

**TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION IN A MEXICAN MONTESSORI
SCHOOL: EXPLORING THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITY IN
YOUNG CHILDREN**

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Abstract

The present study is centered on understanding the gender concepts teachers have, and the form in which their gender perspective is related to the way teachers of a Mexican Montessori elementary school interact with their students according to the child's gender in the early elementary school years. The type of messages teachers are sending to children when they are in the classroom in relation to the concepts of masculinity and femininity are discussed. The analysis is rooted in qualitative research methodology and the gender category. Gender is seen as a social phenomenon.

The paper deals with the work that has been done in gender and schools, especially related to the role teachers have when dealing with gender in the classroom. It discusses how a different method of education, in this case the Montessori method, differs from the traditional system of education when dealing with gender issues.

The way teachers deal with gender issues at school is deeply connected to the viewpoint of gender they have. The narratives of the teachers help us understand this relation. It is hoped that by examining their own practice toward gender issues teachers will take a first step towards a non-sexist education. It is true that the Montessori system breaks from many of the conventional gender-biased practices of traditional schools; even so, a total change cannot be seen until our own perspectives on gender evolve.

Résumé

Le présent travail a pour but l'étude de la compréhension du concept de genre perçue par les professeurs de l'école primaire, ainsi que de la façon dont cette perception de genre influe sur leurs comportements avec les élèves lorsque ceux-ci se trouvent au sein de la classe, en relation avec les concepts de masculinité et de féminité seront discutés. Le concept de genre sera exposé en tant que phénomène social.

J'explorerai les divers travaux effectués sur le sujet, plus particulièrement ceux portant sur le rôle que jouent les professeurs dans le traitement et la perception du genre à l'école primaire. Pour le faire, j'analyserai comment une différente méthode d'enseignement, le cas de la méthode Montessori, s'éloigne de l'approche traditionnelle d'enseignement en ce qui concerne le traitement du genre.

La façon avec laquelle les professeurs réagissent face aux différences de genre à l'école, est étroitement liée à la perception qu'ils se font de la conception du genre. De plus, en examinant leurs propres comportements face au genre, ces derniers paraîtront tendre davantage vers un enseignement faisant abstraction du genre des élèves. Il est certain que le système d'enseignement de Montessori, en ce qui concerne le traitement du genre, diffère nettement du système d'éducation des écoles traditionnelles, toutefois cette différence ne pourra être réellement perçue que lorsque nos propres perceptions du genre auront évolué.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

One of the questions that I have asked myself throughout my life is, how do we get to be who we are today? Of the many paths I could have followed to answer this question, my first “formal” approximation to it was to study psychology. There I discovered that there were many roads I could travel to find an answer. Many different circumstances led me to “discover” gender studies, which have helped me approach my initial question and have also opened my eyes to many new ones. Now I have established a committed relationship with them, and this research is another way to open and close new questions.

Gender studies analyze the different roles men and women play in society. Researchers from different fields can use a gender category to guide their studies in such areas as psychology, education, philosophy and sociology. This type of research has been key in the debates about equality between men and women, because they support the idea that gender differences are not “natural”, but are instead, constructed by society.

Gender is assigned to a baby from the moment parents know the baby’s sex, but the person is not necessarily conscious of it until he or she is approximately three years old (Lamas, 1986). We manifest behaviors, emotions, temperaments and attitudes that are interpreted by the culture in which we live as feminine or masculine. This net of thoughts that makes us interpret things in a specific way is a product of many centuries of history that have developed different areas of our lives, such as the State, job field, school, families, mass medias, and culture in general. “Gender is the category where all

aspects psychological, social and cultural, that make possible femininity and masculinity are grouped, reserving sex for the biological and anatomical components” (Bleichmar in Bustos, 1988). From this we can say that the stereotypical differences between men and women are culturally built. Lamas (1986) states that, with the exception of biological maternity, biologically there are no behaviors or characteristics that are exclusive from one of the sexes, these differences are a cultural product.

Gender norms are usually learned in our every day life, generally they are immersed in our every day conversations. This norms are learned by what language and other symbols imply. Bustos (1988) observes that to talk about gender roles, norms or stereotypes, implies talking about socialization. It is through different institutions (family, education, religion, mass medias) that people learn gender roles. The process of socialization is not passive, as Corsaro (1992) puts it. For children the creation and interpretation of culture is usually the same process; the meaning they give to their activities is linked to the process of social contextualization in which they are generated. Socialization is not something that just happens to children, it is a process in which through interaction with other children, they produce their own culture and reproduce, amplify and integrate themselves into the adult world. This is why we can say that socialization homogenizes members of society.

One of our very important socialization institutions is school. There we not only learn about history, mathematics and arts, but, we also learn how to relate with others, how society functions and about many other unspoken aspects of everyday life. Schools play a very important role in the socialization of kids and in the way they'll view themselves in the future, as men and women in the world.

Then it is very important that, as a society, we are aware of what is going on in our schools. Some work has been done in this area, and it will be discussed later on in this document, but there are many gaps that need to be taken into consideration.

Gender categories can help us study and amplify our understanding and knowledge of society, and in particular of the school organizations. At the same time the way in which schools work can help us understand gender identity. In general, gender categories can help us understand the way in which society functions. Because gender implies a way of thinking about our selves in societies, and a different way of thinking and living in the world for men and women, it is a form of a social organization.

Autobiographical study

When one has to decide in which setting to base your own research on, there are many factors to consider. One of them is the academic point of view, where you have to ask: What would be the most interesting setting for the study? What setting hasn't been explored sufficiently? Which setting could help the study to be original?

On a more personal level, you have to consider your own interests and passions, and if you are fortunate enough, you will be able to find a balance between those two and start an interesting project for yourself and the academic world.

When it came the time for me to decide where to base my study on, I realized I had the option of choosing between two countries; one of them was Canada, because it is the country where I'm doing my graduate studies. The other country where I could base the study being Mexico, which is my country of origin, and where I did almost all of my previous studies.

From reading the literature on schools and gender, I realized that there has been a lot of work done in First World countries, but I couldn't find a lot of material on Latin American countries for this specific topic. As I read some of the material I kept wondering how some of those situations would work in a Mexican school, would they be the same, or would there be a totally different world to explore? After all, Mexican reality can be very different from that in the USA, Canada, or Europe.

Some other questions kept coming to me; how are gender issues treated in non-traditional schools? How do different systems of education deal with gender issues? Would the environment be so different as to change the paradigms that have been promoted by traditional systems?

After setting different ideas on the table, the thought of conducting the study in a Mexican Montessori school came up, and it immediately seemed like the best option to follow. It would address the queries mentioned above, and it would also be exploring an area that hasn't been approached sufficiently in gender literature.

Going home to do the research implied that I would be able to move around in an environment familiar to me, and many other advantages that it can bring. For example, it would be easier for me to gain access to the setting, because I had previous contact with some of the people at the school, and knew before hand how things work there. It also gave me the opportunity of exploring my own culture. But I now had the chance to explore my own construction of gender identity, not only because I was doing the study in a Mexican school, but also because it was the same school where I had done my elementary school studies. In that sense one could say that this study is a part of autobiographical content.

The world literature on gender and education, has addressed issues of unfairness in the classrooms, such as that of girls being constantly in a disadvantaged position compared to boys, (Sadker and Sadker, 1994) and of girl's voices being silenced, which leads to a loss of identity (Gilligan, 1992). Gender literature based in Latin America, constantly brings up issues of "machismo", which goes on to explain that the ideas are learned by children through their families and school, and are reinforced by society in general. One of the ideas that constantly comes up in the literature, is that if we want to see a change in relation to the traditional gender norms that we see now in society, schools have to play a major role. In other words, the authors are suggesting that schools diverge from their traditional practices. By studying a non-traditional school, as in this case, a Montessori school, we have a chance to observe one of the ways in which these changes might occur and also evaluate the impact of changes from the traditional practice, in relation to gender issues.

Women in Mexico and Latin America

A factor that seems to be of great importance when evaluating the life standard of a country is the birth rate; it has been linked to factors like, the economical and educational situations. In the past decades the birth rates in Latin America have dropped considerably. In the 1960's women in these countries had an average of six children, while today they have an average of three, which shows a lot of change compared to other regions of the world like Southern Asia and Africa (un-wire, p. 74, 1990).

A un-wire article from 1999 (talks about the specific situation in Mexico in this matter. It says that "Mexicans are moving away from traditionally large families and

opting for fewer children, resulting in a tremendous reduction in the fertility rate, from 7 children in 1965 to 2.5 children today” (p. 74). This same article says that women in Latin America have gained “substantially more rights and better treatment than women in the rest of the developing world” (p. 74). This news sounds encouraging, but there is still a lot to be done in these countries. Women don’t have the same rights as men in everyday life. Also the same article states that in countries where there is a high indigenous population, gender gaps in literacy and income per capita, tend to grow (p. 74).

The model of family that we see in Mexico is patriarchal, where the male figure is the one in which the development of the family is based. We know that this type of organization is not the most adequate for a healthy development of members in society, because it does not represent equality among its members (Hierro in Casa-Tirao, 1997). Women in Mexico and Latin American countries, study, work, and are self-sufficient, but when they establish a relationship with a man, they reproduce the characteristics learned in their patriarchal families, in which they were socialized to show abnegation, beauty, tenderness and compassionate behaviors. For their part, men defend and support intellectually feminist groups and ideas, as long as they are not in their own families or about “their own” mate (Casa-Tirao, 1997). The patriarchal model gives the father the control over important decisions such as the education of children, acquisition of goods, the working situation of wife and daughters, if they might go out their homes, etc.

Stromquist talks about issues of inequality in Latin America, by expressing that even if women have the same rights as men, such as the right to work outside their homes, vote, divorce, access to education, when it comes to equality, things are not as

good as they might seem from the outside. This is because women in these countries suffer from, “oppressive ‘machista’ relationships with husbands, informal or de facto bigamous marital unions, intense but hidden physical violence, ridicule when seeking political and organizational leadership positions, and lower salaries than men’s for jobs of comparable worth” (Stromquist, 1996).

In the past decade there was a big increment in the number of women who received higher levels of education. However, they seem to be concentrated in limited fields of study. The curriculum in schools in general, tends to be very gender biased. As Stromquist (1996) explains, for example, it does not challenge male advantages over women, and important female figures are not included in the history and politics text books. At the same time that the text books are presenting sexual stereotypes, teachers are generally not prepared to deal with sexual inequalities in the classrooms or are themselves biased and insensitive to them.

It seems that changes are starting to show in relation to gender inequality, but there is still a lot to be done when it comes to the individual preparation of members of society.

The study

We know now that school plays an important role in the child’s acquisition of gender identity. The views that teachers have toward gender concepts can influence the way children define masculinity or femininity and the way they feel about themselves as boys or girls in the world. Teachers are supposed to provide a gender-neutral curriculum, but it is not clear if they are always doing this, either because they are giving

biased information or because they are not dealing with certain situations that arise at school (Grossman and Grossman, 1993). It is also not certain whether a gender-neutral curriculum is even possible to implement, because we live in a world where gender is deeply rooted in our culture. We cannot move through the world without our gender assumptions. Perhaps what is more important is to be aware of what those assumptions are.

To date, the studies that have been done on “gender and schooling” have been based primarily on North American, Australian and British schools. I based my study in a Mexican school. I am aware that the school system in Mexico is very complex, and has many different facets. I decided to center my work in a Montessori elementary school, because it is also a very different setting from the one that is generally described in the literature. It also gives new insights on how a different system of education integrates gender issues into the every-day learning experience. This type of setting differs from a traditional classroom in almost every way, starting from the way the tables are spread around the classroom, to the form in which students learn new topics, and the activities they have throughout the day. I think this study brings new light in understanding how an alternative method of education helps form the gender identity of girls and boys.

The problem that I approached has to do with the understanding of the way in which teachers of Montessori (early-elementary-school years), interact with their students in relation to the construction of gender meanings, concerning concepts of masculinity and femininity. Another issue I explored is the way in which the assumptions that teachers have about gender are related to what they are actually doing inside their classroom.

Outline of the thesis

The thesis is organized as follows; in the first chapter I have described some of the key issues of the study. The next chapter constitutes the theoretical background of the research. The different fields that are related to the research and some of the different authors that have worked with them are reviewed. The gender concept is studied more in depth, the importance of being a woman versus a man and how this leads us to live in our world in a different way. Also, I take a look at some of the research done in Mexico and other Latin American countries related to gender and schools, as well as an exploration of research in gender and the school environment in western countries. The idea of having a more engaged pedagogy is linked to the concept of gender and the way that changes in the traditional system of education could help us reach a more gender neutral world. The final part of the chapter is dedicated to explaining how the Montessori system works.

Chapter three, talks about the methodological aspects of the research, and how a design to study gender in a Montessori school was developed. I describe the way in which I gained access to the setting and how the study took place. I try to clarify the way in which the school was organized for the children and the different activities they had during the day. Also, I explain the interview process, and the type of questions I asked. On the final section of the chapter I describe the way in which I organized and analyzed the data.

In chapter four the categories that emerged from the analysis of the data are presented, the key issues that came up during the analysis are explored and the voices of the teachers can be heard through their own narrations of how they experience the gender phenomena in the school.

Chapter five constitutes of the conclusions. Different issues that were observed and narrated by the teachers are related to what the previous literature describe. New ways in which teachers are approaching gender issues are reviewed. Also, suggestions on how we can help children form different views on gender concepts are discussed.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender

The socialization process we experience in our life teaches us the norms, stereotypes and roles that we integrate and use to move around our own culture. By norms we refer to the rules by which behaviors have to be adapted. By stereotypes we mean simplified mental images that refer to a certain category of people, institutions or events. The characteristics have to be shared by a large amount of people. Finally, by role we refer to the way in which we are supposed to behave, depending on the situation we are in or the person or group of people we are interacting with.

Burin (1989) explains that, girls learn more interpersonal roles, related to private life and affections, while boys, learn social roles, in a more abstract and less personalized context. Some of the stereotyped characteristics that are given to men and women are explained in the following way:

The traditional conception of masculinity includes assertivity, independence, object-oriented, more than people-oriented, active sexuality and emotional control. The traditional conception of women includes passivity, dependence, willingness to help others, person-oriented more than object-oriented, passive sexuality and emotional spontaneity. (Strummen, Kinney, Fitzgerald, 1982, p. 148).

It is important to understand that gender is not a static concept, but, a constantly emerging one; it is not something that happened in past cultural realities. Rather gender is a contemporary way of organizing past, present and future cultures or societies. It is an active way of “living” and understanding our own person in the world. An example of this has been given by Corres (1994) when she states that there is a difference from what is considered to be a masculine or feminine way of thinking. The former is described as

rational and logical, it is always searching the no-contradiction; differences are categorized as dichotomies, exclusions or hierarchical orders. Feminine thought is conceived as mythical, poetical, imaginative, and reversible; it does not try to explain things in a rational manner, rather it just lets things blend in a more harmonious and random way. Feminine thought is directed to the inner self, while the masculine is directed to the outer world. These different forms of thought account for the possibility of living and interpreting the same world in different forms.

While on one hand some of the studies that I reviewed have a tendency to present what might appear to be an essentialist argument – ‘boys do this and girls do that’ – (Kholgerg in Sadker and Sadker, 1994, Casa-Tirao, 1997). I have nonetheless included them here because they do provide a context for the kinds of approaches that have been used traditionally to explore gender and schooling. Indeed, they represent the type of ‘first steps’ that are needed to begin to get an idea of what the picture really is for boys and girls in school.

Trautner (in Lloyd and Duveen, 1993), explains that children go through different stages in their understanding of sex-typing, which is a way of categorizing gender:

The first phase is characterized by unawareness of links between sex-group membership and traits. In the second phase, gender-marked traits are linked exclusively to sex-group membership. In the final phase, children display awareness that adherence to gender-marked traits varies within and between sex groups” (p.8).

Another important issue when it comes to the gender differences, is to understand that females and males develop different moralities. Sadker and Sadker (1994), explain that Kohlberg had created a hierarchy of moral development where males were seen as more moral than females.

In Kohlberg's hierarchy of moral development, the lowest stages show human behavior driven by fear of punishment and by self-interest. People at stage three act responsibly by caring about others, while those at stage four behave in accordance with rules and laws that maintain the social order. The most advanced levels of the hierarchy reflect commitment to abstract principles of justice and individual rights (Sadker and Sadker, 1994, p. 227).

The authors also explain that women are usually in stage three of this hierarchy, while males would score higher. It was not until Gilligan criticized this work, by saying that this study had been done with only male subjects, that people started to realize that morality could develop differently for males and females. "Gilligan derived her own theory: Men reason morally through a voice of individual rights and justice, but there is also a different voice, one of connection and caring, that belongs primarily to women" (Sadker and Sadker, p. 228).

In other words, morality can be divided in two different ways, one that is male, seen as "objective", distant, and impartial, with a lot of rules, equalitarian. The main objective of it is justice. On the other hand, there is the female morality, seen as "response", which is about doing what seems to be the best thing to do for each situation. It is more flexible, and it adjusts to each individual and his or her situation. We cannot say that one of these is better than the other; they are simply two different styles of relating to the world. Maybe they reflect the different roles that women and men have played throughout history (even though that is changing today). Where men have dealt with rules of the outside, and a more impersonal job world, where there are large groups in which rules and objectivity have to be strong to maintain the group. Women on the other hand, have dealt with individuals who have different needs, in a more personal context. Where the needs of everyone are taken into consideration, are more

individualized, and have more responsive relations, where universal rules cannot be applied.

Gender studies in Mexico

Gender studies are generally linked to a critical understanding of society. Mexican gender studies are not the exception. Whenever a researcher talks about gender, the work becomes also a social critique linked to issues like, democracy, poverty, etc. Researchers are very concerned with other oppressive forms like social class and race (Lamas, 1996, Hierro, 1997). One of the aims of gender studies in Mexico and the world, is to reinforce the right of women and men to not being an object of domination because of their gender, and to not let anyone obtain sexual power over another individual.

Gender studies in Mexico coincide with other studies around the world, in the sense that, they have found that Mexican boys and girls are socialized to learn traditional gender norms, roles and stereotypes. Diaz-Garcia (1997) explains that girls are being educated for an unfair life, in which their liberation becomes near to impossible, since they are learning from childhood to be passive, weak, abnegate and submissive; always searching for and retaining a man that will be able to protect and take care of them, and finding security through others. They comprehend from an early age that their role will be to take care of others, as mothers, wives and daughters. As Casa-Tirao (1997) explains, women teach these roles and stereotypes to their own daughters, along with the defense mechanisms to survive in a culture that is arranged and governed by and for the male population. Boys, on the other hand, are prepared to exercise power in the many circles of their lives, like the family, economical activities, work and in society in

general. To obtain all this power they have to be strong, protective and hide their own emotions.

Casa-Tirao (1997) explains that in order to move away from the traditional conceptions of gender, there has to be a shift from the patriarchal model of families we see today. If we want individuals to live in freedom and democracy, they have to be educated within these values. She proposes the democratization of families, through the participation of all their members, in the decision making processes. Also, that families shall have clear and open communication, members in the family shall have the same rights and obligations. Parents shall be able to share their power with the other members of the family. Schools shall also promote and implement these types of practices.

Gender studies in Mexican schools are not very abundant. They tend to confirm the findings in other parts of the world, where schools maintain and promote the gender differences and the domination of one gender over the other:

The real problem of the differences is based in the use of a double morality, in which on one hand, is neglecting, hiding and oppressing women, and on the other its neutrality is favoring and regulating in favor of the masculine gender” (Delgado and Mata, 1996, p. 112).

They explain that parents and teachers materialize these differences through giving permission to do certain activities to boys while denying these same rights to girls.

The teacher-student and student-student relations are going to be very influential in many aspects of the children’s lives, and it affects them in different levels, like the ideological, emotional and behavioral parts of the person. When schools promote gender differences, the same experiences can be lived differently by boys and girls (Montes, 1995). In this sense, one can say that even if men and women live in the same world, they interpret it in very dissimilar ways. This is why education shall be understood as a

way to assimilate knowledge, but also as a form of teaching values of equity that will be translated into more responsible attitudes and behaviors.

The Mexican government provides every elementary school with free textbooks on the different subjects. These textbooks are mandatory, and every school has to work with them. The gender content of the textbooks has been analyzed by many researchers (Delgado 1991, Cano 1992, Fernandez and Tronco, 1992). Delgado (in Delgado and Mata, 1996) found that the books used from 1975 until 1994, for the first and second grades, presented differential roles and stereotypes for men and women. They referred to women as: boring, kind, tender, biologically fertile, dumb and shy; at the same time they presented males as: brilliant, smart, fast, brave and astute. Also, there is a more frequent appearance of male figures, in which males are presented as active and females as passive. The roles they present for women and men are the ones traditionally supported by society. The different authors that have studied these books (Delgado, 1991, Cano 1992, Fernandez and Tronco, 1992, Mata, 1996) coincide in saying that they generally define females only in relation to men. Leaving only three roles for women: they are hidden behind a male, they are asexual, or they do not exist at all.

In a study about the gender structures behind the reading habits and processes of teenagers (Ariezpe, 2001), it was found that even though young people in Mexico are conscious of gender inequality and say things have changed from the way they used to be when their parents were young, they are still finding a hard time relating to characters that don't follow the traditional concepts of femininity and masculinity. They supported the idea of females being able to work outside their home, but were concerned about the fact that children might be neglected by their working mothers. In a way they knew that

traditional gender concepts are not the ideal way to experience the world. They want to move away from them, but they still had a hard time imagining the world in a non-traditional form. The author says that this was even more predominant in teenagers of lower income families, where the domination of males over females is even more evident.

Stromquist (1996) proposes some changes that would help children and society in general to experience a world of gender equity. These changes move towards democratizing the family needs with a more “flexible sexual division of labor, changes in gender patterns of child rearing, a more egalitarian balance of authority between father and mother, and greater participation of women and girls in the economy and community.” The same author (p.422) explains the proposal of different Latin American organizations towards a democratization of education, which include:

the promotion of the “creation of opportunities for boys and girls to discuss in critical and creative ways the sex-gender system and its consequences on social and work life; make gender issues more visible in educational environments; support processes by which teachers discuss sexual discrimination and fragmentation and identify social opportunities for both genders; eliminate the sexist features of curricula and educational materials; incorporate into the curriculum the contribution of women to the development of culture and society; promote the analysis and revision of programs that train women for the labor force to eliminate all forms of discrimination and segmentation; sensitize and train teachers to eliminate sexist practices and to improve their performance to attain an effective equality between women and man in the educational process; and incorporate in teacher training curricula the themes of gender and equal opportunity for men and women” (Stromquist, 1996, p. 422).

Some of these propositions have already been taken into account. For example, the Mexican government has done a revision of the textbooks, and an effort has been made to eliminate gender biases in these books. While steps are being taken there are many areas to work on to obtain gender equity. Sometimes politicians and policy makers base their

conclusions in studies based in North America. This is because there are still a lot of gaps in the research in Mexico and other Latin American countries. Research in these countries is necessary in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the problematic and develop new ways to approach it.

The importance of school in building our gender concepts

The role of formal or school education in the acquisition of gender identity is of great importance and because of that, the teacher's influence on children cannot be neglected, since schoolteachers are role models for kids while they are in school. As Lloyd and Douveen (1993) put it, "things which happen in the classroom are arranged and allowed to happen by the teacher. The teacher creates the realities of the classroom..." (p. 12).

Sometimes teachers, without even wanting to, give children the idea that their identities are shaped by the sex group to which they belong, and as our authors explain, kids learn that sex-group membership has inexorable consequences. Grossman and Grossman (1993) have provided an insight on this subject, when stating that,

Teachers reward behavior they want to encourage and punish behavior which they disapprove. They consciously expose students to certain information and models of behavior through the articles, short stories, and books they assign to students, the topics they select for class discussion, the guest speakers they invite, the behavior they choose to model, and so forth. They also do the same thing inadvertently, without consciously planning to do so (p. 73).

It is possible that teaching children stereotypical behaviors, without even planning to do so, is more "dangerous", because it can be perpetuating even more the patriarchal model of society that on the other hand they are trying to eliminate, so they are exposing students to a double morality.

It is also very important that teachers have an awareness of all their own characteristics, because that is the basis for accepting and understanding others and of dealing in the best way with students in their classrooms. If teachers examine their own values, it can be easier to give a nonsexist education.

Jordan (1995) explains that when trying to create gender equity in schools, "the focus of non-sexist policies should move from suppressing recognition of gender differences to evaluating, and if necessary modifying, the gender definitions made available to and constructed by children" (p. 73). The author also states that teachers can educate children to know that gender identity is not built by rejecting the opposite sex or by doing certain activities that are thought to be exclusive of one of the sexes, but, that there are different valid ways of being male and female; and that if there are activities in common it does not mean that they are denying their gender identity. They can teach children that the activities have to be evaluated by how good or bad they are in human terms, and not by if they are considered to be feminine or masculine.

Cook-Gumperz (1986), explain that teachers do not do anything to integrate boys and girls' play during school. They attribute this to the fact that teachers tend to assume that school has to be gender "neutral" and prefer to ignore situations where children are not acting accordingly to what adults consider gender equity should be like.

In the eyes of most of western society, schools are a place where girls and boys go to receive the same education, but as many authors have explained, this is not really happening. Sadker and Sadker (1994) say that, overall, girls are receiving less attention from teachers than boys. They explain that this is a very subtle process, which slowly silences girls' voices, and gives women a less complete education. This happens on

many different levels; teachers don't demand as much of girls as of boys, by not giving constructive feedback, not calling as much on them for participation in class, choosing topics that talk about only males, etc. The authors describe the situation of girls in school in this form:

Then girls and women learn to speak softly or not at all; to submerge honest feelings, withhold opinions, and defer to boys; to avoid math and science as male domains; to value neatness and quiet more than assertiveness and creativity; to emphasize appearance and hide intelligence. Through this curriculum in sexism they are turned into educational spectators instead of players; but education is not a spectator sport" (Sadker and Sadker, p. 13).

But girls are not the only ones that are affected by this situation. It is known that boys drop out of school more than girls do, they also fail more courses, miss promotions, dominate accident rates, they tend to commit suicide more and have much higher homicide statistics. "Raised to be active, aggressive and independent, boys enter schools that seem to want them to be quiet, passive and conforming...when a boy and a girl are involved in an identical infraction of the rules, the male is more likely to get the penalty" (Sadker and Sadker, p.204).

In schools boys are at the top or at the bottom, both positions are very stressful and can affect deeply the lives of these students. In the school system boys will get a lot of attention for being either too good or too bad, either of which calls a lot of attention from school personnel (mainly the teachers). In this way, boys' problems are always very public, while girls problems are once again on the private side.

In a very dramatic way, it seems that neither boys nor girls are getting a total benefit from schools, and it draws attention to the fact that school systems need a deep change. They need to go through a process of rethinking their position and the way they have been running things, so that society can get the most out of each individual's

education. Schools need to support individuals' development, and not to punish them when trying to grow.

It is important that we can have an active way of approaching schools and other socializing institutions, because it can make us aware of what these different institutions teach us. Such awareness can provide us a way of analyzing different ideas or concepts that we some times take for granted.

Engaged teaching

As we have seen, traditional methods of education are perpetuating a patriarchal society, where traditional gender roles, norms, and stereotypes are being taught to children. That is why it would be of major importance to learn how a different method of education approaches gender issues, in this case, a Montessori pedagogy.

There have been many critiques to our traditional methods of teaching; many researchers have proposed major changes in the way we approach teaching and learning. If we are to change our society, to make it into a world were everybody's needs, concerns, ideas, etc. are taken into account, we have to start by changing our formal socializing institutions, starting with schools. Paulo Freire and bell hooks, have discussed and criticized the way traditional schools function, and they propose a new way of being involved with education.

A central point in Freire's pedagogy is that education is about teaching how to be critical and not how to memorize facts, or in the words of Freire:

Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the 'banking' concept of education...knowledge emerges only through invention and re-

invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world and with each other (1969, p. 58).

In schools where the “banking” method of education is implemented, students find that they learn only facts, and they have only information with no meaning. A big gap between the student and knowledge is built and it marks the way students relate to it. They alienate themselves from what they are learning, and they become, as Freire explains, easy to dominate.

Education as proposed by Freire is a circle where everyone teaches something to the others:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach (1968, p.67).

This method it is about letting every human grow and learning by it.

In the same line of thought, bell hooks talks about the role that the teacher has to engage in, so that engaged pedagogy can take place. “When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks” (1994, p.21).

The same author explains that if we want gender differences and cultural diversity to be recognized, we have to rethink our ways of knowing and by doing this transform the classrooms. Traditional methods of education only misinform society, and it denies individuals of the capacity to change its own reality.

hook says that we have to open the classrooms to controversy. Teachers shouldn't be afraid of different opinions in a classroom; they have to stop thinking of the classroom as a neutral setting, where everyone has to be given a chance to participate, "making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy" (p.39).

There has been some criticism of Freire's work related to the fact that he leaves all gender issues out of it, and uses sexist language in his work. hook explains, "Freire's own model of critical pedagogy invites a critical interrogation of this flaw in the work. But critical interrogation is not the same as dismissal" (p.49). By this she means that Freire was congruent with what he believed critical thinking should be and made those criticisms part of his learning process.

Teaching as a practice of freedom can be used as a way of dealing and eliminating gender biases. Freire's work shall not be neglected because of the accusations of sexism, because in its own method, it gives a way to deal with that. Freire talks about making the problematic part of the teaching, and gender biases are not an exception.

When we rethink the way we learn and teach, we also rethink the way society functions. Schools shall stop "repairing" their problems by healing small problems that will come out sooner or later in another, and very likely bigger form. A complete change in the school system is what society needs if we want schools to serve their purpose; have educated people that can relate to the world in a responsible and caring form.

Montessori schools

The first Montessori school was founded by Dr. Maria Montessori in Rome in the beginning of the past century. She was a Doctor in Medicine and Surgery, and also the first woman to complete medical training in Italy. In a broad way, she wanted to transform humanity into a universal “brotherhood”, where the mission of women and men would be to know, love and serve. Her educational method aimed to develop confident, competent, self-disciplined, spiritually strong and cooperative children. She promoted the interaction of children with their environment, as a way of learning how to master it (Burns, 1974). Students are helped to reach their potential through self-development.

When learning through this method, children work and learn at their own pace. They work with materials developed specifically for their learning. In general, tasks are leveled from easy to more difficult ones. This helps children to learn gradually and build new knowledge into what they already know. When children master one material they can go on to the next one. The materials are developed so that children can work in different areas from the academic, to the physical, to everyday jobs like watering plants and serving a table. As Montessori explained:

The didactic material renders auto-education possible and permits a methodical education of the senses. Not upon the ability of the teachers does such education rest, but upon the didactic system. This presents objects which, first, attract the spontaneous attention of the child, and second, contain a rational gradation of stimuli. (Montessori in Orem, 1974).

The materials were developed from equipment used in the past with “regular” children, as well as from material used with children with disabilities.

The teachers, also referred to as directress or director, focus on teaching the children how to use the materials, instead of only giving lectures. They do give presentations to the classroom from time to time, but also give a lot of individual feedback. More than anything, the role of the director or directress is to give direction to the spontaneous work of the students, and to prepare the environment for their auto-education. Montessori was also a great believer in children teaching each other. She explained that this activity helps both children. The one that explains something to the other, because it helps him or her organize and clarify the material in his or her mind, and also the other children who can sometimes learn in a more relaxed way. The teacher's job also consists of promoting a disciplined environment, in which children can work without interference.

Discipline is a big issue in Montessori schools; teachers spend a lot of time maintaining a good learning environment for the children. The goal is for children to achieve inner discipline. They are allowed a lot of liberties, for example, the ability to choose what they are going to work on most of the time. But it is only through their work and in becoming absorbed in it, that children will develop concentration and good working habits, in other words, self-discipline. Children learn early on that they cannot interfere with other students' work, unless they are invited to do so. They also know that running and shouting are not allowed, so even if they are free to move around the classroom, they'll have to do it in a quiet form. Also, order is very important, so children are taught to leave all the materials in their original spot after using them.

Some important characteristics of the Montessori program are:

- Auto-education

- Real tasks available (as opposed to role playing)
- Intrinsic motivation
- Process, not product
- Cooperation, not competition
- Fostering autonomy in the child
- Fostering competencies based on success
- Spontaneous activity
- Peer teaching
- Sensory-motor preparation for intellectual development
- Natural social development
- Biological basis for support of developmental needs
- Responsible freedom (Bona, 1974).

The method's fundamental principle is to allow the development of the student, through the spontaneous manifestation of the child's nature, always permitting children to have liberty. The teacher has a fundamental role, because it is his or her responsibility to create an effective and ordered environment where children can truly learn and develop. They also have the chore to promote cooperation and respect among children. Sharing is a very important factor of Montessori education, students share the materials as well as their own knowledge with other students. This system views the child as "an active participant within an environment specially prepared to meet his needs" (Orem, 1974, p.97). The child's own interests in learning is key to Montessori education, children learn by doing, and their concentration and creativity are stimulated in the process.

Children are given the freedom to learn at their own rhythm, to develop at their own capacity and their individual needs are met.

It is true that the Montessori method can be a path to follow when trying to get a more personalized and human approach to education. This system of education can work for many children, but there are times when some children don't feel comfortable in it. Probably what we need in society today is different types of alternative schools so that different individuals can choose the one they'll learn and develop the most in. Montessori schools can be one of these options.

The next chapter talks about the methodological aspects of the thesis, it explains the way the research took place. Different aspects of the Montessori school that has been studied are described, so that the reader can get a more specific idea on what these type of schools look like in real life.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Research question

What are the gender messages that are being transmitted by teachers in the early years of a Montessori elementary school in Mexico City?

Objectives

-To understand the way in which teachers of Montessori-early-elementary-school years, interact with their students in relation to the construction of gender meanings. Concerning concepts of masculinity and femininity.

-To explore the way in which the assumptions that teachers have about gender are related to what they are actually doing inside their classroom.

Setting and sampling

The material (field notes and audio taped interviews) was collected in one Montessori school in Mexico City. The school has children as little as day care level, all the way up to students in the sixth grade, which is the last year of elementary school. Basically all the teachers at the school are Mexican. The school is a private institution. Because it needs a lot of special Montessori material, school fees are high, which implies that children who attend there come from middle to upper class families.

From some of the literature I had reviewed on qualitative methods, I knew that gaining access to the setting could be a complicated step (Ely, 1991, Patton, 1990, Hitchcock, 1989). Nevertheless, I found that in this case gaining access to the setting was

rather easy. I find that this is in part due to the fact that I am from the same culture that I was studying and know how to move around the environment, what different expressions mean, the way people react to different situations, etc. But I think it is also because in general, Mexican culture is very open to letting outsiders into their lives. For example, when a foreigner visits Mexico, people are immediately interested in where they are from, what the culture in their country is like. They also want to make outsiders feel comfortable, they want them to have a good impression of the country and enjoy their time there. In a similar way, when a researcher wants to explore something about an environment there, people don't put up resistance; in fact I would venture to say that being the object of a research is something that Mexicans enjoy to a certain level. All of these factors helped me have a smooth process of gaining access to the setting. In this way, my entrance to the field wasn't as complicated as it is in many cases, as Burgess 1991, explains, "...no one set of strategies for gaining access has been appropriate every time. Much has depended on the social and political context of the project, the location of the project site or sites, the relationship established between researcher and researched, and whether the project involved a lone researcher or a project team." (p. 44). The fact that Montessori schools are generally open to observation, the fact that the school was in Mexico, where people are more open to letting strangers into their lives, my former contact with the school, and the fact that I was only one researcher, were some of the factors that helped me enter the field without major complications.

The day I arrived at the school to ask for permission to conduct my research there, I was somewhat nervous. It had been a long time since the last time I had visited the school, and I wasn't totally sure of who to expose my plans to do the research at the

school first. In other words, I was not sure of who the gatekeeper was. I related to what Ely et al explain in relation to this situation, “often, qualitative researchers determine their appropriate gatekeeper only after they understand more about the situation they are studying” (p. 20, 1991). I went straight to the administration and found that the secretary working there was the same person that had been there when I was a child attending the school. Seeing a familiar face gave me some relief. After reminding her of who I was, I asked her who I could talk to in order to obtain permission to do a research. She assured me that there was not going to be any problems and called the coordinator of the classrooms. The person in question turned out to be one of my old teachers. She said that there were not any problems; she immediately called a teacher from one of the classrooms I wanted to observe so I could arrange the details with her. I talked to the teacher and explained a little bit about my research, and my reasons for doing it at this particular school. She agreed with me doing research in her classroom. She said that I could give her the consent forms, and she would give them to the parents, and also that she was going to talk to the other teachers about me, and that I could ask for their consent before visiting their classrooms for the first time. During the next couple of days I did some visits to the school with the purpose of talking to all of the different teachers from the classes I wanted to observe. I gave them the consent forms, in which I also explained the objectives of the research. After they read them, I asked if they had any other questions and talked about any concerns they might have. I found a lot of enthusiasm from the teachers, and also a real disposition to help. They all assured me that they had no problems with me visiting their classes and said I could go in whenever I needed. In general, teachers were surprised to have to sign a consent form to have me do the study

there, because they have people observing their classes all the time, and they never have to go through that, but they did it with a good attitude.

My original idea was to videotape the observations at the same time that I would be taking field notes. But, when I exposed this idea to the first teacher, she explained to me that students were going to be too distracted by a camera, and would be acting up all the time. She suggested that I only take field notes. This was disappointing to me at the beginning, but as I thought about it later, I came to the conclusion that it was probably for the best, because I wouldn't like to have students "going crazy" while I was there.

Just before I started the observation period I realized I had two options. One was to observe the children only in the general classroom with students from grade 1st to 3rd. This classroom is where students learn the traditional subjects, like Spanish, mathematics, science, etc. In this classroom the idea was to focus on the interaction of the children with the two teachers that are in charge of it. The other option was to observe the children from grades 1st to 3rd in all of their classes. The former alternative had the advantage of having more observational time in each of the classrooms. Nevertheless, the second option also seemed very appealing because I would have a chance to observe very different activities with more teachers, and I would get to understand the way all of them perceived gender concepts. I decided that the second option seemed a better alternative that would bring better data for the analysis.

Once I got all the consent forms back I was ready to start my work! I observed two classrooms with students from grade one to grade three of elementary school each. I did observations of the children in all their different classes. One of the classrooms had 23 children; 9 were from first grade (5 girls and 4 boys), 9 from second grade (5 girls and

4 boys), and the remaining 5 students were from third grade (3 girls and 2 boys). The other classroom had also 23 students; 7 from first grade (4 girls and 3 boys) 7 from second grade (6 girls and 1 boy), and 9 from third grade (5 girls and 4 boys). In each classroom there were two teachers.

Even though the children were divided in two main classrooms, the two classrooms would mix according to the year of the students for different classes. The students would take the English class in a different classroom. There were two first grade English classes: one for the students in one of the classrooms, and another for the students in the other. The students in second grade from both classrooms had the same English class; the same happened with students in third grade.

In the Art class, the students of one classroom of the first and second grade would work together, the third year students would have a different class. The same was the case for the other classroom in which the first and second year students would have one class, and the third year students would have a separate class.

For the Drama class, the students would be divided by their school year and would take the class with children from the other classroom.

In the Physical Education and Music classes, the children would take the class with all the students from their regular classroom.

The regular classrooms had two teachers each. There was one different teacher for each of the other classes. Out of the nine teachers, six were women and three were men.

I found that in general students were not disturbed by my presence in the classroom. This is probably due to the fact that they get observers all the time, and have

gotten used to it. They only seemed to start asking questions after the fourth or fifth time I visited them, I guess the other observers just visited the school for one or two times. The students were very friendly and would come up to me during recess and ask about my research, my age, and other issues. I think sometimes they had a hard time understanding exactly what I was doing. Some of them thought that I was evaluating them, even though I had explained before I wasn't doing that. I heard a group of first grade students talking about me and saying, is she a teenager or an adult? I just smiled, and one of them came up to me and asked me. Also, some students confused me for the mother of one of the children, because in Montessori schools parents are allowed to observe the classrooms if they want to. I feel that my presence in the classroom didn't really disturb the flow of the class; also teachers encouraged the children to ask me questions if they had any doubts in what I was doing. I would say that helped lower the anxiety level that children can experience by having a stranger in their environment. I got a good level of acceptance from all the participants in the study, which coincides with what Ely et al, (1991), explain about getting acceptance from the group: "The task in group entrée is to get a degree of acceptance from people without their being overly self-conscious" (p.24).

The observations were conducted during six weeks, every school day for two hours. Each class was observed for a period of 5 to 7 hours. During the observation periods I was mainly taking field notes. Also, I would spend some time writing notes from some of the events, thoughts or impressions occurred during the classes, immediately after leaving the school. As described by Lofland and Lofland (1971), the field notes consisted mainly of running description of events, people, dialogues between

people. In this case mainly teacher-student or teacher-students dialogues. Also, they contained the physical description of the places and people.

Interviews

Interviews with the teachers were conducted at the school. I interviewed 5 female teachers and 3 male teachers. The idea was to get a sense of what meanings they had of gender roles, norms and stereotypes. It was also to obtain an understanding of how they thought gender meanings contribute to their practice in the classroom, if they thought it did in any way.

Each teacher's tape-recorded interview was conducted by me. One open-ended and tape-recorded interview was conducted with each teacher. The duration of each interview varied from 45 minutes to one hour approximately. Before the interview started, I would ask them if they had any question about the research, which I feel helped in two ways. One was I could clarify any issues that concerned them about the work I was doing, and the other one was to get them comfortable, so that when the interview started they were more relaxed.

I had a general guide for the interviews, but I would incorporate more questions, and change their order, if I felt the need to do so, because of the things teachers were saying. In terms of Lofland and Lofland (1971), my interview guide was not a tightly structured set of questions, but was in fact a flexible format, in which I had a list of things I wanted to make sure to ask the teachers. This also helped them to keep away from pre-worded answers, as our authors explain these "interviews might more accurately be termed guided conversations" (p. 59). Every interview was in a way different from the

other. Sometimes teachers went straight to answer the questions they were asked, but in other occasions they would bring many interesting themes to the conversation. I tried to follow their ideas when they were important to them and to the research. Also, sometimes I could relate what another teacher had answered about a topic and asked them what they thought about that specific theme, in order to see if they coincided in their ideas. Sometimes there were questions that I had to skip to later on in the interview, because they had already been answered without me having to ask it directly.

GUIDE TO OPENENDED INTERVIEW WITH TEACHERS:

- How do you think boys and girls are different?
- Could you describe situations in your own classroom where you have seen these differences?
- Do you think these differences are innate or learned through culture?
- Through your practice, have you perceived any differences between your male and female students?
- Do you think boys and girls should be treated differently in the classroom? How so?
- In what ways (if any) do you think you have treated your male and female students differently?
- Do you think male and female students need to be prepared differently for their adult lives? How so?
- Can you describe your best male student?
- Can you describe your best female student?

- Can you describe your worst male student?
- Can you describe your worst female student?
- How do you think you influence the gender identity in your students?
- How do you think you influence the concepts of femininity and masculinity in your students?

The interviews were conducted during the last two weeks of my observation period. Before starting each interview I talked to each teacher again, about the research and answered questions they had. In general teachers were very open to the schedule in which we could meet and they were very cooperative throughout the interview. I interviewed only 8 out of the 9 teachers I observed, because one teacher was absent for the last three weeks I was there. Otherwise, no problems arose.

I found a good disposition from the teachers to answer the questions from the interviews. They generally had more the feeling of a guided conversation rather than an interrogatory one. The relationship I had established with the teachers also helped the interview process. I can say that there was only one interview in which getting the information I wanted from the teacher was hard. The teacher seemed to have a lot to talk about and would always wonder off to some other topic, interesting of course, but far away from the gender field. I had to intervene and ask her some of the questions more than once. I can also say that I was more comfortable in the interviews with the younger teachers. Somehow I could relate more to them. Burgess (1991) talks about this phenomena, "they were similar in age to me; their status was much like my own. Accordingly I found it easier to associate with them..." (p. 49). Even if I related more to

some of the teachers than the others, in the end I had a particular bond with each of the teachers, and that helped me understand more their points of view, and where they were coming from in relation to their practice and the answers they gave in the interviews.

Data analysis

The tape-recorded interviews, and written field notes, that were gathered throughout the research, were organized and transcribed and translated to English into a computer, for the coding and indexing of the data.

An inductive analysis was carried out, during and after the data gathering process. Themes and categories came out from the data, a posteriori to the data collection. As Patton (1990) explains, there are two ways of representing the patterns found in the data in inductive analysis. One is to use the categories developed and articulated by the people studied, which will allow the organization of the themes. The second one is to become aware of the categories that the people studied were not aware of, or had no labels or terms for. In this case both techniques were employed. That is, indigenous and sensitizing concepts were used. Then, the “recurring regularities” in the data were grouped in categories.

The data is presented in key events, where critical incidents or events, are shown, where the gender process of the classroom and the narrative of the teacher interviews is particularly clear or insightful, so that readers can get a sense of the gender meanings and interactions that occur in the setting, through a narrative presentation of the data. This is, a cross-case analysis of the data was performed. That helped to group the information into key issues that addressed the gender views from the teachers and the gender related

events from the classrooms. The narrative of the teachers is presented in a form that pretends to get readers as close as possible to the phenomena that is described. As Patton states, "By presenting respondents in their own words and reporting the actual data that were the basis of his interpretation, Conroy permits readers to make their own analysis and interpretation. The analyst's constructs should not dominate the analysis but should facilitate the reader's understanding of the world under study" (p. 392). The author says that in the analysis, the analysts should let the data tell its own story.

The credibility and integrity of the data is supported by the systematic methodology in the process of interviewing and observation. By using observations, and interviews as methods of data collection, it was aimed to give support and reliability to the data. Special care is given to inform the reader of the strengths and weaknesses of the different sections in the descriptions and the interpretations, and so that it is possible to know which findings are found to be strong ones, and which others will need further study. In using qualitative methods throughout the research, I hope to shed some light and understanding on the gender phenomenon in classrooms.

CHAPTER IV: THE FINDINGS

Teachers' views on general gender issues

The data has been divided into different groups that are related in content, with relation to the issues they talk about, the description of different situations happening at the school, and how teachers view their practice in relation to gender. Throughout this chapter all the quotes from the teachers' interviews are in italics to make them stand out from the rest of the text.

One of the first issues that came up when talking to the teachers about their gender beliefs was the thought that girls and boys were equal, that everyone should have the same education and should have the same rights and responsibilities in school and life. That can also be the first idea that comes to mind at the beginning of the observation period. The perspective starts to change little by little when taking a closer look to what happens in the classroom and listening carefully to the narratives of the teachers. The first day I observed a classroom I wrote in my field notes:

Today I didn't really see any differences in relation to the way teachers are relating to their students, I wonder if it's because there are really no differences, or could it be that they are very subtle? I just hope that I'm not missing important information.

It was only after a few days that I started to see some of the differences and patterns emerging from the collected data. The differences would also appear in the interviews with the teachers:

Well, here in the school we treat them the same, with the exception of a few very little details, related to grace and courtesy, for example, that probably boys can help the

girls take the chair out, and let her sit, yes, the boys could do that, and well that... but in general, I think that just as, girls shall respect boy, boys shall respect girls, because sometimes it is said that "girls shall not be hit on", but then girls also hit the boys, and there are times when girls are more abusive, for the fact that they are girls and "girls shall not be harmed". We try for things to be the same, except on those details, that the boy shall be kind, mm, and a gentleman, and thinks like that... Well, we try to send the idea to them, that we are all equal, that things are the same for boys and girls. As I told you at the beginning we don't let them disrespect the other, boys or girls. It's more like they are persons. That they all deserve respect and that they all have rights men and women.

Another teacher talks about the same issue, also expressing mixed ideas on the subject of equity between boys and girls, and their physical abilities, first saying that they are the same as long as children practice, at least until puberty, when he says the changes start to increase, and boys become stronger. But then, the participant goes on to say that boys do have physical advantage over girls and he has to do something about it, so that boys don't take advantage of girls:

Well, there is a moment when they tend to... the difference comes in attitudes and abilities, when they start to be teenagers and for example, you saw the very little ones that they all work the same, all the way to 6 years they work the same, there is no difference, I could say that even through 9 or 10 years you cannot mark a difference in ability or aptitudes with the boys and the girls, regarding the physical ability, they perform the same, and have the same abilities, and well, obviously there are boys that do some extracurricular activities and it helps them, or for example, here in my class the

students who have extra curricular activities are more outstanding, and girls that go to after school classes are more outstanding than a boy in that activity, but I feel that if they'd had a constant activity, with discipline and a fixed schedule, mm, as far as time and space, they could develop the same ability, it's just when the part in which the boy starts for his own nature to develop the muscles, then the differences come... Yes, in that sense we try for boys to be courteous with girls, and because there are boys who sometimes, they abuse their physical condition, for example, there are times when girls don't want to participate in some activity because boys won't pass the ball to them, because, I mean, in general when a boy comes and plays he doesn't care about passing the ball and things like that, and those are things that girls want, so in those occasions I have to interfere and for example I say that boys cannot score goals, it has to be the girls, so boys have to pass the ball to the girl... And sometimes you achieve their integration and sometimes you don't, but, most of the times you at least get them to participate in the game, sometimes they seem so bored, just hanging around the place and they get the ball and knock it, but, sometimes that is all you get, but sometimes, you see girls playing and see that they play very good, and in that sense you have a special treatment for girls.

In relation to the same topic, where boys and girls were perceived as being the same and different at the same time, and about treating them the same, but not in every situation, a teacher expressed:

Well I think that in relation to the academic there are no differences, and they don't have to exist, because they are all the same, and they all make an effort, and all work. If there is a consequence it's going to be the same if you are a boy or a girl... -I try not to support stereotypical differences- because in that way you would be making those

differences even more marked, for example right now with this group in which the girls use this as a form to say "I don't defend myself because he is a boy" or "I'm not doing that..." for example, the other day I told a girl "Hey you didn't arrive..." because they form a line to go out to their other classes, and this girl cut all the way to the front of the line, and I told her "no, you go at the end, because you arrived just now" and she said "at the very end! But the ladies are first", and I told her "yes, but you didn't hurry up and the others did", so if I had say, "yes that's right ladies go first", then boys are going to say, "I won't hurry up, because girls are going to be first anyway" and the girls would also get a worry free attitude in a way, like saying "I'm first, I'm weaker, and I deserve the first place, and respect", I think it also depends a lot on the situation, in some you can make differences and not in others, mm, for example, in a situation that involves anger, and that sometimes boys and girls have gotten to the point of fighting physically, I think that there you'll have to treat them differently, because, maybe I'm contradicting my self, but look, I think there it would have to be different because, even if boys and girls were the same you couldn't allow boys to fight with a girl, because they don't have the same physical strength, so you cannot allow for a boy to hit a girl, because precisely, there is this physical difference, right? So a boy is stronger than a girl, so I couldn't allow or say "if you hit someone I'm glad they also hit you", when it comes to a boy-girl situation, but in other situations like their education, is not fair that for the fact of you being a girl will be ahead of the others, that hurried to do their jobs and made an effort, so in that case I couldn't make a difference regarding the way I treat them, but in the other situation I think it would be necessary. I think it would depend a lot on the situation, exactly on how you see it, and you would decide how you are going to handle

them, but I think it depends a lot on the situation, I couldn't say always, because it's not the truth, and I have not done it, I mean, for example in a situation of work, where you recognize their job and all that, it doesn't matter, if it's a boy or a girl, I think that in that case you treat them the same, or I try to treat them the same, right? Because sometimes there are very good jobs... from boys and from girls, and it would be a mistake for me to make a difference or to say that the jobs of girls are much better, no. But in other situations, I think that there has to be a difference in relation to how you are going to handle the situation when it comes to what I told you, the fighting example that came to my mind, because it has happened, that they start to fight or something, and I feel that there your reaction has to be different, right?

Listening to the these narratives, I got the impression that teachers do think that equity shall be maintained between their male and female students, but that they also feel that in a way women are at a disadvantage as compared to men. This situation drives them to, promote and maintain the disadvantages, or biased gender concepts, even if that is not their intention. In making the distinctions between their students they are supporting the idea that men are in a way superior and that because of that, woman shall be protected from that, and instead of confronting the differences they are some how hiding them, which doesn't mean they won't be there any more. The idea of facing and acknowledging the differences, that in most of the cases are imposed by the adults, is expressed by one of the teachers:

Obviously, well, socially we are used to men and women being different, so in that way, from childhood we learn that, right? Even if I would like not to lay any barriers between boy and girl, because that sets a limit, that really sets a limit. What I think we

have to take into account is, that culturally, socially and in a humanistic way we have to bring this into a conscious state, and through this try to erase these differences, right? There are some physical things, and one realizes that it's easier for boys or that it's easier for girls, also limitations, that boys have limitations for some things, and girls have limitations for other things, but well, there are differences, and I try to erase some of those differences, and not so much to cover those differences, but to assume them, and work with them, right? To be able to...I'll give the example of physical education, that sometimes I've seen in other schools...that girls don't relate to boys when they play, soccer, or basket ball or baseball, and girls of the same age, instead here they perfectly mix them so they can, mm, well, not erase the differences but to assume them and try to make them fade away, and I feel...well I think the differences are marked by us, the adults, right? And also culturally.

When teachers were asked if they thought the differences between men and women were “natural” or learned through culture, they would usually answer they were cultural, but in some cases they would say that it was a little bit of both; a natural and a social component. It is an interesting point that none of the teachers would see the differences between their students as being absolutely innate:

Well, there is a part that comes from the culture; they are hearing from all the media and inside a lot of homes, mainly in our Mexican culture, the macho and the nice little women, etc. But I do think that there is something that girls bring with them, the fact that they take more care of themselves, they like to dress better, and boys don't care if they are all dirty, and girls care more about fashion, even from this age, that's why I

think there is something that comes natural, and some other things that are product of our culture, right?

Similarly, another teacher expressed:

Both things, I do think we all bring our "women" side, I mean you come with that, like a pattern or something like that. And of course you learn that in all your life because, mm, family is very important, because if your family always tells you that boys don't cry or that women are more delicate, you tend to follow those patterns, and sometimes they'll stay with you for the rest of your life. Then, if, you went into a school where they supported maybe wrong behaviors, you kept going like that. So I think yes, a lot of it you bring it, your essence of men or women, like sometimes they say "why is it that men say..." well, because men are like that; they already have it, they have that in their nature, and women also, but that can be modified absolutely. Because there are women that almost turn to man, or the other way around, men that are almost become women in their attitudes. Because that's the way they grew up, and the school contributes a lot, and what you go through in your life, what you see, your friends. There are times, that probably is not that you wanted to think in some specific way, but you learned it and modified your behavior, so, I think that you learn it and you have it.

In relation to the same topic, the narrative of one of the teachers talked about an innate component, but at the same time gave a lot of importance to the role peers play in the acquisition of gender identity:

I think is both things, one is what you bring, is something internal, the difference you already have it... also, your own circle of friends makes you or helps you obtain your

identity, right? But there are some cases where, well, you as a member from the other sex have to help the other and say, "you know what? I like to be with you but, I don't want you to be here right now, so go and play with them", so the same children help each other say "today I play with you, and tomorrow I don't want to. I want to play with her, tomorrow I want to play something as a girl, and there are games that only girls have to play". Is not like you as a man have to play soccer, there are boys that don't play soccer, and they can go to the swing, or can play another game, not necessarily soccer... They can say, "I don't like this, or I don't like sports" but not because they don't like sports or something rude, they stop being men, no, they simply don't like it, and it's also valid, I mean there are the two sides, one you have, and the other is how you turn out, or how you handle it for yourself.

Some other teachers would argue that the way we constitute our gender identities are shaped by culture and all the socializing institutions of our environment. It is interesting to notice how the same argument is used by different teachers to support divergent ideas. On one of the examples above, a teacher said that because we can see the differences from an early age in children, it means that they are innate. In contrast, in the next example another teacher argues that it is because we can see the differences in the students from the time they are toddlers that we can say that our gender identities are culturally shaped.

I think it's basically that, the culture the family, and the fact that since they are little, conscious or unconsciously you get it into them, since they are babies. For example, for girls the hair clips and more like, "sit properly", and the boy can rest on the floor and nothing happens, right? So, I think that those little details form the way you

are, for example, from the games and this situation concerning the presentation and order, because since they are little, I'm telling you... well, I see it even with the little ones here, when the children that are attending children's house, right now there is only one boy and the rest are girls... For example, the girls come, they are dressed nicely, and they are very calm, and they are very little. The boys, are more, like, well they lay back and they throw themselves to the floor and they lay there, and yes, I think all of this is mainly learned, encouraged by culture, right? I think yes, well, first the family and then school and all the rest, and I think it's mainly that, more than a biological aspect that they already had, or innate, I don't think so. I think that basically it's something that they learn, from the adults, that consciously or unconsciously, is something that you mark, for example a boy that has been told not to cry. I mean...so, all those attitudes are encouraged by adults, and society.

In a parallel form, another teacher expressed that adults are the ones who impose biased gender ideas in children. *"Yes I think that us as adults mark the differences on them, a girl can perfectly play with a little car, mjm, and a boy can perfectly weave, sew, cook, play with dolls, and it doesn't mean anything, right? And we give them those differences anyway, right?"* According to another teacher, the family has most of the responsibility in the way children acquire their gender identities. *"Oh, I think by society, mainly the families, because for example many times, in some homes maybe they say the girls, shall do this and that, and boys shall do this and tha;, or they don't let girls do many things, and the boy because he is a man yes. But in the school they are treated fairly".*

Teachers did see some general differences concerning the type of things boys and girls liked. This is not so much related to entire subjects of knowledge, like math, science, Spanish, or history, but concerns more specific topics in some of the classes. A lot of the time the narrative of the teachers would indicate that they saw the preferences of their students in a stereotypical male-female form. In the next example, the teacher was talking about preferences boys and girls show in the activities they choose to do in the field trips organized by the school:

Well yes they have a preference, yes in jewelry, I think there are no boys, but it is because of them, we don't tell them [not to], if a boys wants to go [to the jewelry class] he can get in. Because in jewelry they do activities that don't seem so much of girls, because they have to hit and, use the hammer and sandpaper, because they are working with metal in jewelry, and probably it would even be better if a boy did it. But because we say jewelry, it's weird, but probably we could have a boy, but we definitely have more girls than boys, but it's because of them.

It is worth pointing out how in the example above, the teacher was making stereotyped comments in relation to having some “boy” or “girl” activities, when mentioning that probably that activity was more suited for boys because it involved the use of hammer and sandpaper.

Another participant talked about the different interests that children manifest in the classroom:

Well I have noticed that boys, when they do some research, they usually do research about animals or wars. There are some books that talk about different cultures, and for example, they love a book that is about weapons and armours, that's the name of

the book, so they always look for that book, and the ones about dinosaurs, or animals from the jungle, or sharks, they really like doing that type of research. And girls instead, look for a book that talks about jewelry or something like that, so they talk about precious stones, that's the name of the book, so it has necklaces worn by some princes...or also girls like doing research about nature or things like that... and we've even thought about taking those books away so they will look for others, right? Or they also like the one on forest, and topic, mm, how can I explain? On plants, and more... not so much about wars or things like that, they don't, girls don't pay so much attention to this, not as much as boys do.

In a similar line, this teacher expresses that:

The topics, for example, boys like themes related to wild animals, about fierce, when for example we talk about the jungle animals, boys immediately take their role as hunters, and they start imitating tigers or lions, etc. right? That type of themes are the ones boys love, girls prefer themes related to birds, and the fields, they generally like everything, but they digest those images easily. Boys prefer other type of topics, right?

Another teacher argued that the differences were not very big, and that they could be seen in relation to small details. *"Well, it could be in relation to drawing, girls are more into hearts, flowers, butterflies, and boys on boats, war, but outside of that there is no difference in subjects, for example, the same girls like to do a research about animals and...or work in math."* On several occasions I heard one of the teachers asking their female students to think about different topics to draw, and move away from the stereotypical female themes. I wrote in my field notes a conversation between the teacher and a female student:

Female student: Can I draw some hearts?

Teacher: No, not hearts, you girls spend all your lives drawing hearts and princesses.

Female student: No, I really don't like princesses.

Teacher: It would be better if you draw something different, think of something, probably a geometrical shape.

In a way, this teacher was trying for her student to expand her ideas on the different possibilities she had. But because she was a girl, the teacher was also assuming that "hearts and princesses", were the only thing that interested her.

Teachers' attitudes towards their male and female students as they experience them

Now that we know how teachers see the origin of the gender differences between women and men, and how they view some of the differences and preferences of their female and male students, we can start to look at how they say their attitudes and behaviors towards boys and girls are, and how they are relating to their students in their daily activities.

A very dominant characteristic that teachers kept bringing up when describing girls, was neatness. Most of the teachers would think of this as one of the predominant differences between their male and female students inside the classroom. After describing how nicely presented girls' work always is, they would go on to explain how boys don't really care about handing in a clean job, but only focus on the content and getting the right information. *"Well probably in presentation of the work, that girls usually are more careful. Girls usually are more careful, you don't have to be on them all the time, telling them don't hand in a dirty job or something, remember to draw the*

margin, presentation of the job, it's easier with girls than with boys". Accordingly, another teacher expressed:

There are a lot of differences, from the work, simply the way they turn in a paper, the presentation of a paper, girls worry much more about having a well written job, that doesn't have lot of eraser marks. A boy doesn't worry so much about that, he cares about the content, for example, to get all the sums right, and they don't care if they have a food or ink stain, they don't pay so much attention to that type of details.

Likewise, some teachers talked about this difference between girls and boys, but they also said that it wasn't always the most important aspect of the job. And that sometimes it wasn't such a good thing, because girls sometimes would spend too much time on it, and would not concentrate in other aspects of their work.

In the work, most girls are more clean, they like to use little colors, they want the job to be pretty, sometimes they spend too much time in making it look nice, and sometimes, they fall out of the work rhythm. Boys, do it less carefully, even if there are boys that are true artists, and dedicate a lot of time to that, but in general they do everything faster, they pay less attention to their hand- writing, in general.

An interesting point here, was that teachers said that the fact that boys were not so neat didn't really affect their grades. Even if grades are not the main objective in a Montessori school, the view of this teacher summarizes what other teachers expressed in relation to the topic:

I'm interested in them [boys] learning how to work neatly. Because, a well presented notebook or book is always going to talk better of them, right? Of the person and his habits. Never the less, if the content is right, and a kid has ugly hand writing or

hands in a dirty job, I grade it fine. It's not really about lowering the grade, but to tell them, "be careful with your hand writing", or if it's dirty to say, "it can be better", and the kids actually improve, they usually compare their work with the others and they do improve, I mean, they try to imitate the good things. They realize it's better to have a nice notebook, than a dirty one. But there are some children with whom you don't get this in a long time, a lot of time goes by and they are still unorganized in many aspects.

But even so, teachers would spend a lot of time making boys repeat their work, because very often they didn't put enough effort in the presentation of the material they had worked on:

We constantly see these differences, because whenever they make a job, we try to immediately review it, or on the weekends if we have some free time, so we are constantly checking the children, or sometimes they simply come to us and ask: "Am I doing well" and right there you realize and say "no, I cannot accept this job from you if it's all stained and dirty, you didn't put the date", mjm, so it is constant, very noticeable... it stands out that boys don't... they are more concerned or focused on the result being right, and they don't care if they didn't put the line nor in if they used high-case letters, or, if they erased too much and the paper tore, well they tell you "If you want I'll rip it off, and then I'll glue it back in", I mean it is, it is a more worry free attitude, and not with the girls, if you say to a girl "hey you missed something here", "oh yes I missed the line".

In concordance to the information above, a pattern that emerged from the classroom observations, was that teachers would constantly send back their male students to repeat their work, because of the bad presentation it had. I wrote in my field notes: "Today the teacher used different work from girls as an example of how the job should be

presented, also, corrected a boy for making a mess in his work, and all around him". Many times the issue of teachers making boys repeat their work because it was unclean came up in the field notes. The next dialogue is an example of many similar ones between teachers and male students:

Boy: "I have finished my work."

Teacher: "Let me see it...it's ok, but just look at this! It is so messy, you are going to have to repeat it... Show me your hands, mm, [his hands were very dirty] I don't think you can work like this, wash your hands and then work on this some more".

The fact that children had the chance to repeat their work when it wasn't totally satisfactory has a positive impact, because it is telling children that they always have to put their best effort in the things they are doing, and try to get them done as best as they can. This teaches children that they can always aspire to do a good job even if sometimes it is not perfect from the beginning. This view of work is so much different to the one maintained by the traditional system of education, where children do their work, or a test, and they are graded for it, good or bad, and that's the end of it; children don't really get a chance to improve themselves, but just feel they are how they are graded for the first time and have to accept it.

The Montessori school would always ask for the best effort from every child. In relation to the academic learning of boys and girls, every teacher agreed in saying that it should always be the same for all the students. Teachers expressed the idea that boys and girls deserve the same preparation: *"In relation to the academic there are no differences, and they don't have to exist, because they are all the same, and they all make an effort, and all work. If there is a consequence it's going to be the same if you are a boy or a*

girl". The narrative of this teacher also sums up what the other participants thought: *"Academically there should be no differences, because everyone has the obligation to respond to something, to give their best effort, and it doesn't matter if it's a boy or a girl"*.

Even though teachers would say that male and female students should also receive the same treatment from them, they would later start talking about exceptions from their original statement. This was particularly noticeable when the teachers talked about the way they handled discipline problems when there is some type of fight that involves physical violence between boys and girls.

Look, academically I try not make any differences, I think that in some cases, even if you want to be fair, there are times I probably do come to that difference. When it is about...for example that type of problems, when boys do physical harm to girls, I really don't like that, in general I don't even like a boy that hits another boy, right? No, I don't think it's right, but when a boy hits a girl, probably unconsciously I do make this difference, I try for it not to be so big, as to say "you hit a girl and you are going to stay grounded and not her", definitely, I don't mark it so much, right? But probably in some cases, because you know the children, and you know the groups, and you say she really doesn't deserve to be treated that way. Because there are girls with whom you say, well you earned it, you really earned it, but there are girls that, because of how they are, and because you know them, you know that "it was not the way for you to defend yourself and to hit her in that way, right?" I mean, I think that in that type of things I make a difference, even if sometimes you don't want to, sometimes it's not something you control, and I do it. Even so, in relation to the work, I can tell you I don't make any distinction,

no, because you have to be fair, I cannot ask more from a girl, or from a boy than from a girl, right? So there the demands, the consequences the prizes, well, if you can call them prizes, they are for all... I mean, if I think a boy needs more time, I'll give it to him, but, not because of the difference that there is between boys and girls, it's individual, those are differences that you give in a very individual way, not because it's a boy or a girl.

The notion that girls are weaker comes out of the teacher narratives again, and as a consequence, teachers are responding to this idea by being more protective of girls, and being more careful in the way they address to them. At the same time, they are teaching children that because of this difference, girls have to be protected, which puts the girls in a disadvantaged position. This point of view is expressed by the next narrative:

...I tell the boys, probably old fashioned or something, but I say "let the girls first" so from that moment they are learning, that girls have the preference and that boys have to wait, so in that moment I think they are learning that girls have a role, and that the way they are treated has to be a little bit more delicate... even if boys know that I address them differently, more strict, it doesn't mean that I'm a strict person, but just to make the distinction, but they understand that the objective is for them to understand what they come here to understand, and simply that I have to call their attention more often than to girls. Now, for the future, I think that the message is clear, if you treat the girls in a more delicate way, it's because they are more fragile in a physical way, and only that, so you have to protect them in some games because boys would bump into them, and if they bump into a girl they would make her fall, so in some way you have to make them see that they can get hurt and that they can hurt them, even if there are girls that also, can hurt a boy, there are some brusque girls, but it's not the general thing, I do

feel that girls are more delicate than boys, it can be innate, or learned, but you can detect that here, right?

Also, in the classroom observations sometimes teachers would be more strict with boys, or talk to boys in a “stronger” and firmer form. As I wrote in my field notes: “Just now I observed a big contrast in the way the teacher answered a question from a male and a female student, when addressing to the boy she said ‘Let’s see, what is your problem? ...No, it is not right, do the additions now’. Then she went on to answer a question from a female student and she said ‘Let’s see, what is your problem dear? ...yes little woman but you must correct this one here.’ Her voice was also softer and nicer when addressing the girl.” Similar situations kept happening in the classrooms, where teachers would talk to boys in a less delicate way than they did to girls. Also, when talking to girls they would call them with nice little names, like young lady, dear, or their own names, but in a shorter version.

A recurring idea throughout the teachers’ responses was that they saw girls as being more fragile, or delicate with less physical strength. This was an issue that they would describe and that was sometimes linked to them treating their female students in a different way. *“Could be that probably with girls I am more affectionate, right? mm, that you hug them more, but in relation to the way we treat them and the privileges it’s exactly the same... Well, girls ask for it more than boys, much more.* Another teacher talked about having a much more aggressive way of playing with the male students:

My responses to them, mm, not so much because they are girls, but because I feel that what I do to a boy, a girl won’t stand it the same way, like if we are playing and I push them, or sometime that I kick or hit them, or things like that, maybe it sounds from

the stone-age, the attitude I have with them, but I mean, you measure the force, I mean, you don't hit them in a way that would harm them, it's more in a playful way, and I feel sometimes they do hit with everything they have [the boys], and sometimes you have to see it, and allow a little bit that part of the game, and sometimes for them it is to get rid of what they have to put them into the activity, once this euphoria of measuring their force has finished, I tell them to calm down, and sometimes they do, and we get into the activity.

When disciplining the children and trying to have them finish their work, teachers also felt that sometimes they didn't need to use the same firmness with female students that they required to employ with their male students: *"In relation to accomplish the objectives, with the girls you don't have to be so strict, because I also feel that they react, they are more sensible in relation to the attitude one has toward them. I couldn't have the same attitude towards boys than towards girls, right? It is not necessary".* So, in a way, teachers are demanding things from boys in a firmer way, at the same time that they are protecting girls from getting their feelings hurt by a firm attitude from teachers.

Teachers talked a lot about looking for respect between female and male students, but, most of them were also encouraging a different treatment between them, where the boy would have to be a gentlemen and the girl a lady. In a way, boys would have to be extra nice to girls just for the fact that they were girls. Teachers were not doing this with the intention of perpetuating unfair gender differences among their students, however in a way that was the contradicting message they were sending when asking for these behaviors, because with this nicer treatment to a girl, an image of a girl being somehow weaker or unable to do some things was being formed.

Well, they are obviously different in a physical way, but as far as the way we treat them...and what they have to do inside and outside the classroom, mm, they have the same conditions, mm, yes, I mark a little bit more the boys in the sense that they have to be more courteous, I want to focus on that part, that I think has been lost. Like, letting the ladies pass first, a little bit if you want, mm, antique, but, I mean, those type of values, not exactly like before, but yes, not only to respect women, because that has to be among all, they all owe each other respect, but a little bit of courteousness, I think it's the only difference I try to make, because with work I want exactly the same... And politeness with all, that boys and girls, "please, excuse me..." but yes, with boys the courteousness, because me as a woman I know it's very pleasant to get somewhere and have someone giving you their chair, or, well, without exaggerating, but yes, as I tell the boys, when you are teenagers you are going to thank me for this. That girls will say "Oh this is a nice boy", I mean little details that have been getting lost, it doesn't have to be like before when women couldn't even open the door, but yes a little bit more of courteousness, and in relation to being respectful it has to be the same for boys and girls.

In the next example, the idea that girls should be the first ones to choose members from a team is proposed, implying, that because girls have some type of implicit disadvantage from boys, this would be fixed by letting them choose first.

I think there is a moment in which they are treated differently, even sometimes we ask for boys to treat girls differently, there are times in which a boy and a girl get to choose the teams and then...when it is 2 boys or 2 girls the ones making the teams, I let each one do the teams as they'll like, but when there is a boy and a girl I tell the boys that to be gentlemen they shall let the girl choose first. And, for example, all the way up to 9

years I have to tell them, to be gentlemen, not so much because the girl is weaker but, yes, the boy has to learn that girls shall have a special treatment, and I tell them that girls... it has never happened that a boy says no, they always say ok, let them choose. That I think it's the learned part, and when for example it is with older boys... and then, when they have been with me for many years sometimes I don't have to tell them anything. And sometimes there are girls that say, instead of me choosing first, what if we choose by jumping, or by this other method and if they all accept to do the teams in that way, I will accept it too, I won't interfere.

It's worth pointing out that girls themselves are not totally comfortable with this situation and try to have more neutral circumstances, by proposing to choose their teams with another method.

On the other hand, teachers are also trying to have boys and girls doing the same type of activities, and asking for the same things from both genders, in order to erase the gap between the genders. *"I can tell them when we go camping 'you can do the beds to the boys, and you sweep, to the girls, or the other way around, you sweep and you do the beds', we all have obligations, and not because of that we are going to stop being men or women".* The narrative of the next teacher explains how they try to erase biased gender roles by having boys and girls do the same activities:

When the children have to wash the dishes in the cooking class, it is the same, and at the time of picking things up it's the same, at the time of cleaning up it's the same... it is not like the girls clean and not the boys, they open the door and put the chair, no, it's not like that, so in that sense it's the same... probably outside they tell you, boys don't cry, well here you can.

Another teacher describes how sometimes children are the ones who have a biased perception regarding some of the activities, and what can be done for the children to understand that boys and girls can do the same things:

Well, I try to explain to them that the activity is in general for both boys and girls and sometimes I have to tell them a little bit of history, in relation to how the women in this case have been integrating to do activities that they wouldn't do before, and that obviously this has given them more capacity of expression and more capacity to move in the environment in which we are now, that's the part that I have tried for them to get involved and stop making the difference.

Similarly another teacher felt that instead of promoting the differences, teachers should push their students to always give the most they can and to encourage them when they feel they cannot do something:

I mean, for me this "machismo" this "homosexuality", for me that is too censured, we all feel, we all feel the same, we suffer, we might suffer differently, but we all feel the same, so, to make of someone less or more, it's like treating a sick person like a small kid "no, don't do anything" you'll make it worse if you do that, on the contrary, you have to ask for more, "do this, you cannot hold, well try to hold it", that's what I try to arrive to. Not because someone is a girl is not going to try and do something, or not because it's a boy he's not going to try and do something that the girl does, I try to push them, to have fair situations, that's it.

Going back to the differences teachers describe between their male and female students, they would sometimes express that children relate to their own classmates in different forms. It was very interesting to hear them say how girls' fights are usually

more complicated to handle because they usually involve gossip and they get their feelings hurt easily, while on the other hand, boys' fights are easier because they are very straightforward and just say what they have to and finish the problem. *"It is very characteristic the way a boy behaves, from the way a girl behaves. I mean, the girls at this age are a little bit more conflictive among them... they quarrel a lot, there is the gossip... and with the boys you almost don't see this, they are kind of more colleagues".*

In a similar way, the next narrative contrasts the way teachers perceive children's fights, how boys can be more aggressive in a physical way, and girls go more into the emotional side:

*The boys are more straightforward, if they have a problem they'll say, hey this guy what ever. Girls go more into the gossip, "hey this" they'll go and tell on each other, this happens a lot with girls of this age [between 6 and 9], they are much more like that than the boys. The boys in this sense come and yes, they might hit you, but that's it, right? it's over. They don't go on with, things like, I don't want to be your friend and now I do. That's a **huge** difference.*

The comment of the next teacher is in relation to how we carry these differences with us to our adult lives:

Look, girls, girls like to talk about the other girls, they like to talk about other boys, I mean, girls are always in everything, nothing passes them by, mm, they are very feminine... must of them are very feminine. The boys are extremely practical, they cut to the chase, they are like men, those are the basic differences since they are little, I mean, they don't complicate anything, no, they go straight to what they are going to, girls are

more complicated and boys are more practical, girls go a lot into details, boys so much less.

An interesting twist to this description of girls' and boys' problems was that, even if teachers saw that problems among girls were hard to handle, they would also think that girls would be much more cooperative when trying to come to an agreement in big classroom problems, mainly those that involved all the children or a great part of the students in the classroom, or discipline issues. Boys instead would think more of defending themselves.

Now too, when there is a group problem, girls try more to reconcile than boys, for example, right now, right now that they came in from music, there was a problem with a boy, and all the boys, "I'm going to defend myself, and if he insults me I'm going to insult him back, and I'm not going to let him do something to me", and all the boys started attacking him, right? Well so "what is happening Raul, tell me what's going on?" "No, it's only that they are also telling me that I am I don't know what, and that I'm a boy that doesn't help them and..." So, girls where kind of just listening, and then they started to try to get a consensus and say, "well, also you Carlos, you have to recognize that you also bother people", so yes, those are noticeable differences among them.

Teachers would also expect the girls to be more disciplined, and to be the ones who would keep the class in order in many situations:

...I have seen that, mm, girls are more moderate, girls are the ones that, most of the time...I'm not saying that is a general thing, but, in a lot of the cases they mark the order, and the boys, I've seen boys that also mark the order, but in general they establish more the disorder on the boys side, that is something that is very marked... the girls are

the ones who say "calm down" or "let's start working", because in general, also some times in general they are the ones who say "shh, shut up, let's start working, stop the racket", that is kind of very marked with the girls, also in a general level.

Probably this perception of girls has also led teachers to rely more on girls when it comes to needing some type of help from their students. One of the first differences I noticed, in relation to how teachers treat boys and girls, in the classroom observations, was that in the majority of the cases, when teachers needed a favor they would ask a girl to do it, and also, that girls would usually volunteer to do it with a very good disposition. One entry that I made regarding the "favor" situation in the classroom, and that summarizes how the situation was presented many times reads as follows: "The teacher was working at her desk correcting some papers, she turned and ask a girl for an eraser, she was far away from the teacher's table, but she said "hold on, I'll get it", another boy that was working on his own table, much closer to the one where the teacher was seating, heard the conversation and said: "I can lend you mine if you want, just don't finish it", to which the teacher just said, no thank you, I already asked her for it". In a way, teachers not only rely more on girls to do the favors, but also, they are in a way discouraging boys to do them.

In one of the classrooms it was not only that girls would do the majority of favors for the teachers, but a specific girl was the one doing different types of favors most of the time. I asked her teacher about that particular situation, because it was so persistent that I came to think it was on purpose, the teacher was surprised at the beginning, but later realized that this was what was happening in the class.

I think it has just happened that way, because look, now that you make that comment, you are very right, because she is such a cooperative girl, she is a girl who likes to participate, she is a girl that is always very willing... because, yes, there are some children who simply don't like that, right? But not her, so maybe we have fostered that in a way, because, I mean, well, not so much that we have fostered it, because she has, I mean, she has earned that, I don't know, just for us to say "I'll ask Lisa", she is a very accessible girl to everyone, she doesn't makes differences, in the way of not wanting to help someone because she doesn't like them. Because other children, if it's not for their group of friends, they say no, and she is very fair with everyone, even if sometimes she doesn't likes someone, it doesn't matter, if they ask for something she'll be able to help.

The best and worst students according to teachers

When teachers were asked to describe their best and worst male and female students, their answers were divided in two ways; some of them would start talking about general characteristics for good and bad female and male students, saying that the characteristics were the same for both genders. Or they would describe specific cases of male and female students. In the cases where teachers would go for the description of specific students, it was noticeable how they would always talk more and in a more passionate form about the male students, good or bad. The following comment exemplifies how differently teachers could talk about the best male and female students:

He is like a genius... Well, he is also very special, for example he doesn't tolerate frustration a lot, I mean, everything has to go perfect with him, I mean, he doesn't tolerate it if he makes a mistake, it's hard for him to make a mistake, I mean, he has to do

everything right, but he does make mistakes, I mean, he's only a kid. But, in general if I tell him that "zapato" goes with a z he tries to remember it always and never to forget it... Well, yes I think the boy is super smart, very well informed, he has much more knowledge than what he should for his age, he even knows about the universe, and he can talk about everything, maybe even more than kids in the fourth grade... he is an only child, but don't you think that they [his parents] try to motivate or make him do something at home, he is just like that. By himself goes and asks his parents for books and his bedroom is full with books, and he knows perfectly how to handle a book, he knows where the index is, and starts looking for the page, and when he is going to do a research he says for example, here is "silver" and he looks for the page, I mean, he has a lot the facility to handle a book, and the dictionary he handles it like a third grade kid... he is the one that never has anything pending, and everything stays in his mind. At the beginning of the year it was hard for him, he was here before, but the change from children's house to 1st grade was hard, he used to play alone, and talk alone, and in his own world, it was hard for him to integrate to the other first grade kids to play, now he plays, he runs and everything, but even so, it's hard for him to have another kid laughing at him or something, it's hard if he fails or something. And academically he tries to help the others, because he notices that he knows, and sometimes I have to tell him, "don't say", or leave them alone, and he stops, or sometimes he knows before and he tells me "I'm not saying". Because he sometimes helps them too much, and it stops being help, because they wouldn't learn.

When I asked the same teacher about her best female student she said:

Mm, mm, well yes there are girls, but I had more boys, but there are girls. Well, right now, there are, well I only saw them for a little while. When I just started working at this school, now they are bigger, one of them in fact won the narrative contest in her grade... well, there is one girl, but she is not as brilliant as the other boy, but she is very brilliant, she has a very beautiful hand writing, I think it's even nicer than mine (laughs), and I try to write very well, so that they can understand me... she is very brilliant, and she gets the concepts very well, and she colors and does everything very neatly, the presentation of her work is like the one on kids from 4-6th grade... She is good, she gets the concepts fast, there is also another girl that is very good in that sense, she is young but brilliant, she reads very well, for her age she is very brilliant.

At the other extreme, when talking about the worst male students, a very impressive answer was the one from a teacher who told me that he had a lot of excellent male and female students, but that, when talking about absolutely terrible students he could only think of males.

The worst male student? There are also many (laughs) I had one that I didn't have the whole time, from how bad he was, from how difficult he was, he wasn't dumb at all, he was very intelligent, he was machiavellian, he was really machiavellian, and is one of this things in which all the teachers coincide, his name was Ignacio Lopez, and latter when we learned about the family situation, you understand, you get to comprehend a lot the situation, he went through very hard situations, very bad ones with his father, and a neurotic mother that combined for that boy to be a bomb, and from what I know he is still the same, he is a brilliant boy, probably the 16th place in math for the whole city, but he is a boy that was always looking for a way to spoil the class, and to put

his foot in the classmate's way, and not physically, but intellectually, he was always underwater measuring you, and when you least expected it he would stab you, you as a teacher and to the other students, so he was like that, I hope he doesn't want to be a politician, because as a politician he would be like Salinas de Gortari [Mexico's ex-president], yes because he has all the characteristics to become that, right? He didn't care about life, he didn't care about anything, you would talk to him and he would get it off somehow, he was really bad, very, very bad. It's really very few times when you come across children that deep inside bring something bad. In general you come across very mischievous boys, or boys that talk or have problems, but bad boys, what you can call a bad boy, is very hard, but, for a boy to become that magnitude, it means that he has already lived through very horrible things, I mean, I'm not justifying him, but I don't judge him saying "that boy, no, we have to lock him in a reformatory" because they end up worse, because, I think one has to understand also a little bit what they are going through, right? The history, but there are sometimes when the way they are gets to you, and it gets greater than your understanding, I mean, there came a time when we said, the school is incapable to help, I mean, in this case, we have to accept that we cannot help him, it was that hard, that hard, yes...

And this is what he said about very bad female students:

Well, it stands out right now the fact that I cannot remember any, (laughs), no I don't remember a terrible girl. Terrible male students I can count more than 5, but girls, no.

These two examples on how teachers view their best and worst female and male students, are probably the most extreme ones, but the same pattern could be seen in the

other cases were teachers would talk about specific student cases. Probably the fact that teachers consider that in some way the best and worst students are mainly male, leads them to be constantly aware of boys inside the classroom.

From the analysis of the field notes, it stands out that teachers would pressure their male students a lot to finish what they were working on, while they rarely did this with their female students. One particular entry in the field notes summarizes the situation: "It's almost the end of the school day, the teacher is going from one table to the other checking what children are doing. She goes to a girl's table and says: 'ok, you'll probably have to finish this tomorrow, but it's going fine.' Then she went to a few more tables and stopped to say to a boy 'You have to finish this, hurry up now, because we are going soon, I don't want you doing this tomorrow'." Probably if this would have been an isolated incident, I would have assumed that possibly that particular boy was behind with some more work, or that he was almost done and so, the teacher wanted him to finish. But I have many annotations in the field notes where teachers are pressuring their male students to work faster, and only a few where they are pressuring the female students.

Teachers in this school would usually pay a lot of attention to what children had to say, and they generally take the time to answer every child's questions, and work individually with them. However, through the observation period a pattern started to emerge, if a teacher was very busy with one student, and another approached the teacher with a question, the teacher would usually answer it and go back to working with the first children. If for some reason the teacher was too absorbed in the work with another student, and didn't answer the other child's question, it would be almost always happen when a female student was asking the question: "The classroom looks very busy today,

there are children coming and going with materials, and the teachers almost don't have a chance to breathe...just now, a girl went up to the teacher to ask a question, she said, "be quiet, I'm talking", and turned back to finish explaining something to a student, when she was done, she turned to the previous girl, that was still standing next to her and said, "ok, what were you saying?". At first glance, it seems pretty reasonable that teachers would ask students to wait or take turns, because it is humanly impossible to answer everyone's questions at the same time. What doesn't seem so normal, is that girls are the ones who generally have to wait for the attention.

Teachers' views on their impact in the development of students' gender identities

Most of the teachers believe that they or the school as an institution had an important impact on gender identities and ideas that boys and girls develop. Such impact they said, will be with them for the rest of their lives.

I think it is a lot, mainly because in these times, well, few children get to be a lot with their parents, because almost every parent works, the father and the mother, right? So well, we've talked about it here in the meetings, and we notice how in other times the school was in a 2nd place, because you would only go there to learn and that was it, but today, I think that, school is taking more importance, because a lot of children are alone in their homes, yes, so a lot of the time, the role of the parents is taken by the school, ok? So, I think that the preparation, or what you can teach them, it's going to be very important, more in this stage of their life, that is like the roots for them, I think that it is very, very important the role of...and maybe not so much our role as teacher, but in general the role of school.

Teachers would talk about trying to have a positive impact on children's gender concepts, meaning that they would seek to eliminate some of the biased gender information they had. At the same time they would try to diminish some of the exaggerated characteristics children had as a part of their gender identity. This was the case in the perceived vanity in girls.

The girls start doing their hair, and they like to look in the mirror a lot, and, mm, even if it's cold girls like to wear shorts, it is not that they are not cold, but because it's a way to call for attention, and it's nice, it's nice, that it's beautiful, and I've told them that it's nice, but you can concentrate on something else... And I have taken away the mirror, and we've taken things away because it is not the time. "You look very pretty, you look very good, but now it is time to work" when this is not so often we keep the mirror. When we see that this is an obsession to look in the mirror, they go and they fix their hair, they come back and do it again, then you say, "this is too much, it is nice if someone likes you, it's nice if someone has noticed you, but that's it, you have other things now, now it is time for you to have fun, to work, it's time for you to have friends..." Talk to them about it, and make them understand that what is happening is not bad.

One entry in my field notes describes a situation in which a teacher addressed vanity issues with her student: "Today the teacher called up one of her students, to review her work, when the girl was near her desk she asked 'did you put make up on?' the girl said that another girl had brought the make up and that they had been playing with it. The teacher told her that she didn't need all of that, that she was pretty just the way she was, and that all of those things could be bad for her skin, that if she wanted she could use some lip gloss but that she shouldn't think about those things now. Then she asked

her to please remove the make up, and just when she was getting away from the teacher she asked her for a favor, to give a pencil sharpener back to its owner”.

According to the teachers, boys and girls without any adult intervention segregate themselves. Teachers in this school would always try to avoid gender segregation from taking place. They would go as far as considering this one of the objectives of the school:

Well, in my situation, when one could say I trick them is in some of the activities...I sometimes say, that children make their own teams, there are kids that will look for...no matter if it's boy or girl, but there are some that look for only girls or only boys and that is when I interfere and say, but you have to have 3 boys and 3 girls, so it is a way to make them look, and you always have the boy or the team that comes and tells me "but, we don't find anyone, or no one wants to team up with us" but, we know those are excuses not to integrate... I think that what I've done has had an impact, because I've worked in other schools and I don't know how their teacher worked before, but if I don't tell them anything they do that, the boys choose the boys first and then the girls... When they are older, [the impact would be] that they'll see their female or male classmate the same, and they won't put girls behind.

Similar situations are described in my field notes: “The teacher was dividing children into two separate teams, they were being integrated with both boys and girls. A group of girls screamed from a corner that they wanted to be together in the same team. The teacher told them in a very funny way that ‘he wasn’t accepting suggestions’, and followed to say that they had to learn to work with different people”. Teachers are very aware that this situation happens a lot, as one teacher described:

When they have team work, when there is team work because I mix them, and they hate it at the beginning, but later they I think they come to like it, and a lot... And to work in teams, at the beginning it's very hard for them, also because of gender reasons, this is very funny, but there are boys, boys that don't let the girls rule, or that girls impose their ideas, right? Which is something that obviously fades here little by little, there are some boys with whom that is very hard, you have to talk about it a lot, you have to explain why and you have to say what for, but that is also something that really gets your attention, that since they are little they have this very marked, right? Sometimes, not all of them, this are not general things, but well.

Teachers seemed to be very aware that the fact that they push the children to avoid gender segregation, was really having an impact on other activities where they were not directly interfering, like at recess time, as another teacher explained:

Because, for example, at play time, they always, always, always play soccer in the court, and there you can see boys and girls, playing the same, the goal keeper, or defense or center, can be the same a boy or a girl, I mean, they play the same boys and girls soccer. This has a lot to do with having, the physical education teacher, treating them all the same, and making them do the same things, the same activities.

In general, the teachers seemed to think that the way they were handling gender aspects in their classroom was helping their students become balanced and responsible people, who understood each other and the differences among them. We can see that in general, the way teachers were behaving towards their male or female students, was very related to what they thought male and females should be like. Sometimes this had a

negative impact, but a lot of the time had a positive impact. We can see from the last example on children and same-sex segregation, that if teachers are aware of that and try to do something about it, they can change the way children relate to each other.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

In this study the interaction between teacher and student in relation to gender issues was explored. A point has been made in relating teacher's beliefs concerning gender to the actions they have towards these issues in their practice. Some of the patterns that emerged from the analysis have been previously described by some of the literature on gender and schools.

The research on gender biased education, by Sadker and Sadker (1994), reported many little details that happen every day inside classrooms across North America and that have a major role in creating a non-fair environment for boys and girls in the school, which in turn will leave a mark in the students that accompanies them for the rest of their lives. In chapter two some of the issues related to biased gender behaviors were described.

It is worth pointing out that some of the situations described by the authors mentioned above were observed during the present study. In the previous chapters, the fact that teachers see a big preoccupation in girls to create very clean and well presented work was addressed. This particular characteristic was one of the most predominant differences that teachers described in their male and female students in relation to their work inside the classroom. This is similar to the findings described by Sadker and Sadker, when they say that girls are encouraged to value neatness over creativity. Teachers in the Montessori school realized that girls were sometimes not concentrating in some important aspects of their work, because they were spending too much time in trying to have a pretty notebook.

The same authors also highlight the fact that when boys and girls are involved in the same problem, where rules are being infringed, boys would get harder punishment. Comparable situations emerged through this study. From the classroom observations it was clear that boys were addressed by teachers in a much more firm way for doing things that probably girls were doing at the same time, like talking to other classmates when it was time to work and other similar situations. Also, teachers talked about having different behaviors towards boys and girls when they were involved in fights; in a way teachers said they felt that they had to protect girls from their much stronger counterparts.

As mentioned in chapter II, Sadker and Sadker explained that boys will usually get most of the attention from the school personnel either for being too good or too bad. Once again, this information can be linked to some of the findings in the present study. When teachers were asked to describe their best and worst female and male students, they would usually put more emphasis on male students, either the good or the bad ones.

One of the main roles that Strummen et al (1982), describe as being characteristically learned by women, is the willingness to help others, which is related to the person-oriented characteristics of females. In the previous chapter it was described that teachers would usually rely on girls to be the ones they'll ask to do most of the favors, because the teachers somehow thought that girls had a better disposition. However they were in fact, reinforcing these condition in the every day interaction with their students, at the same time that they were not promoting and even discouraging these type of attitudes in boys. In this way they were helping maintain the stereotypical roles typically assigned by society to their male and female members.

Sex segregation in children's play and activities is something that different authors have described (Lafreniere, et al, 1984, Hall, 1977). It is not clear why this segregation between boys and girls occurs, but it is being researched (Leaper, 1994 in Benenson, 1997). It is worth pointing out that in the case of the school studied in the present research, teachers made a constant effort to avoid segregation from occurring between male and female students. It seems that their efforts are paying off, because the integration they are fostering while doing different class activities that might involve teams or couples, in which they mix boys and girls, are leading children to later integrate with each other in their games in a very natural way. This situation was described by some of the teachers and also perceived by the observer when watching the children play at recess time. Even more so, some teachers explained that the integration of male and female students was one of the objectives of the school, and that they had discussed this issue many times among themselves. Also, they described how in other schools where teachers don't work on this matter, children act in a totally different way from the one seen in this particular Montessori school. The teachers said it was an eye opening experience to see children in other schools totally divided in same gender groups only.

Teachers from this study also made a point to make all of their students do every activity in the different classes. Sometimes they talked about children rejecting the idea of performing activities that were considered by them to be appropriate by individuals from the other gender. But teachers would talk to their students and explain to them that performing those activities wouldn't take away their feminine or masculine side, and that it would not imply that they had to deny their own gender identity. This same idea is expressed by one of the authors mentioned in the second chapter of this study. Jordan

(1995) expressed that teachers could do a lot to bring boys and girls together, and to make them realize that to accept members from the opposite sex doesn't mean that they will harm their own identity. Bringing boys and girls together can also help children evaluate the activities in relation to how good or bad they are, and not by how they are considered to be socially.

It is interesting to point out that teachers acknowledge the impact they can have in the concepts their students form on gender issues. *"I think that students do notice that well, you try to be fair, but maintaining their individuality, but that in relation to work activities, it's exactly the same, and that for the future they have the same opportunities"*. This teacher also talked about the impact they can have in relation to making students see that no matter what their gender is, they can become whoever they want: *"and sometimes I tell them 'don't let someone abuse you because you are a girl', we have talked about it in the classroom...you can all be astronauts, you can all be cleaning people, but it's how you want it, you have to fight in this world to achieve things"*. In a way the teacher was saying that they can make a difference as teachers in relation to how their students will see themselves in the future, and the things they can accomplish, as well as how they see themselves as men and women. And also making the students realize that it is not always going to be easy for them to develop in the world as men and woman: *"you tell them 'sometimes as a woman, they are not going to give you the job, but you don't have to let that happen', it's more like making it conscious for them, right? The same as you could do with ecology"*.

It was also mentioned in chapter II, that researchers (Cook-Gumperz and Seales) have pointed out the fact that many times, teachers just assume that education has to be

gender neutral, but never stop to think if they are doing something to obtain it. When teachers were asked if they talked about gender topics among themselves, they said that not very often. They would discuss the topic in relation to some specific objectives, like having children integrate, but otherwise, they would probably only talk about the subject when a specific problem arose. In a way teachers are sometimes neglecting gender issues, which can be very alarming, because it can mean that on many occasions they are not even aware of what the gender messages they are sending to their students are.

As described above, throughout this study we have seen that some of the gender biased behaviors that were presented in the school are similar to the situations described by other researchers (Strumen, et al, 1982, Sadker and Sadker, 1994). But even so, there are some others that are not maintained by the participant school. I think that in a way, a very important element in these changes was the fact that this was a Montessori school. As such, it was dealing very differently with many pedagogical issues. Probably the most outstanding of those, is the role that teachers play in this institution. As described by the literature, teachers in the traditional system. Sometimes have a “dictator” role, their word is the rule and everybody has to follow their lead without asking too many questions. In contrast, Montessori teachers are seen more as guides. They are there to help the student develop their individual abilities in an orderly fashion. I think that the liberty students are experiencing inside this different approach to education, helps them develop their own gender identities in a less rigid form. This, along with the fact that in relation to some of the gender issues teachers are making an effort to eliminate biases, is allowing students to move away from the traditional gender concepts. It is not an absolute change, but some

changes, even if they are small are starting to show. The teachers themselves can notice the difference between their school and other institutions.

Teachers would also argue that something they would really focus on was the search for respect among all the students. This teacher's statement summarizes what many others thought: *"I insist on the respect, if it's boy or girl they have to respect, because all of us cannot live together if there is no respect, you have to respect, and listen, and always try to help the others, I think that it is something that I always remark, and I tell them a lot"*. This is a very important aspect when trying to find equality between men and women, because it is implying that no matter how or who we are, we are all part of the same community and it will be better if we see each other as equal.

Concerning gender studies, I think that there are still many gaps in the literature on gender and Mexican as well as other Latin American education institutions. The findings presented in this document are not intended to be generalized on all the schools in Mexico. As it has been said before, this school represents an alternative method of education. The traditional method however is still the one predominant in the Mexican education system. I also think that this particular Montessori school can represent a very different picture from what other schools with the same methods could show. A study in which different Montessori schools would be analyzed would be a good way to complement this research. Also, it would be very interesting to hear what children have to say in relation to gender issues and the way they are presented at school, what are their own feelings on being confronted to do activities they would initially think of as of the other gender, and how they think that the fact that they get work with mixed gender teams affects them.

As a final comment I want to express that, I think the method of education is having an impact on the way children construct their gender identities. I also think that it is taking a closer step to finding equality between men and women, so in a way we are on the right track. But still, a lot of work must be done. One important step is making teachers aware of their own gender meanings, and of their own biases, because if they are not aware of them, they cannot be aware of how they are dealing with them every day. And also to acknowledge that individual characteristics are a good thing, as long as they don't imply hierarchy, and are not an excuse to dominate the other. This last quote talks of this:

"What I try to do it's for them kind of to take those costumes, those masks away, and a little bit, at the beginning it's very hard for them, to say 'me, a girl, am I going to be in the shoes of a boy' or 'me boy, am I going to be in the shoes of girl no way', but later on they realize that it's even fun, and that there's nothing wrong with it, and that it's not taking anything away from them. And finally, men have a feminine side, and women have a masculine side, so, why would we have to cover that?"

How hard would it be to take away all the masks we have carried for all those centuries?

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McGill University
Consent to participate in research study
(Teachers)

Ana R. Moreno
M.A. Student
Dept. of Educational Psychology
McGill University

**Project Title: Teacher Student Interaction in a Mexican Montessori School:
Exploring the Construction of Gender Identity in Young Children**

- a) Purpose of the study: To understand the way in which teachers of early elementary school years interact with their students in relation to the construction of gender meanings. The problem that I would like to approach has to do with the understanding of the way in which teachers of Montessori-early-elementary-school years, interact with their students in relation to the construction of gender meanings. Concerning concepts of masculinity and femininity, I want to describe the type of messages teachers are giving to the children when they are in the classroom, either by direct comments in relation to the activities or work, by their attitudes, by what they say and what they don't say. Another issue I would be interested in exploring is the way in which the assumptions that teachers have about gender are related to what they are actually doing inside their classrooms.
- b) Benefits envisage: One of the possible benefits of participating in this research, will be to make consciousness of my own perception of gender differences and the way I am using these meanings in my practice as a teacher.
- c) Inconveniences: At the beginning of the observation period, children might be distracted from their normal activities. Every effort will be made to have as little disturbance to the regular classroom procedures as possible.
- d) Tasks to be performed: This will include one to three audio taped interviews with the researcher, and having the researcher observing and videotaping the activities in the classrooms during six weeks one hour every school day.

- e) Rights of the participants: You will be able to withdraw from the study with no penalty or explanation. You will also have the right to confidentiality of personal information. To ensure your privacy and anonymity the researcher will be using codes when referring to your name, the code correspondence sheet will be kept in a different location from the transcripts. All the audio and videotaped material will also be kept in a different place
- f) Risks involved: The questions and observations of the researcher will pose no risk on you as a participant. But if at any time you feel that you do not want to continue in the research you will have the right to withdraw without having to give any explanation and without any penalty.
- g) Dissemination of the material: The research will be presented in a thesis document, this document will be available at McGill University educational library. Also a copy of the document will be donated to the participating school, where every person interested in the study will be able to read it.

I _____ have carefully read the above information. I agree to participate and to permit Ms. Ana R. Moreno to collect and analyze data on my participation. I give her the permission to **videotape** and **audiotape** the material. I understand and agree with the procedures to respect my right of privacy and ensure my anonymity.

Signature _____

Researchers' signature _____

Date _____

McGill University
Consent to participate in research study
(Parent or guardian)

Ana R. Moreno
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Dept. of Educational Psychology
McGill University

**Project Title: Teacher Student Interaction in a Mexican Montessori School:
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- b) Benefits envisage: No benefits are anticipated.
- c) Inconveniences: At the beginning of the observation period, children might be distracted from their normal activities, every effort will be done by the researcher to let students concentrate in their daily tasks.
- d) Tasks to be performed: Children will be asked to go through their school activities like they do every day, the researcher will be observing and videotaping the classroom every day of the week during one hour for a period of six weeks.
- e) Rights of the participants: Your children will be able to withdraw from the study with no penalty or explanation. You and your children will also have the right to

confidentiality of personal information. To ensure the children's privacy and anonymity the researcher will be using codes when referring to the children's names, the code correspondence sheet will be kept in a different location from the transcripts, all the audio and videotaped material will also be kept in a different place.

- f) Risks involved: The observations of the researcher will pose no anticipated risk on the children as participant. But if at any time you or your children feel that you do not want to continue in the research you will have the right to withdrawal, without having to give any explanation and without any penalty.
- g) Dissemination of the material: The research will be presented in a thesis document, this document will be available at McGill University educational library. Also a copy of the document will be donated to the participating school, where every person interested in the study will be able to read it.

I _____ have carefully read the above information. I agree to let my children participate and to permit Ms. Ana R. Moreno to collect and analyze data on my children's every day school activities. I give her the permission to **videotape** and **audiotape** the material. I understand and agree with the procedures to respect my children's right of privacy and ensure my anonymity.

Signature _____

Researchers' signature _____

Date _____