, that Matthew would consider his “complicity in benefiting from the rewards” of our culture. Although later in my journal I commented that I think he is trying a little to change his patterns but I still feel that he talks a lot, I have no evidence that his
Thus I ended the school year of 1993-94 on both a high and a low note. On the one hand, I was delighted by the results of the letter writing campaign. On the other, I was discouraged by my own reflections prompted by Courtenay-Hall's comment. My discouragement was increased in the fall of 1994 by my interaction with Matthew. By Christmas 1994, I could see that I had reached the end of the third round. In this third phase I had addressed the redefined problem of explicitly involving the children in the process of both understanding and changing our gendered attitudes and behaviours with some wonderful results. My collaboration with my professors, once again in the form of papers, had lead me to critically assess the results drawing both very satisfying conclusions and somewhat disturbing conclusions. However, significant to this point in my research is that, unlike the conclusion to my earlier research rounds, I did not redefine the problem. The unexpected but very empowering results of the letter writing campaign, encouraged me to believe that I had found a solution to the problem I had set at the outset of this cycle. I thought that I now only had to repeat it to achieve similar success with another group of children.

RESEARCH CYCLE #4
In April of 1995 I moved into the final and what was to prove to be the least satisfactory cycle of my praxis research. The nature of my collaboration with both my students and my university professors moved into a new phase. I had finished all my course work and was beginning what I intended to be the formal stage of my research to be used as the basis for my Master's thesis. The collaboration with my university professors moved from writing reflective papers on my experiences, to writing a research proposal and discussing various elements of that proposal and
the results with my committee. However, I felt very confined by the scope and sequence of the research proposal because I had made definite commitments both to my supervising committee and to the university's ethical review committee. Until this point, I had not had to obtain approval for any of my activities on gender in my classroom; I had interpreted what had come out of the normal give and take of classroom discourse "after the fact" in the papers I wrote. Both the children and I had been free to explore the equity issue in any way the topic took us as is evidenced so well by the children's redirection of the awareness raising unit to a letter writing campaign. Unfortunately, I considered the relative success of my thesis would rest on following to the letter the process that I outlined in my proposal; I allowed myself no more flexibility in altering that process than I did the children. Thus, despite the fact that I intended the collaboration with the children to be the same as it had been the previous year, the confines of the research proposal effectively removed the children's voice from the collaborative process by eliminating any flexibility I had in responding to their concerns. Although I did not realise this until long afterwards, the unit became a travesty of what I had intended because we were imprisoned within the framework of the thesis proposal.

Because of my success with the praxis unit on the gendered stories in our society and the remarkable results of the letter writing campaign in the previous school year, I wanted to recreate this unit to study it for my thesis from March to June of 1995. In my research proposal, I described the project thus: This study is situated in an integrated teaching unit which I designed and have refined over the past several years to expose the students to the sexism prevalent in the stories that they both read in books and watch enacted on television shows. First, the children analyse the gendered nature of both the stories that they read and that they watch enacted
on television. They determine who the main characters of those stories are and their sex; whether the main characters are active or passive; discuss the implication of the differences between the male and female characters both in terms of the numbers of males and females and the type of roles that males and females play. Second, bearing in mind the discoveries they have made about the gendered nature of stories, the children will write and produce their own television shows using video cameras. Not only will they be responsible for the filming and the editing of the shows, they will also have to ensure that the finished product is gender-sensitive. Furthermore, they will have the opportunity to observe videos of themselves working on this class project so that they can discuss the nature of their gendered behaviours. Although they would be able to personalise some aspects of the research, there was little room for the children to redirect the course of the research.

Henri Giroux's (1988) call to teachers to become transformative intellectuals who develop counterhegemonic pedagogies informs praxis research and is particularly helpful in addressing the mixed feelings that I had about this final cycle of my research. This radical approach to teaching demands that teachers "not only empower students by giving them the knowledge and social skills they will need to be able to function in the larger society as critical agents, but also educate them for transformative action" (p.xiii). In practical terms that means that teachers must "make knowledge problematic, utilise critical and affirming dialogue; and make the case for struggling for a qualitatively better world for all people" (p.127). Central to this, Giroux continues, is "the need to give students an active voice in their learning experiences" (p.126). In the form my praxis research took in the Spring of 1995, while on the one hand the unit as I designed it gave the children some knowledge and social skills to act as critical agents, on the other hand it severely limited their
ability to struggle on their own terms for a better world. I had outlined the scope and sequence of the unit in my research proposal and intended the children to create a better world on those (my) terms.

The grade two and three class I was teaching in the 1994-1995 school year had 26 students of whom 7 had been with me the year before for the letter writing campaign. Although, as I outlined above, in this school year I had tended to focus more on improving my practice, in the period leading up to this project the students and I had had some brief discussions about sexist situations in the classroom and had taken some action to combat it. Early in the school year we had discussed the difference between active and passive characters. We then kept track of the main characters of the books that I read aloud on a graph to ensure that I read an equal number with female main characters as male main characters. I made sure that when we gathered as a group at “circle times” the boys and girls were mixed up so that there were no more than two children of the same sex sitting together. I did this because the dichotomy between the males and females was very evident at circle time when the boys formed a half circle and joined it to the half circle created by the girls. However, during the months leading up to this project I had not done anything designed specifically to teach the new group about the issues of inequality.

In March, 1995, therefore, I began the unit as I had done the year before by raising the children’s awareness with an analysis of the nature of the sexism in books that we had in the classroom. Because we had discussed early in the school year the distinctions between active and passive characters, we were able to begin the unit with the book analysis sheets. In those earlier discussions, the children who had been in my class the year before had suggested that we maintain the active, passive
and active/passive distinctions. I explained that I thought it was not really necessary to keep the active/passive distinction because characters who recognised that they needed help to solve a problem were just as active as those who solved the problem on their own. Thus the version of the book analysis sheets that this class used did not include the active/passive characteristic.

Working in pairs, the students selected, read and analysed as many books as they could in the time allowed. Some partnerships analysed three books, some only one book. When all the children in the class had had a chance to analyse some books, we gathered together to graph the results on both individual graphs for their personal reference and on a large chart paper graph for classroom display. Although the numeric totals on this 1995 graph were slightly different from the year before, the results were similar. Of the 52 characters that we analysed, 31 were active males; 2 were passive males; 17 were active females and 2 were passive females: 33 males to 19 females.

After we completed this exercise I felt that the children understood how to examine critically stories using the analysis sheet so I sent them home to look in the same critical way at the television shows that they watch. At this point the children found some room to personalise the project by suggesting that instead of being limited to television shows for this second phase, they analyse either a television show or a video that they had at home. I agreed with them that these results would be just as significant as those from the television shows. Each child indicated which television

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3The time frame was loosely based on two factors I use to guide any of the work we do in class. First, I made sure that even the slowest working students had the opportunity to finish one of the analysis sheets. Second, I had to be guided by the very real time restrictions of the amount of time we have in a day to do all that we need to accomplish.
show or video tape she or he would analyse so that we were sure to check 26 different shows. Before they began this stage, the children predicted that they would get the same results doing this analysis as the results they had from the storybook analysis. The results of this 1995 television survey were again numerically different from the year before but indicated, not unexpectedly, that little had changed in children's programming during the course of a year. Of the 56 television or video characters that they watched there were 44 active males, 0 passive males, 9 active females and 3 passive females: 44 males to 12 females.

To my dismay, these plotting sessions highlighted passive, do-as-you-are-asked girl behaviour and assertive, in-your-face boy behaviour. During both graphing sessions the girls carefully and doggedly stuck their stickers on the correct columns without too much comment or reaction. As we plotted the first graph many of the boys cheered as the male columns got higher. I had hoped that they would respond to the injustice of it but when it became clear that they were not going to do so, I stepped in and told them all that this was nothing to cheer about. That this was not an issue of who wins but rather an issue of fairness. While this admonition did not stop the cheering during that plotting session, it did have the desired effect when we plotted the results of the second survey. Then, as the male columns on the second graph grew higher and higher the boys sighed and said "Oh no another male!".

Graphing the results of our television survey generated much discussion between myself and the children and between the children themselves. While in one instance I allowed the children to personalise the research, in three other instances I directed the discussion to meet my criteria. As they were seeking to place a character in the appropriate slot the children first made a slight modification to their
definition of an active character. They were talking amongst each other about whether or not one of the male other important characters was active or passive. The children said that he sat around and told other people what to do but never did things himself. Of all the criteria in our definitions of active and passive the passive “sitting around” was the only one that the children could identify with this character. Thus this character was deemed passive because he seemed not to fit anywhere else. As I was questioning this, Gordon suddenly called out “we should put giving orders with the active roles” by which he meant adding the criteria “giving orders” to our definition of active. Without hesitation the children agreed that this was acceptable and after we had done so the children had no difficulty deciding that this character was active after all.

Parenthetically, I should note that this discussion was in keeping with some of the tenets of praxis research. That is, we had renegotiated the meaning of “active” character and later we were to explore the implications of the dichotomy of active versus passive. In the context of the validity of post-positivist research and thus of praxis research, there has been much debate amongst academics on the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity. Central to that debate is the nature of knowledge and what is important to know (Greene, 1992, p.40). Post-positivists claim that knowledge is situated in the very complex and dynamic cultural, sociopolitical, and historical contexts in which we experience it and as such it is political and impossible to reduce to empirical statements of truth (Donmoyer, 1991; Giroux, 1992; Greene, 1992). Elliot Eisner (1992) relates the “impossibility of knowing that we know the world in its pristine state” to perception. He argues that because perception is “influenced by skill, point of view, focus, language and framework... what we come to see depends on what we seek, and what we seek depends upon
what we know how to say" (pp.11-12).

In the three other instances drawn from our discussions of the television and video surveys, I deliberately directed the discussion we had so that the children would seek what I wanted them to find. In our class analysis of the video, *The Lion King* and the television show, *Saved By the Bell*, we focussed on what qualifies as a main character. In the interpretation that two of my students put on it, the "love interest" qualified as important character. While I did not explain this directly to the children, I felt that an important character has to move the main action of the story forward. I conducted a question and answer session in which I deliberately guided the children to reach the same conclusion. Even though I had not seen the movie, I disagreed with Naomi's claim that in *The Lion King* the next most important character after Simba, was Nala. I first summarised the storyline as Simba's uncle trying to become king in the place of his brother and nephew both of whom had legitimate claims on the throne and asked the children if this was accurate. After adding a few key details, the children agreed that basically I was right about the plot. I then clarified with them that the problem in the story was that Simba was supposed to be King but his uncle keeps trying to either kill him or prevent him from being king. When I had further established that Simba solves his own problem, we agreed that he was a good example of an active character.

I then asked the children if they thought that Scar, the uncle, might be the other important character instead of Nala. All of the children agreed except two girls, Naomi and Tammy. They felt that Nala played a very important role. As Naomi and Tammy argued to the contrary, the other children, convinced of my interpretation, kept producing arguments to refute them. The children said Nala never did anything
and did not show up in the movie as much as Scar so she could not be the other important character. On the "official" class graph, I recorded Scar as the other important character and did not put Nala on our graph at all.

This issue as to the importance of a particular character had also arisen earlier, though not so clearly, in a similar discussion around the Saved By the Bell television show. I had not seen it before and had no idea what this show was about. The child who analysed it was away on the day we were graphing so I read from his paper. Under the heading "main character" he had noted the names of five or six people. After I read this I asked if this was true that all these characters were main characters. The children immediately said no; that Zack was the main character. We then had to decide which of the other characters was the other important character. Kathleen and Tammy stated that it was Laura who was Zack's girlfriend, but several of the boys claimed that it was Screech, who was Zack's best friend. When I encouraged them to consider which of the two showed up the most in the show and use that as the criteria for determining the main character, Kathleen quickly changed her mind and said with conviction that it had to be Screech. She raised several points to try to persuade Tammy who remained convinced that Laura played a key role. In the end I recorded Screech, the character I led the children to interpret as being more significant, on the graph and did not record Laura at all.

In the last instance, the active versus passive dichotomy that I set as the basis of our analysis of the literature proved to be very problematic and although I again directed the discussion on my terms, I became very concerned about the message I was giving the children as a result. As the children and I interpreted the two terms, active had a very positive and desirable connotation while passive had a negative
and undesirable connotation. The children were very clear that it was better to be active like Elizabeth, the Paper Bag Princess than passive like Lenore of Many Moons. In watching and interpreting the Walt Disney movie Snow White, Lindsay decided that Snow White was active because “she did things”. When I asked what she did Lindsay explained that she cooked and cleaned for the seven dwarfs. I found myself in the dilemma so well articulated by Sue Adler (1993) in her challenge to conventional views of sexist children’s literature. Adler argues that

In an effort to provide girls with the same opportunities as those available to boys, there is a danger of strengthening the masters’ house by establishing his values and achievements as the most desirable ones. Valuing girls and women when they behave, or aspire to behave like boys and men is no solution. Rather, it seems to me, this escalates the problem with wide-ranging implications for education.... Under the guise of widening options, are we pandering to a hierarchy in which the strengths and interests of many girls are sacrificed to the needs of a male-defined world? Where is the space for other views of the world? (p.112)

On the one hand I did not want to devalue cooking and cleaning, traditional female jobs, by saying that they were not active characteristics because for so long women have struggled to have “housework” acknowledged as work. On the other hand, I also did not want the role of Snow White to be seen as an active role. Because I emphasised the fact that Snow White did not save herself - the wood cutter and the prince did, the children conceded that Snow White should be graphed as a passive character.

However, this upshot bothered me then and has disturbed me ever since. In my research journal that day I wrote: The question now is whether or not I raise the housework issue now that I have clarified my concerns. On the one hand I do think that it is important for the children to know. On the other hand, will it just confuse the
issues we are already dealing with? Are they old enough to think about all the various aspects of this very very complex issue? Is it my role to raise their awareness at one level and hope that the rest is raised at another time? Have I done more damage than good to the cause of women's concerns by devaluing housework?

That all layers of this praxis research were still in place afforded me the opportunity to wrestle with this dilemma at an academic level two weeks later. Dr. Peterat had invited me to talk about my research to a gender equity group with which she was working. After I presented my concerns about the active versus passive dichotomy, we examined the possibilities of setting up a dyad that was not based on a negative and positive construction but rather on a need to achieve a balance between the two terms. Thus we conceived of looking at the stories from the perspective of active versus caregiving roles with the emphasis that males and females need to be evenly represented on both sides of the dichotomy. It was, unfortunately, too late for me to take this notion back to the children.

As we followed the course of the research outlined in the proposal, I encouraged the children to reflect on the implications of our results from the graphing activities so that they could reach a deeper understanding of the gendered stories of our society (Lather, 1986). When we had finished making each of these graphs, I asked the children to comment on the results. I recorded what they wrote each time on chart paper, highlighted those responses that I felt were particularly pertinent and left the large sheets hanging on the classroom walls for the duration of the project. The complete list of their responses to the storybook graph was: "Unfair"
"There's more male books"

"It's no fair to girls; they have more males than females for books"

"There are less female books; it's no fair"

"It's no fair to boys too because the females have a passive and the boys don't"

"They [kids] are going to start thinking boys are more important than girls"

I highlighted this last comment which was made by two of the students whom I had taught the year before because it clearly articulated one of the concerns I was trying to raise for the children.

The children's responses to the video and television show graph were similar and illustrate that they recognised the parallels I was highlighting between those stories in literature and those in television shows and videos.

"It's unfair because there's more male shows than female shows"

"Kids are going to start thinking boys are more important than girls"

"Kids are going to think boys shows are more important than girls shows"

"All the boys are active and of the girls only nine are active, that's unfair"

"It's better to be active"

When we moved into the next and much more complex stage of this unit, the making of the television shows called for in my proposal, the children showed that they were prepared, at least on paper, to take action based on their observations. In this version of the unit I prepared for the expected expression of the children's concern that we not only learn about these inequalities but also have a way to address them. I therefore proposed that we make our own television shows to overcome some of the gender inequities that they had observed. To ensure that the shows addressed these gender inequities we set the criteria that we would follow for
creating gender sensitive television shows. I recorded them on chartpaper in their
language and we left it on the classroom wall for future reference

1. make active characters
2. make sure there is an equal number of males and females
3. it could be funny
4. make sure no one is left out and everyone has a part
5. make sure everyone can share their idea
6. no violence

Each of the television shows that the children made meets the criteria they set.
However, the interaction between the children that I observed and the interventions
that I made illustrate that while a few children could conceptualise and then realise
those criteria easily in their own stories, many could not. As his group was
struggling to decide upon a story line for their television show, Phillip not only kept
insisting that they needed more female roles, he created them for each of the
storylines that one of his partners, Kathleen, suggested. Three boys in three other
groups provide a distinct contrast to Phillip. Kyle, Matthew and Gary each designed
starring roles for themselves and relegated the other members of their groups to
supporting roles. In Kyle’s first conceptualisation of his group’s show, he was to be
a monkey chased through the jungle by three hunters to be played by his partners.
Matthew assigned himself the task of playing all the monsters who inhabited a maze
which held a hidden treasure. The other members of his group were to be the
explorers in search of the treasure. Gary’s group devised a cops and robbers plot in
which, he and Naomi, as the two robbers escape from the two cops played by Gloria
and Daniel. Gary describes his role in their escape animatedly “I’ll push the cop
down. Then I get those paper clip things. I get it straight and then I uncuff Naomi with
one of them!" It was only through my direct intervention that these boys reluctantly changed their role assignments.

In keeping with the tenets of praxis research, I planned that, as they were making the television shows, the children would not only address gender issues in the larger society but also look more closely at their own gendered behaviours. Thus I explained that we would videotape ourselves in action several times throughout the television show making process. I hoped that this would enable my students, like the children in two of Ricki Goldman-Segall's recent studies to "begin to "direct” the research" (1991, p.471) and become ethnographers of their own classroom society (Goldman-Segall, 1991, 1994). We would then watch these videos to try to come to an understanding of the gendered social web in the classroom and our own roles within that web. I refer to these tapes as the praxis videos to distinguish them from the television show videos. Ultimately we taped and viewed five praxis sessions of the process we were going through to make the television videos.

I remained concerned about the imbalance in the number of interactions I was having with my male and female students so I incorporated it into the praxis. In my research proposal I outlined one of the goals of what I intended to be my formal research project for my thesis, which was to give the children the opportunity to observe videos of themselves working on this class project so that they can discuss the nature of their gendered behaviours. The gendered behaviour that we looked at most closely was the number of interactions that I had with my male and female students. However because I was then involving the students directly in trying to shift the balance, they were able to identify and comment on the imbalance themselves and, in one instance, actually alter their behaviours.
My agenda of balancing the number of interactions that I had with my male and female students dominated our first two praxis sessions that we filmed. In the first session, I set the camera up in the corner of the classroom; in the second, I carried the camera around as I moved from group to group. I filmed the sessions within several days of each other at a criteria setting session for our videos and the first writing session the children did on their video scripts. Before beginning the filming of the criteria writing session I told the children that we would watch it to observe male and female patterns of behaviour in the classroom. Several days later when we viewed the tape of the two sessions, I announced that to do this we would tally how many times boys had spoken and how many times girls had spoken. Because this was a very difficult task, no two tallies corresponded exactly. However, it was very clear to all of us that the boys dominated classroom talk with the teacher. The children’s comments during the discussion of this afterwards which I recorded on chartpaper were:

"I think it's not fair that males talk more than females."

"The males did more funny faces than the females"

"Children are going to start thinking that if boys talk more than girls they'll [boys] interrupt whenever girls are talking."

"Let the girls talk."

In an effort to be less directive and more sensitive to their interpretations of the gendered patterns of behaviour in the classroom, when I showed them a praxis tape made several weeks later on May 24, 1995, I asked the children to look for something to do with how boys and girls behave or how I treat boys and girls. Their responses were eerily similar to those I recorded in my first video for Goldman-Segall. Both sexes were very aware of the flip side of the talk coin, that is, not how
much the boys talk but rather how much attention I give to each one. Kyle commented “girls paid more attention [to the teacher] than boys.” Sandy pointed out that “the boys talked more than the girls.” Gordon noted that “boys are more funnier than girls but girls are sometimes funny.” Sarah very succinctly summarised the aspect I had noted to myself in watching the video that “the boys got all the attention and the girls got hardly any - like you [me] got to talk to them most.”

In “Feminist Praxis and the Academic Mode of Production”, Liz Stanley (1990) argues that praxis is “an indication of a continuing shared feminist commitment to a political position in which ‘knowledge’ is not simply defined as ‘knowledge what’ but also as “knowledge for”” (p.15). Gary, who had dreamed up such a central role for himself in his group’s video plot, is an example of a child who made this crucial shift from a ‘knowledge what’ position to a ‘knowledge for’ position and thus was able to make a minor but significant change in our world of the classroom. He did so in an off video encounter recorded in my research journal on May 24, 1995. I noted that while I was talking to one of the girls...Gary came over and was about to interrupt the discussion so that I would deal with his problem/question. He realised I was taping ... and so decided not to interrupt.

Belatedly, I noticed that I had created a number of unsatisfactory power relationships in my groups. I had structured 2 groups comprising of grade three boys and grade two girls. I thought I had created the working groups carefully using a buddy system that I already had in place as the basis for framing them. The buddy system is one that I have used for several years. I designed this system originally to partner up grade two students with grade three students who could help each other working on class projects and assignments. I assign the children to new partnerships each
term so that about once every three months they get a new buddy. While I have always taken into consideration work habits, academic abilities, social abilities and the individual idiosyncrasies of each child as I place them together, it is only in the past two years that I have also taken the sex of each child into consideration and have devised mixed sex partnerships as much as the numbers would allow. As we began this project my class consisted of sixteen grade three students, and ten grade two students with an even split of males and females. I had had thirteen sets of mixed sex buddies in place since the end of March of which ten were mixed grade and three were not.

In creating the television show working groups I looked first at the buddy partnerships and then considered which sets of buddies would work well together. This time I bore in mind the academic abilities, work habits, social abilities, leadership qualities and the idiosyncrasies of the partnerships as an entity. There were five groups of four students and one group of six students at the outset. However well this breakdown worked as a buddy system, it soon became clear that it was an inappropriate model for forming the video teams. The group of six and one of the groups of four had only grade three boys with grade two girls. The grade three boys, strong and dominant in the first place, were able to exploit their power over the younger, less confident girls with whom they were working.

On the morning of June 28, 1995, my class held a gala “world premiere” showing of their videos. The children invited their parents and those kind volunteers who had helped us in videotaping; I invited my parents and my thesis advisor, Dr. Goldman-Segall. After the children described the research we had done, each group introduced their videos and made such acknowledgements as they deemed
important. All the videos met the criteria we had set and each was met with great enthusiasm by the audience. However unsatisfactory I found the activity, the children clearly felt a wonderful sense of accomplishment and thoroughly enjoyed celebrating their achievements.

Nonetheless, as we finished making the television shows in June of 1995, and concluded the unit, I became increasingly concerned about the dearth of interesting results from this version of the awareness-raising sessions. I wrote in my research journal on June 19, *I am beginning to think that all this research and self-analysis that we have been doing has been to no avail. I have not noticed a significant change in the kids behaviour. Only when I am constantly pushing them on the issues do they make some effort to change. It is discouraging.* This was a dramatic shift from the "high" on which I had finished the same unit a year earlier with Svend Robinson's flattering introduction of his Private Member's Bill. At the close of school in June of 1994, the children and I left feeling a marvellous sense of accomplishment - that we had indeed influenced for the better the larger society. At the close of school in June of 1995, although we felt proud of the television shows, I think the children were as relieved as I was that we were finally done.

Implicit in the notion of the spiral cycle is that each round of the research moves forward through a similar process with a slightly altered path as mapped out by the redefined problem which is generated by the earlier cycle. Although the activities in this unit did not exactly match those from the year before, the problem it addressed had not changed. At the end of cycle three, instead of drawing the conclusion that I had discovered a definitive way to involve young children in *praxis research,* I should have concluded that *praxis research is indeed possible and can be very*
successful with young children. The redefined problem might then have been: How can I achieve praxis with a different group of children? The challenge would then have been one of figuring out how to write the flexibility necessary to address the needs and interests of that different group into a research proposal and in particular into a submission that met the very needful requirements of the ethical review committee.
You strive to treat all students equally. But is it possible that you're not as fair as you think? Here, two preeminent researchers on gender bias in education explain how you can identify - and correct - sexist practices in your teaching.

This is the headline of a March 1993 article in the popular teacher magazine Instructor for which most school libraries have a subscription. The two "preeminent researchers" are Myra and David Sadker who, according to the brief biography attached, are professors of education and "have conducted teacher workshops on gender bias in more than 40 states, have written 75 articles and numerous books on the subject and have appeared on national television and radio talk shows" (p.45). In four short pages, the Sadkers not only document their research on how teachers shortchange girls but also give helpful tips on how to "correct" sexist practices. The "Checklist for a Non-Sexist Classroom" which appeared in the January 1990 issue of another popular teacher magazine, Young Children, was designed "to be used as a self-evaluating tool" for teachers. It helps teachers assess the sexist "look" of the classroom and the sexist attitudes of the teacher. In a paper published by the Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Women's Equality and distributed free to all schools in the province, Rebecca Coulter states that "little attention has been given to gender-biased teaching practices at all levels of education" (p.9). Coulter goes on to list possible strategies teachers can employ to promote educational equity for women. Unfortunately, all these recipes for "fixing-the-teacher", which get so much press and thus are often cited in other articles, oversimplify a very complex and far reaching dilemma which cannot be easily "corrected".
Throughout my teaching career, indeed throughout my life, I have not only been concerned about issues of social justice but also taken action to address those issues. In my classrooms over the decade that I have been a teacher, it has always been important to me to show children how they can take action on issues that interest them. Until I began the research chronicled in this thesis, however, that action was primarily asking others to change; not expecting change in ourselves. For example, we often wrote to the government about the problems with the way environment was being treated; annually we made calendars which pictured endangered species and included short dissertations for parents and friends on things the readers could do to save habitat.

In taking on the issue of equity in the classroom, I initially intended it to be a personal action taken to address my own sexist practices. However, as my experience over the past five years has demonstrated, to presume that I could resolve these inequities on my own was naive. The sexist practices that exist in the classroom are rooted in societal inequities which manifest themselves not only in the teachers and in the children but also in the relationships between the teachers and the children. Although his discussion is situated in a historical context, Neil Sutherland's (in press) description of how children acquire and maintain their gender identities is useful here.

From almost their earliest moments children began to acquire their "gender identity," their sense of themselves as girls who would grow into women, or as boys who would grow into men. Gender identities grew out of complex interaction amongst the way in which parents and other members of families provided role models, family discourse on such matters as appropriate behaviour, rule setting, and the like, and the tasks that girls and boys were assigned or assumed in their household....Moreover, gender, as with other forms of identity, is much more than knowing; it is also very much a matter of daily doing and living. Within the family, the sexes separately, constructed the behaviours and skills, and constantly practised the roles that their parents in
particular and society in general either modelled or assigned to them. (p.3)

Because children bring that gender identity to school, it influences and affects the dynamic social web of the classroom. To initiate effective change in gendered classroom practices, the children must be included in and empowered by the process of change; they must be able to both witness and understand the influence society has on them and have a voice in conceiving the form that change may take.

In Women Teaching for Change Kathleen Weiler (1988) identifies the forces that shape our lives as limiting what it is possible to accomplish in a classroom. However, rather than allowing us to sink into despair as a result, Weiler claims that "by recognising the limits of what is possible, teachers (and all of us) should recognise the value and importance of doing what is possible"(p.153). Although I could neither claim to have "corrected" my sexist practices nor to have fixed the sexist behaviours and attitudes of the children that I have involved in praxis over the past five years, I learned that I could create an environment in which both the children and myself could explore what is possible and discover ways to realise those possibilities. Furthermore, I found that although teachers and students may not be able to resolve the complex problems of gender inequity, they most certainly can take significant steps to address those problems.

Thus I am not discouraged by the conclusion that I have not "corrected" either my sexist practises or the sexist behaviours and attitudes of the children. On the contrary, I am excited both by the discoveries that I have made and the possibilities for the future that I can plan. Not only is praxis possible with young children, it is, perhaps, the only way to effectively challenge the inequity in classrooms. Moreover,
it is fun. As I reread my account of the first round of book and television show analysis and the letter writing campaign, I vividly recall the pleasure both the children and I took in disputing the issues, challenging one another on interpretation and celebrating our triumphs. I am looking forward to going back to the classroom to a new group of children and struggling to find that new “hook” that will involve them in the issue.

Recognising the importance of not confining the work the children and I do to clearly prescribed boundaries, I can see many avenues open for me to explore with the children. I have considered examining with the children the question that a woman raised in my most recent discussion with students in Dr. Peterat’s class, How do the children reconcile what they learn about equity at school with the reality of their home lives? Another important aspect of the equity issue is the notion of the male standard being the norm that both sexes need to strive for. It would be interesting to discuss first the concept of having a norm and then look at how individuals from both sexes actually incorporate aspects of maleness and femaleness into their lives. Leaving the academic side of classroom life, I have also thought about looking at “play” as a gendered activity. We could examine the gendered nature of structured “play” in P.E. class as opposed to - or as complementary to - unstructured recess “play”. Or, indeed, the students themselves may suggest yet another way to address or think about the gender inequities in the classroom.

That I was able to create a classroom environment open to possibilities, is largely attributable to the collaboration and critical reflection offered by the professors who guided my trip through a Master of Arts degree in Education. However, not all teachers have the opportunity to collaborate for change in this way. If we are serious
in the call to address gender inequity in the classroom, we must not only provide teachers with time to analyse and assess their classroom situations but also encourage them to collaborate with one another. Collaboration offers teachers what the university offered me: time to talk about the implications of academic research on classroom practice; time to reflect on their own classroom situations; and, most importantly, time to express the frustrations and celebrate the achievements of the research. Then, perhaps in some future classroom, Charlotte’s daughter will not have to wait until after the three o’clock dismissal bell to tell her teacher her news.
REFERENCES


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Who is the main character of the story? 

Are they male? female?

What is the problem in the story? 

What does the main character do to solve the problem? 

Is the main character active? passive? active/passive?

Who is another important character in the story? 

Are they male? female?

Are they active? passive? active/passive?
An analysis of the show "Power Rangers," using male, female, active, passive, good, bad as our criteria.

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Appendix 3  Environmental Attitude Survey

1. It is more important to save leatherback turtles than it is to save panda bears. Yes  No

2. Medals made from the ivory of elephant tusks are really neat. Every kid should have one. Yes  No

3. Women care more about the environment than men. Yes  No

4. It is OK to kill mice and rats if they are pests. Yes  No

5. People should be able to plant gardens in areas that are protected for just animals to live in. Yes  No

6. It doesn't matter if elephants are extinct by the time I grow up. Yes  No

7. Boys take better care of the environment than girls. Yes  No

8. If people need houses it is OK to fill in a swamp where animals live and build the houses there. Yes  No

9. It is more important to save dolphins than alligators. Yes  No

10. Jobs that men do hurt the environment more than jobs that women do. Yes  No

11. If people are starving it is OK to use drift nets to catch fish to feed those people. Yes  No

12. People who have important jobs can hurt the environment if they need to for their jobs. Yes  No
A QUICK START TO YOUR MORNING

Guys’ eyes open

By Judy Swanson
Staff Reporter

Who says young people don’t care about gender equality?

Two Burnaby boys are putting to rest the myth that we’re in a period of post-feminist complacency.

Aly-Khan Virani and Tim Wood wrote to The Province after their Westbridge elementary school class surveyed television aimed at kids. They discovered that girls are still playing second fiddle to guys.

“We found out there were 42 main male characters and only eight main female characters,” wrote the two eight-year-olds. “We would like you to tell people what we found out.”

Tim, who says his favorite show is Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, is worried that “kids are going to think girls can’t be superheroes.”

During a lunch break at school yesterday, his friend Aly-Khan added: “I thought it would be pretty even between (male and female leading characters).

“When I found out, I was pretty sad about the females.”

Emily Sutherland, the boys’ teacher, said her students were upset when they saw the discrepancy in television’s portrayals of women.

“When they saw the results, they were angry and they wanted to tell people about it,” Sutherland said.

The Burnaby school teacher said her class has written to other newspapers and to television stations.

Tim said he and Aly-Khan also wrote to the Fox Television Network and the Power Rangers show.

“We told them to make some more female characters,” he said.

The boys said the school project has really opened their eyes.

“From now on, I’m going to look for TV shows that have both boys and girls in active roles,” said Aly-Khan.

Added Tim: “It will encourage me to speak up for girls when they are being teased.”

The kids aren’t just focusing their efforts on TV. “They’ve written to (Prime Minister Jean Chretien) about the national anthem,” said Sutherland. “They’ve asked him to change ‘in all our sons command’ to ‘in all of us command.’”
Some generation gap

Young boys' take on TV's sexism puts the old boys' view of women to shame

Jeani Read
A Good Read

The other day in The Province, a great little story: Two eight-year-old boys from Burnaby's Westbridge elementary school participated in a study of images of women in media and were upset by what they found.

Actually they were doing a survey on TV for kids, but in the course of that they found that girls are still much worse off than boys in terms of how they're represented.

You may already have seen this story, but bear with me. When eight-year-old boys were dismayed to find only eight main female characters, compared with 42 males, in kids-oriented TV, that's news.

Westbridge teacher Emily Sutherland's whole class was involved, but Aly-Khan Virani and Tim Wood wrote to The Province — as well as to the Fox Television Network and one of their favorite shows, the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers.

"As I told them to make some more female characters," Tim said. "They don't want that to happen." As you can imagine, I loved this.

Ryan makes $6 million US a year, is a wife and mother, has tremendous intelligence, an incredible depth of emotion and is a brilliant talent, the story acknowledges.

"When I was a kid, I was worried about the atomic bomb," she said. "The environment is these kids' atomic bomb. Kids really care." She took some time to put kids in their place — way above adults.

"Kids are wonderful in terms of educating their parents," she said. "They told their parents to 'buckle up.' And not to smoke."

And now, in Burnaby, to not be sexist.

They teach you everything very well," Caddell said. "They teach you very well." And what the heck. I guess I can wait another generation, if they really will.

Jeani Read on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.
Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-264, an act to amend the National Anthem Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to change in the English version only the words “thy sons” to the words “our hearts” in order to remove any sexist reference from our national anthem and to change the word “hearts” to the word “pride”.

In introducing this bill I would like to pay tribute to a group of students at Westridge school in my constituency, in particular Tim Wood and Aly-Khan Virani and their teacher Emily Sutherland, who have worked very hard to document and help change the unequal representation of females in the media and elsewhere in Canadian society.

I congratulate these young students and their teacher on their leadership in promoting equality for all Canadians including girls and women in Canadian society.

The purpose of this bill is to ensure that equality is reflected in the wording of our national anthem as well.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed.)

Svend J Robinson, MP
Burnaby-Kingsway
Appendix 8  Kae's Letter to the CBC

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Gillian Dusting,
Communication Manager
C.B.C.
Box 4600
Vancouver, B.C.
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Dear Ms. Dusting,

I'm a student from Westridge Elementary School. I'm in a grade 2/3 class. In our class we have been doing things about males and females like surveys of books and surveys of T.V. characters. When we did surveys of books we found out that there are 34 male main characters and 22 female main characters. When we did surveys of T.V. characters from shows we watch we found out that there are 43 male main characters and 8 female main characters. This is not fair at all!

Even each time Ms. Sutherland (our teacher) read us a story she tries to find books with active female characters and active male characters. She finds it very hard to find good books about girls. This doesn't mean we think males shouldn't be active. We are just trying to get females a little more active because most books and T.V. shows only have males active. We hope you can help us. And I hope you can write back to us. Thank you very very much!

Sincerely,