Examining Male Education: Discipline and Classroom Structure in a Single-Sex Elementary Classroom

Erin Michelson
Ed400 Senior Research Project
Educational Studies & Psychology
Trinity College
Fall 2005
Research Questions:

- What effects do sex-segregated classrooms have on the boys enrolled in them?

1. What effects do sex-segregated classrooms have on discipline practices for boys?

2. Do discipline practices differ in single sex classrooms from those of “regular” mixed sex classrooms?

3. If the children who are placed in all male classrooms are labeled as “discipline problems”, does their label change during and after the school year?
Significance

- Current single-sex research:
  - focuses on females – positive elements
    - (Signorella, Frieze, & Hershey, 1996)

- Discipline:
  - Who gets punished/disciplined more – boys or girls
    - (Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000)

- Importance:
  - Brings the two topics together and fills information void
  - Can be used to address debate of single vs. mixed sex classes
    - Pros and cons
    - Question of separate but equal mentality
School & Classroom Setting

- **School:**
  - Grades PK to 6
  - 98.9% minority (2003-04) – Black & Hispanic
  - 1 all male and 1 all female fifth grade classroom

- **Classroom:**
  - Desks in clusters
  - Point system
  - Rug area
  - Nicknames
Students and Teacher

- **Students:**
  - 17 males in classroom
  - Assignment to classroom

- **Teacher:**
  - Male
  - Introduced idea of single-sex classrooms to the school
  - Fourth year teaching all male class
  - Has similar life experiences to his students
Methods

- **Observations:**
  - During October and November
  - Four classroom observations of three hours
  - One classroom observation of six hours

- **Interviews:**
  - Teacher of all male classroom
    - Twenty questions
  - Nine student interviews
    - Eight questions
  - Vice principal of school
    - Twelve questions
Thesis

- Due to the nature of the co-educational and single sex classrooms, there is an apparent difference between discipline styles that are needed to maintain order.

- Because of the close bond between the male teacher and his all male students in the classroom I studied, discipline tends to be more fair and less severe than previous research claims.

- As a result of this unique style the students who enter the single sex environment as “discipline problems” tend to lose this label by the end of the academic year.
Findings: Discipline

- Harsh discipline is not necessarily the answer:
  - “The intended goal in my class is that students will become better individuals when they leave me. Discipline is not about the pencil thrown across the room; it is how you want your students to make choices in the future” – teacher of all male classroom
Findings: Discipline

- Students recognize discipline differences:
  - Other classrooms:
    - “Teachers scream and send you to the office or RTC”
    - “They don’t give students a chance”
  - All male classroom:
    - “He tells the students to be by themselves, sit on the carpet, and chill out”
    - “He takes away special privileges and fun stuff”
    - “He tries to talk with the students.”
    - “He gives students chances and jokes around with them”
Findings: “Discipline Problems”

- Student growth:
  - “I do see differences between the beginning of the year to the end. The students develop and become more responsible yet don’t always make the right choices. I have witnessed students –hostile/aggressive- take responsibility for their bad behavior. Usually when one student apologizes then the others will. I have been able to make the right connection with the right student that all others will follow. He was/is a very violent student (had violent outbursts where the classroom had to be cleared, knocking over desks, telling the teacher off) who has bought into my philosophy. He believes that what goes on in my class is right and that being in my class will make them men.” – teacher of all male classroom
Conclusions

- According to the teacher and the students in the all male classroom, discipline practices differ a great deal from those of coed classrooms because of the students’ needs.

- Boys in the single-sex classroom appear to respond positively to the specific discipline environment that has been created.

- The close bond between the students and their teacher allows the children to face their problems without being sent out of the classroom and severely reprimanded.

- Students who are known as “discipline problems” at the beginning of the school year have the potential in this setting to change their label.

- Overall, students who struggle with behavioral problems in “normal” classrooms will benefit the most from being enrolled in this specific setting.
Bibliography
