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**A study into the philosophical ideas of young children
on the topic of gender**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on research concerning pupils' perspectives of gender within a small sample of year one children in a mainstream primary school. An analysis of existing papers on the topic of gender is also included, concentrating on children's perceptions of their sporting ability and intellect in relationship to their gender, and gender roles as perceived by children (including the role played by the media, family and peers in constructing these opinions). The research group participated in teacher guided, philosophy sessions which were recorded, transcribed and then coded. The quantitative data collected shows that the children regarded boys as having significantly better sporting capabilities when compared to girls. Some interesting qualitative data was also collected, showing the participants' opinions on gender roles in society and the relationships between the genders.

A study into the philosophical ideas of young children on the topic of gender

Introduction

How children perceive their own gender, and their gender in relation to the opposite gender is a complicated issue and may depend on many individual experiences, such as family background, socialisation and media (England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011; Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman & Lund, 2003). It is often suggested that children mimic their parents as their primary role models, and are likely to base their initial concept of what it is to be male or female on their mother or father, books, films and toys (Fine, 2007, pp. 173-178; Knesz-Greulich, 2007). The Disney films and their merchandise are thought by many to present stereotypical gender roles to young children, which, one could hypothesise, would be likely to result in children adopting a ‘Disney’ perspective on each gender and gender relationships (England et al., 2011; Tanner et al., 2003).

As implied above, children are thought to make sense of the world through their experiences to date. White argues that at the ages of 5 or 6, children will not be able to apply their limited, grounded knowledge of the world to more abstract ideas (White, 2012, p. 450).

Using a philosophical approach, the following questions shall be explored in this paper:

How do year one children view gender and relationships within their experiences in school and in the family environment?

How do year one children perceive gender and relationships within the Disney fairy tale Cinderella?

Literary review

The nature versus nurture debate continues to cause a division amongst the scientific world. Are the genders predisposed to display masculine and feminine characteristics? Or do environmental factors have more weighting in shaping young children? Most scientists believe that it is a combination of both factors that defines gender (Esposito, Grigorenko, & Sternberg, 2011, pp. 79 - 114). As Stiles states, “there is no point in development when the organism is “self-

contained” and separate from the external world” (Stiles, 2011, p. 19). Therefore, biological gender differences cannot be the only aspect to a person’s personality and their conception of gender. Children become aware of the physical differences between the genders (perhaps due to family discussions, observations or socialisation), while the media portrays gender (often via differentiated gender roles) to young children, via advertising, toys, film and other means. Further knowledge of scientific gender differences is imparted onto children during their schooling.

Constructivism, the theory that “human beings are personal scientists who are continually creating conceptual templates from experiences” (Ronen, 2002, p. 23), supports the nurture debate that individuals are shaped by their personal experiences. Constructivist theory implies that “the social construction of gender differences is predicated on the idea that these differences could have been different from what they are [...] if human agents had made different choices” (Kukla, 2002, p. 3). This means, according to the theory, that identical individuals, who were exposed to different life experiences as children, would not grow into identical adults. For constructivists, it is the experiences that shape children and that provide them with the interactions that help to form a definition of gender for the individual.

Cultivation theory is the idea that the media (in particular television) skews the viewer’s perception of reality, or how reality ‘ought’ to be, by providing the viewer with an often utopian depiction of society (Piette & Giroux, 2001, p. 100). If this concept is applied to young children, who will be particularly susceptible to ‘believing what they see’ as they try to make sense of the world, it is logical that they will interpret their observations and experiences of, for instance, the Disney franchise, as being comparable to real life – to their own lives. Being offered consistently gender stereotypical role models in the Disney characters may therefore impact on how children view gender, and the characteristics and roles that the genders should fulfil within society. Many educational and sociological experts believe that it is therefore a “possibility that exposure to gendered material may influence children’s gender role acquisition and expression” (England, Descartes & Meek, 2011, p. 557) since “young people use various forms of media to negotiate who they are and what the world is like” (Drotner, 2001, p. 301). The constructivist approach and cultivation theory suggest that the gender role portrayals present in the films may influence children’s beliefs and ideas about gender, social behaviours, and norms (England et al., 2001, p. 556).

The Disney franchise aims to appeal to children via advertising and cinematography, by creating characters that children idolise and empathise with, with the aim to promoting their alternative products to be purchased (Do Rozario, 2004, pp. 34 - 59). Children are frequently presented with images of gender stereotypes, particularly through the Disney Princess films. It is suggested that exposure to such gender role stereotyping as seen in the films is likely to have a profound effect on children's understanding of males and females and their roles within society (England et al., 2011, pp. 555 -567). In their study, England et al. found that physical strength was shown throughout the Disney Princess films to be the domain of the rescuing Prince; while the Princesses were significantly more likely to show affection, collapse crying, be fearful, take on a nurturing role, be submissive and to tend to their physical appearance (England et al., 2011, p. 561). The traditionally feminine attributes presented by the Princesses portray females as being weaker than men. The women are frequently reliant on a male rescuer to save them, and the tales tend to be made complete by the female submitting to the arguably patriarchal institution of marriage (Cecire, 2012, p. 252). Princes are required to be strong and dominant, and to not show emotion through crying. 2.26% of the Princesses' behaviours involve collapsing and crying, whereas absolutely no Princes are found to display such emotion (England et al., 2011, p. 561).

The results found by England et al. show that female characters in Disney films are repeatedly presented as being "pretty" (England et al., 2011, p. 561), which may encourage girls to aspire to be beautiful to emulate them. There is a significant difference between the Princes and Princesses in terms of the amount of time they spend tending to their physical appearances. Princesses spend nearly 5% of their time looking at themselves and making themselves look attractive – this is the 6th most common characteristic that the female characters portray and thus a central area of their character development. There is a vast array of merchandise available to young girls, which encourages them to take notice of their appearances. According to Paul, Disney Princess merchandise "seems to come in only one color: pink jewelry boxes, pink vanity mirrors, [...] pink hair dryers" (Paul, 2011, p. 11). When Disney films are viewed by young, impressionable girls, this emphasis on promoting attractiveness - furthermore the importance of making oneself attractive through the use of material goods - is likely to encourage children to mimic the given model. In contrast, the Princes' aesthetic appearance is barely mentioned (0.61%) or tended to (0.40%) during the films (England et al., 2011, p. 561). Female characters being portrayed as obsessed about their appearance, which could result in young girls believing that it is important for them too to be seen as attractive.

According to the social learning theory, children observe and mimic their primary gender role models; their mother if they are a girl or father if they are a boy (Kessler, 1985; Lott & Maluso, 1993, pp. 99 - 123). Infants learn the behaviours associated with their mother and father as parents and their specific roles within the family setting (Kessler, 1985, p. 92). The division of labour between the male and female within a household traditionally acknowledges the man as the main breadwinner and associated with chores that involve physical labour such as chopping wood, gardening and decorating the house (Doucet, 1995, pp. 271 - 284). The female is responsible for the typically domestic, less strenuous tasks, normally cleaning, cooking and taking care of the family in the mother role (Gatrell, 2005). This image of the domestic division of labour within the family is reflected within the Disney Princess films. Snow White, for instance, cleans up after and takes care of the seven dwarves, revealing that she is a nurturing individual. The feminine characteristic of nurturing was significantly more apparent in the Princesses than the Princes in the study described by England et al. (England et al., 2011). This presents being affectionate and caring as characteristics of the Princesses, who could be seen to represent women in general. The Princes do not show these characteristics, therefore insinuating to the children who watch Disney that boys should not be caring.

With England et al finding that Princes are portrayed as being significantly physically stronger than Princesses in the Disney Princess films (England et al., 2011, p. 561), it is unsurprising that males see themselves as being far more competent at sports than their female peers (Eccles, Wigfield, Flanagan, Miller, Reuman & Yee, 1989, pp. 283 - 310; Harter, 1982, pp. 87 - 97; Barnes, Marsh, Cairns & Tidman, 1984, pp. 940 - 956). According to Lee et al., “overall young males value sport activities more than females do and some believe that females as a whole do not have the natural ability to be successful in physical education” (Lee, Fredenburg, Belcher & Cleveland, 1999, p. 162). There could be some sporting activities that girls feel more confident about partaking in, which may correlate to the findings that Princesses are sometimes portrayed as athletic (England et al., 2011).

Further up the education system, there are clear differences in gender preferences of subject choice. For instance, a mere 20% of pupils studying A-level physics are female (Cartwright, 2013) and less than 30% of English A-level students are male (Garner, 2013). Less studies seem to have focused on the lower years, where pupil motivation across the subjects tends to be far higher, compared to the 40% lack of motivation concluded by Barber (Barber, 1997). Interestingly, Leo found that in the

primary school, girls with special education needs were more likely to experience helplessness than boys with SEN in the subject area of maths (Barber, 1996, p. 17). Opposing this was her finding that, in general, girls scored higher than boys on English self-concept (Barber, 1996, p. 185). From this evidence, one might anticipate that in this study will find that females will perceive themselves as better at literacy, while males will have a higher self-concept in mathematics.

Using a philosophical basis for the study will allow children the opportunity to express themselves with as little teacher involvement as possible. White raises questions about whether philosophy should be used with young learners, since their knowledge is based very much on their limited life experiences (White, 2012, p. 450). He argues that children are not able to conceive logical contradictions, or to achieve higher order thinking since he believes that young children cannot perceive abstract ideas. On the contrary, Egan makes the argument that philosophy with children can be used to discuss abstract concepts such as fairness or friendship, since they have had social experiences to help create theories for themselves (Egan, 1988). Although children may not be able to articulate their opinions as philosophers might, they still have ideas and theories to be explored (Murriss, 2000).

Research Design

A mixed methods design was adopted, where quantitative data was collated to choose the research group and group interviews were used to gather qualitative data. A questionnaire was used to establish what motivated the children to learn, with the aim of selecting a goal orientation for each child (either mastery, the desire to acquire new skills; performance-avoidance, the desire to avoid appearing less competent than others or performance-approach, the desire to appear more competent than others). This enables a statistical analysis of the children in the class to be undertaken, in order to select a focus group of three boys and three girls, two from each of the goal orientations. By using a mixed methods approach, some qualitative data from the group discussions will be able to be converted into quantitative data for statistical analysis (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). Using mixed methods also allows children to express themselves through gesture, single word answers to closed questions, more complex answers to open questions and via the individual portrayal of ideas and the collaboration with their peers via philosophical dialogue.

Participants

The research was carried out in the middle weeks of the Spring Term 2014. It was carried out in a state funded primary school, in a class of thirty year one pupils (aged 5 – 6 years). After seeking consent from the head teacher, parental consent letters were devised to inform parents and guardians of the planned research, and to ask permission for their child to participate in a questionnaire. A total of nineteen consent slips were returned and those children one by one participated in the questionnaire with adult supervision.

Questionnaire

A Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scale (PALS) questionnaire was carried out on the participants. Chaplain's (2013) version of the Personal Achievement Goal Orientation scale or PAGO (see Appendix 1), adapted from the original shown in the *Manual for the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales* (2000), was used as it was deemed appropriate by the University of Cambridge. The PALS questionnaire is designed to divulge the pupil's goal orientation as mastery, performance-approach or performance-avoidance. A five point Likert-type scale ranging from "Not at all true" to "Very true" was administered to all of the participants. An emoticon version of a Likert-type scale was used and an adult was required to read the questionnaire questions to the participants one by one, because many of the participants were unable to read for themselves. The results were collated onto a spreadsheet, the totals were found for each goal orientation and then the mean of the orientation (Appendix 2). Only children who showed one clear goal orientation over the other goal orientations were chosen (the means of the other orientations being four or under). Based on this evidence, a group of six focus children was selected to become the discussion group: two with mastery goal orientation, two performance-avoidance and two performance-approach.

Upon selecting the group of six children using the PALS questionnaire, parents were consulted at brief individual meetings. The nature of the focus group was described, as well as the topics that would be covered. The parents and guardians were made aware of the confidentiality of the project and of the process the data would be undertaking before being erased. They were then asked if they had any further questions, before giving their consent. All the parents were happy for their child to be involved in the discussion group.

Group interviews

Group interviews based around open, philosophical questions were chosen to discover pupils' perspectives on gender roles and encourage the children to express themselves. Gender stereotyping is a delicate and sensitive issue, which needed to be approached using a method that prevented any influence from the researcher, while giving the participants the opportunity to speak freely about their beliefs. Group interviews are less intimidating than individual interviews and offer a "natural style of interaction" (Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsey, 2000, p. 52). By discussing as a collective group, it was hoped that the children would build on, or oppose each other's ideas and thus produce a higher quality of dialogue than individual interviews would allow (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996; Dockrell et al., 2000). By using group interviews as a method for gathering quantitative and qualitative data, pupils' true perspectives on gender can be recorded and studied.

Before being presented with a discussion topic, the participants were made aware of the rules of philosophical discussion. A "speaking stone" was used to make the turn of each individual to share their opinion with the group, and as it was passed, the name of the participant was clearly stated into the recording device. The audio recordings were transcribed in a written format, then coded (as seen in England et al., 2011) and analysed.

Ethics within the research study

Throughout my study I have taken the utmost care to provide for the ethical concerns of those involved. I have discussed my study with my school mentor, head teacher and my partnership tutor, so as to design a study that is respectful of the confidentiality of others.

Choosing my assignment

I met with my university tutor to discuss my study proposal. We discussed the ethical concerns that could be raised through philosophical discussions on gender. One of the points that we discussed was making sure that I myself did not reveal my personal opinions of gender stereotypes or gender roles, but merely to facilitate and record the children's perspectives. Another point that arose was that young children are likely to share personal and private information during discussions, and that this should be omitted or masked sufficiently to maintain confidentiality.

Questionnaire

After a discussion with the head teacher regarding ethical consent, parents were contacted via a letter constructed with the cooperation of my placement partner. This letter was sent home with each of the 30 children in the class, and was in reference to conducting the PALS questionnaire adapted by Chaplain (2013) and recommended by the University of Cambridge lecturers (Appendix 1). The letter explained the topic of the questionnaire, how we would be using the data gathered in our research and that we would speak to individuals and their parents should we wish to work further with their child. We also welcomed parents to come and discuss any concerns that they might have with the studies or participating in the questionnaire. We made it clear that responses would be destroyed after the assignment was completed. 19 responses of consent were returned to us, and these were the children that we then conducted the questionnaire on. We discussed the questionnaire with each child before continuing, explaining that it was not a test, and that there were no wrong or right answers.

Choosing the philosophy topics

I met with my school mentor to discuss my proposed study and the outcomes that I hoped to achieve. Together, we selected appropriate questions from a list that I had designed to be interesting, age appropriate and ethically justifiable. We decided not to concentrate entirely on pupils' perspectives of their gender roles within their families, since that might be more of a risky topic, and instead to make the concept more abstract by using the story of Cinderella to discuss gender politics.

Study group

With the information gathered, I chose my study group. I then spoke one to one with the parents and guardians of the children that I had decided to work with, and fully explained my project and answered any questions that they might have, before obtaining written consent. I showed the guardians the questions that their children would be asked, and explained the time constraints and dealt with ethical concerns. I explained that their child's name would be completely disguised and that the recordings I had taken would be erased after use. With my group, we discussed the "rules" for philosophy, such as using the speaking stone, not laughing at other people's ideas, listening carefully to each other and being respectful, as suggested by Trickey & Topping (2004, pp. 365 -

380). We acknowledged that it was not about being wrong or right, and that we were just talking together to see what opinions the group, and individuals within the group, came up with in regard to the questions asked.

Assignment

I have ensured complete confidentiality in this assignment. The school's name where the study was carried out is not included in the text, nor are the names of individual children included or any names that the children mentioned during the recording. I will be using this evidence solely for this assignment and then I will erase my recordings.

Findings

Questionnaire

The PALS questionnaire is provided in the appendices (Appendix 1). A table of the results of the questionnaire can also be found (Appendix 2). The selection of children for the focus group was discussed in the methodology section of the paper.

Group discussions

The transcripts from the recordings of the group discussions have been colour coded. In the appendices there are three transcripts; one to show the frequency that topics were discussed (Appendix 3), and then two more in depth coded transcripts highlighting the perceptions that children have of the sporting abilities (Appendix 4) and the academic capabilities of the genders (Appendix 5).

How do year one children view gender and relationships within their experiences in school and in the family environment?

Perceptions of sporting ability

Quantitative data has been collected through the colour coding of key topics in the transcript (Appendix 3). The children were asked which gender was better, boys or girls. The main topics that

they focused on were sporting ability and academic ability. Table 1, below, shows the mean and standard deviation for the three categories of positive mentions of females/negative mentions of males; positive mentions of males/negative mentions of females and lastly reference to girls and boys being equal or the same.

SPORT	N	Mean	SD
Girls +ve Boys -ve	6	0.17	0.41
Boys +ve Girls -ve	6	1.33	1.03
Equal/same	6	0.67	1.03

Table 1 showing perceptions of sporting ability

The results when put through a T test show that there is a significant difference between the children’s view of girls’ capabilities in sporting activities as opposed to boys’ ($t = 2.5733$, P value of 0.0277, with a 95% confidence interval of this difference). All of the boys in the group promoted their gender to being superior in sport. Boy 1 answered affirmatively to the question “Are boys better at some sports than girls?” and was able to back his theory up with evidence from his personal school experience on sports day (all transcript references relating to perception of sporting ability are coded accordingly in Appendix 4). Boy 2 generalised from his knowledge of his own sporting ability (“I can run faster than my mummy”), using what he knows, his family, as a basis for comparison and justification (Kessler, 1985). Boy 3 alleged that “boys run faster than girls”, which was confirmed by Girl 2. Most interestingly, Girl 2 was very negative about female sporting ability (and ability in general) stating that there was nothing that girls were better at than boys. Unlike the other girls, who both opted for the genders having equal sporting potential, Girl 2 was very much of the opinion that boys were better than girls at physical activities. There was no significant difference found with any other combination of categories from the table above.

Perceptions of academic ability

There were no significant differences between the perceptions of intelligence within the genders. Table 2 shows the coded results from the discussion group (for further evidence of the coding see Appendix 5). For girls and boys, the results when compared via a t test were shown to be exactly the same, with a P value of 1.0000 and a 95% confidence interval.

INTELLIGENCE	N	Mean	SD
Girls +ve Boys -ve	6	1	0.89
Boys +ve Girls -ve	6	1	0.89
Equal/same	6	1.17	1.17

Table 2 showing perceptions of academic ability

Boy 1, Boy 3, Girl 1 and Girl 3 all persistently insisted that boys and girls should be considered to be the same or equal academically, however there were some definite aspects of their education that the children felt boys were stronger at, and vice versa for girls (Appendix 5). “I’m not very good at saying my colours, but girls do”, “Girls know all of the colours of the rainbow” and ”Girls are better at knowing all the colours of the rainbow” were all comments given by the children. They seemed to struggle to come up with any different examples for the strengths of girls, however writing is suggested by Boy 1. For the boys, computing activities, knowing insect species, writing and reading were all suggested strengths. Interestingly, Girl 2 stated that “boys are better at reading”, which reveals a misconception that she has about her classmates: the girls are considerably better readers in the class in general (according to teacher assessments and practice phonics tests), Girl 2 included. This evidence also opposes Leo’s findings that girls have a better self-concept in English. However, Girl 2 also supported her gender as being cleverer than the opposite sex, claiming “Girls are cleverer than boys because teachers are girls and they know a lot”. Girl 2 clearly has a pre-conceived idea, probably due to her personal experience (Ronen, 2002), that most teachers are female, and has allocated the occupation to a particular gender. For her, teaching is a female occupation and one that she associates with intelligence.

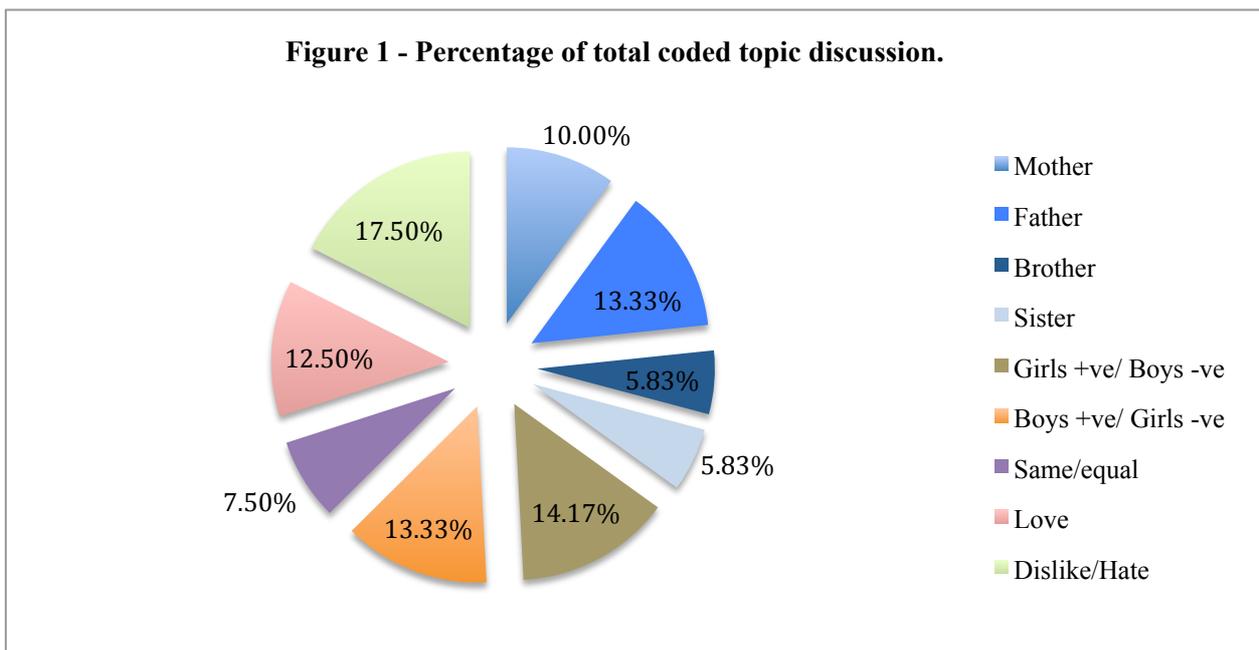
Perceptions of family and relationships

Constructivists argue that children would base their theories very much on their own personal experiences (Ronen, 2002). This certainly seems true from the evidence gathered. Table 3 shows the topics that the children spoke most frequently about, although it should be pointed out that the topics very much correspond to the designed discussion group questions, which were in turn chosen to be age-appropriate and relate to subjects that young children would be able to discuss. 35% of the coded segments of the discussion related to the children’s families, either their parents or siblings (shown in blue on Figure 1), who - according to the social learning theory – are the primary gender role models for young children (Kessler, 1985; Lott & Maluso, 1993).

	Girls	Boys	Total	Mean	% Total
Mother	10	2	12	6	10.00%
Father	11	5	16	8	13.33%
Brother	6	1	7	3.5	5.83%
Sister	0	7	7	3.5	5.83%
Girls +ve/ Boys -ve	10	7	17	8.5	14.17%
Boys +ve/ Girls -ve	7	9	16	8	13.33%
Same/equal	7	2	9	4.5	7.50%
Love	8	7	15	7.5	12.50%
Dislike/Hate	17	4	21	10.5	17.50%

Table 3 showing the frequency that topics were mentioned

Positive and negative mentions of the genders are fairly evenly matched, while there is a relatively low amount of discussion about similarities between genders, or equality (7.5%). When asked to describe who they were similar or different to in their families, the children very much concentrated on saying why they were not the same as other people. The emphasis was on physical appearance, with biological gender differences being discussed by Girl 1. All three girls commented on the hair of their parents, which could support the theory that girls are encouraged by the media from a young age to concentrate on cosmetic beauty (Paul, 2011). Similarly, when asked whether she will be like their parents in the future, Girl 3 said “I’m going to be different when I grow up because I’m going to paint my hair different”.



When asked to discuss emotions, the girls were significantly more negative about their feelings with 17 out of the 21 discussions of disliking someone or something being divulged by the females in the group. However, all of the children agreed that they loved everyone in their family, even if they didn't like them (see Appendix 3 for the coded transcript). The children could clearly perceive the difference between liking and disliking someone, and were able to explain their opinions. This opposes White's opinion that children are unable to address philosophical concepts such as emotions (White, 2012). Admittedly, however, it may be unlikely that they would be able to offer any definition for such higher-order thinking (White, 2012, p. 140).

Girl 2 proposed some very gender segregating responses to many of the questions posed. When asked "Do boys not like girls then?", she immediately confirms this to be the case, and furthermore, that boys and girls cannot be friends, but "they can be boyfriend and girlfriend" (Appendix 3). Boy 1 offers some agreement to Girl 2, saying "sometimes boys don't like girls because sometimes girls distract boys when they are trying to talk to each other", but he is quickly rebutted by Girl 2, who insists "Boys do that but girls don't". From this point on in the interview, Girl 2 continues to provide very generalising, gender divisive remarks, such as saying "I don't like boys", "boys like boys" and "girls like girls". She is determined to voice how she perceives that her entire gender, and the opposite gender, view girls and boys and the friendships (or lack of friendship) between them.

How do year one children perceive gender and relationships within the Disney fairy tale Cinderella?

When asked to comment on how Cinderella would feel towards her family, the children had mixed responses. Girls 2 and 3 decided that Cinderella would still love her step-sisters despite their treatment of her; Boy 1 said that she would still love them "a little bit" and Girl 1 disagreed, saying "She doesn't love them and she doesn't like them" because "they make her do everything" (see Appendix 3). As before, the children are able to express that there is a difference in liking and loving someone, and that, in their opinions, it is possible to love without liking.

The children said some very thought-provoking things regarding the idea of Cinderella being a boy. Most of the children who were present for the third session insinuated that there would be a difference in the love shared between Cinderella and his step-family, if he was a male character. Boy 1 believed that boy Cinderella would love his family "a little bit less" than girl Cinderella. Girl 1 commented that boy Cinderella would love his step-sisters, but he wouldn't "care" for them.

“Care” is an ambiguous word, but from a child this age it definitely has nurturing connotations, which is a feminine characteristic (England et al., 2011), and so it is of particular interest that Girl 1 will not associate “care” with a male character. Girl 2 relates her opinion of male/female relationships in reality to the reversed Cinderella story, to make sense of the concept (Drotner, 2001, p. 301). She reasoning that boy Cinderella would not like his female family because of their gender.

The opinions on gender reversing the Cinderella story were again differing. All three girls said that it would be “worse” if the story were changed, although Girl 1 appeared to change her mind after hearing the other girls’ opinions. Girl 1 went on to make the comment that “the girls always get the magic” (presumably referring to Disney films or fairy tales in general). This could be related to the rescuing element of the Disney Princess stories: most require the Prince to save the Princess from dark magic (such as *Snow White* or *Sleeping Beauty*), or involve the Princess meeting the Prince, or falling in love with the Prince because of the involvement of magical elements (such as *Beauty and the Beast* or *Cinderella*). Boy 1 (who was the only male present for Session 3) felt differently from the girls. He said: “[I]f the story was changed then it would be more good because you could see what the Prince has done instead of Cinderella [...] we could see what the other one does [...] I would like the boy version because I don’t know what it’s like”. The Prince has a very minor role in *Cinderella*, and other than that the film is very female heavy, with both the protagonist and the villains being women. Boy 1 does also clarify that he enjoys the original version of the *Cinderella* film, but hints towards the lack of male presence in the film, and a desire to see such fairy tales told from a masculine perspective.

On the subject of marriage in the *Cinderella* story, the group were not completely in agreement. In answer to the question “Would it be ok for Cinderella to ask the Prince to marry her?”, Boy 2 comments that “Cinderella should be a boy to do that”, showing preconceived ideas of gender roles in proposing and perhaps marriage itself, probably established from family experiences or media exposure (Kessler, 1985; England et al., 2011). Most of the other children believe the question to be ok, once the confusion over the character names had been dealt with.

Analysis and critical reflection on the research methodology

Questionnaire

Some difficulties were encountered when instigating the PALS questionnaire (Chaplain, Appendix 1), adapted from the *Manual for the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales* (2000). It was a time consuming process, requiring each participant to complete the questionnaire on a one-to-one basis with the interviewer, as many children in year one are unable to read independently. Issues arose with the wording of the statements. One involves a double negative which the young children found challenging to understand. Because the questions require closed answers and the children do not expand their thoughts, it is difficult to establish that the questions are fully understood. When responding to “I don’t like people thinking I am stupid” on the questionnaire (see Appendix 1), it became clear that the wording of the statements left some children confused. Comments such as “People don’t think I’m stupid!” showed that some children did not fully understand what was required of them. An emoticon version of the Likert scale was used to aid comprehension, however this may have had adverse effects on the children’s answers. The children associate smiley faces in their school work with feeling happy and achievement thus many of the children would assume (if they didn’t understand the questions) that the correct answer is to select the smiley face. When participating, one EAL pupil commented, “I like the happy face”, illustrating the lack of clarity that children may have felt.

Selecting focus group

There was a difficulty when selecting children for the focus group. The questionnaire results revealed that most of the children had no clear goal orientation so had to be disregarded from the study. Fortunately, six children revealed distinctive goal orientations, a girl and a boy for each class. It would have been interesting to have widened the study and compared the children’s goal orientations as a scale rather than in distinct categories.

Group interviews

The discussion group worked really well as a means to encourage the children to share and build on their ideas (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996; Dockrell et al., 2000). The “speaking stone” was an effective method for speaking and listening, resulting in a more child-directed approach than is

often possible with young children, and the rules for interaction were followed effectively (Trickey & Topping, 2004). The activity was inclusive of all children, regardless of ability, and all were given the opportunity to speak.

Sample size

Because of the small size of the focus group, it is impossible to draw any solid conclusions reflective of children and gender in general. However, it does raise considerations for further investigations to take place with a larger sample size.

Coding

Coding (as modelled in England et al., 2011) my interview transcripts by highlighting enabled me to convert qualitative data into quantitative data for analysis. However, this method is susceptible to human interpretation and the results therefore may have differed if coded by a different person. It may be that coding is biased due to my own desire to find a correlation between the Disney franchise and children's perceptions of gender. Many of the themes are interconnected, for example brother or father and positive or negative mentions of the male gender. This causes some difficulty when choosing which category to put the children's words into, which would affect the outcome of the analysis of the results. If repeated, the categories for the coding of the transcripts could perhaps be broader, simply male and female mentions, and then the subcategories could be further coded to show positive/negative comments on genders, or mentions of family, friends or role models.

Implications for professional development

From my results, I can establish several implications for myself as a teacher. Firstly, I need to be aware that girls are likely to feel less motivated when partaking in physical education classes, since their perceptions of themselves as exercisers may be negative, should the general population follow the trend shown in my small sample. It is important to recognise this, and to strive to motivate and engage girls during PE lessons, while making sure to provide for all children in my care. There may be some physical activities that are more appealing to females, and one could easily incorporate such topics into PE lessons. The easiest way to appeal to the enthusiasms of the class is to discuss the possible lesson plans with the class and be lead by the children's own interests. Child-directed

learning in PE is more likely to engage the children since it is fulfilling a wish to comprehend a sport or activity of their choosing and thus engaging them as learners.

It is also apparent that girls and boys do have some preconceived ideas about their gender's potential, even if these concerns and assertions are by no means universal within the sample group. There may be some truth behind their theories of gender strengths and weaknesses, but I believe it would be conducive to the class' learning to see these not as positives and negatives based on a genetic disposition, but instead to try to perceive the qualities and improvement points that they have as an individual, regardless of sex.

Further more, I will strive not to contribute to gender segregation within my classroom. Children will be encouraged to work with a variety of different individuals within the class, in an attempt to steer away from such a stark perception of the genders being opposing. A mixture of same sex pairings, opposite sex pairings and various other groupings should all be catered for within the class, so that the children can have different experiences and establish the positive attributes of different members of their class. PSHE lessons could be used to emphasise that people are individuals, so that the children can move away from seeing the genders as defined by the masculine and feminine characteristics portrayed in England et al. (2011). I shall try to promote a healthy attitude in each child, concentrating on their personal qualities and targets as a learner and a peer, rather than placing emphasis on gender or ability as the means by which they are judged within my classroom.

Although Disney films remain popular with both genders, the quantity of female protagonists may mean that the male population in the class are less interested in watching the films. The franchise also encourages some highly stereotyped behaviour, which may be detrimental to young boys' and girls' within school and socially. I would prefer to select popular films that promote a greater gender equality within relationships, such as Disney's '101 Dalmations', which portrays a healthy, cooperative vision of parenthood (Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman & Lund, 2003, p. 365) and equality between the genders.

Positive role models are also important in boosting self-esteem and creating a constructive classroom environment. Children should be offered a range of models for morality, academic achievement and sporting prowess, amongst others. The only way to truly provide for the motivational needs of all the class is to get to know the class intimately. As a teacher, I hope to

establish what makes each child “tick” and offer opportunities to nurture their enthusiasm. A variety of role-models should also diffuse the misconception that Disney princes and princesses are the norm, so that the many children who find themselves not adhering to the popular conception of male or female, based on the characteristics described in England et al. (2011), do not feel anxious about being seen as different in anyway. I will aim to instil a culture of celebrating diversity and uniqueness within my class and the wider community, and to encourage the children not to be defined by their gender. Instead, I hope they will be reflective learners with an accurate perception of their own strengths and weaknesses and a drive to better themselves.

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Appendix 1 – PALS questionnaire

University of Cambridge

What I think about learning in school

Name:.....

We are very interested in what you think about learning in school and would like you to fill in this form. It is **not** a test, there are no right or wrong answers we just want to know what you think.

Below are some sentences, read each one then draw a circle round the face which best describes **what you think** most of the time.

If you don't understand any question please ask your teacher to explain.

It's important to me that I don't look stupid in class.

Not at all
true

Sometimes
true

Very
true



In class I want to learn as much as I can.

Not at all
true

Sometimes
true

Very
true



I like to show other children that I am good at my work.

Not at all
true

Sometimes
true

Very
true



I want to learn lots of new skills this year.

Not at all
true

Sometimes
true

Very
true



In class I try to stop other children thinking I am not clever.

Not at all
true

Sometimes
true

Very
true



It is important to me that I really understand my work.

Not at all
true

Sometimes
true

Very
true



I like to show other children that class work is easy for me.

Not at all
true

Sometimes
true

Very
true



I like to look clever compared with other children in my class.

Not at all
true

Sometimes
true

Very
true



I try to avoid looking like I have trouble doing my work.

Not at all
true

Sometimes
true

Very
true



Appendix 2 – table of questionnaire results showing goal orientation

TotalMastery	meanmastery	TotalPerfAvoid	meanperfavoid	TotalPerfApproach	meanperfapproach		
12.00	4.00	15.00	5.00	11.00	3.67	Boy 2	PerfAvoid
14.00	4.67	9.00	3.00	14.00	4.67		
15.00	5.00	15.00	5.00	15.00	5.00		
9.00	3.00	11.00	3.67	15.00	5.00	Boy 1	PerfApproach
15.00	5.00	9.00	3.00	15.00	5.00		
12.00	4.00	7.00	2.33	15.00	5.00	Girl 1	PerfApproach
15.00	5.00	3.00	1.00	11.00	3.67	Girl 2	Mastery
13.00	4.33	11.00	3.67	15.00	5.00		
15.00	5.00	15.00	5.00	15.00	5.00		
12.00	4.00	7.00	2.33	11.00	3.67		
15.00	5.00	8.00	2.67	12.00	4.00	Girl 3	Mastery
7.00	2.33	15.00	5.00	7.00	2.33	Boy 3	PerfAvoid
9.00	3.00	9.00	3.00	12.00	4.00		
15.00	5.00	15.00	5.00	15.00	5.00		
13.00	4.33	7.00	2.33	13.00	4.33		
9.00	3.00	13.00	4.33	13.00	4.33		
15.00	5.00	11.00	3.67	15.00	5.00		

Appendix 3 – coded transcript

Key:
Mother
Father
Brother
Sister
Girls +ve/ Boys –ve mention
Boys +ve/ Girls –ve mention
Same/equal
Love
Dislike/Hate

Session 1

Teacher: I have the speaking stone at the moment, and then I'm going to ask a question and pass the speaking stone to the person that wants to speak first. So my question is "Are girls cleverer than boys?"

Girl 1: It doesn't matter who is. **If girls are better than boys they say it's not and if boys are better than girls the girls say it's not right so both of them are not right so all of the people are good.**

Boy 2: **I think it might be** because I sometimes...I sometimes...because I sometimes can't do the work.

Girl 3: **They are really quite the same.** Because uh...because uh... they're both better.

Girl 2: **Girls are cleverer than boy.** because teachers are girls and they know a lot. **Girls are better than boys.**

Girl 1: Teachers can be boys.

Boy 1: Well (headteacher's name) is clever as well. (Teacher: And he is your...? What type of teacher?) Head master.

Girl 2: **He's the boss of us.**

Boy 3: It's not true. Cause boys are not better than girls and girls are not better than boys. **They're the same.**

Boy 1: Well they're not really because my **sisters** are not really good at playing games on the computer. (Teacher: Does that mean boys are cleverer than girls at computers?) **Well sometimes.**

Boy 1: Well it doesn't matter. I'm not very good at saying my colours, but **girls do**. It's because I don't know if the rainbow has more colours.

Boy 2: Well... I **think boys are better** than girls because I know all my colours.

Girl 3: **Girls and boys. They're both the same.** Sometimes girls and boys are wrong and sometimes they are right.

Girl 1: **I think girls are better than boys and than boys are better than girls. They are both sometimes** **Girls know all of the colours of the rainbow.** And **boys...they know lots of insects names**

Boy 2: Boys know their writing but not me. Because I don't know my writing. **Girls are better at knowing all the colours of the rainbow.**

Boy 1: **They're both the same**

Teacher: Are boys better than girls?

Boy 2: **Me!** Because I can run faster than my **mummy**.

Boy 3: **Me! All the boys** **Because boys run faster** than girls.

Girl 2: **Boys are better than girls because they can run really fast.** (Teacher: Is there anything girls are better at?) **No.**

Boy 2: Because I can run super fast right to the door.

Girl 2: And **boys are better at reading.**

Boy 2: But I can't read!

Boy 1: Well, **girls are better at speed because they have got a lot of power.** (Teacher: Anything else?) **Doing writing.** Well, **boys are better at girls because sometime they can do the egg and spoon race in sports.** (Teacher: Are boys better at some sports than girls?). Yes

Girl 1: The same as last time, they are both better, because all of the girls can run really fast and they try their best and the boys try their best, like at sports day when we were in Early Years, I won the egg and spoon race and the running race.

Girl 3: They're really both the same. Because sometimes uh boys and girls get it wrong and uh sometimes they are right. (Teacher: Who's better at sport?) Both of them.

Session 2

Teacher: Do you have anything in common with your mum and your dad? What is the same and what is different?

Girl 1: I am different to my mum and my dad. My dad because he's got a willy and my mummy because she um... she's...well not glasses cos I've got glasses...um...oh yes I remember now. She's got short and black hair.

Boy 1: Well I'm different to my mum because she hasn't got blue eyes she's got blue green.

Girl 2: I'm different to my dad because he's got no hair.

Boy 3: (Different to) My sister. Because my sister's a girl, and anyway I always win games with her. (Similar to) My dad. Because dad always...he just does what I say.

Girl 3: My mummy is different because, cause, cause she works in a hairdressers because shes got her hair different colours.

Boy 2: I'm different to my dad because he's rubbish at football, and I'm really good at football. When I kick the ball dad misses the ball.

Girl 1: I'm more similar to my mummy because both of us are girls. They like...um...my mummy and my daddy, my daddy always goes on his laptop to play and my mummy goes on her phone to play kids games. (Teacher: Who are you more like?) Mummy because I play games. (Teacher: Who will you be more like when you are a grown up?) None of them. I will not play on my phone. I'm going to be a babysitter.

Boy 1: I'm similar to my **dad** because he always plays candy crush on his phone and I play candy crush on the iPad. (Teacher: Who will you be more like when you are grown up?) I'm going to be more like none of them. I'm just going to sit there playing.

Girl 2: I'm going to be different to both of them. Because my **mum** babysits me and I wouldn't. (Teacher: What job would you like to do?) No job.

Girl 3: I'm going to be different when I grow up because I'm going to paint my hair different.

Teacher: Do you love everyone in your family?

Girl 1: I **don't like** my **brother** or my **daddy**. Because my **daddy** always tickles me when I say I **don't like** tickles and my **brother** never plays with me.

Boy 3: I **don't like** my **brother**. Yeah I **love** him, but he he is always naughty. (Teacher: Does he get you into trouble?) Yeah sometimes he picks me up when his back has a thing on his back so he can't pick me up but he does it still.

Boy 1: I **don't like** my **sister** but not my little **sister** only my big **sister** because she always kisses me when I say I don't like it. When she gets me in trouble I get her in trouble. My **sister** says **she does not like** me.

Girl 3: I **don't like** my **daddy** a little bit because he he he always gets funny to me when I say no. And he keeps doing it when he tickles me. Yes I **love** him still!

Girl 2: I **don't like** my **dad** because he never gives me a carry on the way home.

Teacher: Do you still love them even if you don't like them?

Girl 2: **Yes**

Boy 3: **Yeah.**

Boy 2: **Yes.**

Boy 1: **Yes.**

Girl 1: **Yes a bit.**

Girl 3: Yes.

Session 3

Teacher: Does Cinderella love her step-mother and her step sisters?

Girl 3: Cinderella's step-sisters were mean to her.

Girl 2: She still loves them even though they are nasty to her.

Teacher: What do you think Girl 3?

Girl 3: Yes.

Girl 1: She doesn't love them and she doesn't like them. Because they make her do everything every single day. I will like my mummy and daddy and brother but they just make me sometimes get the car ready. (Teacher: Do you still love them?) Yes I still love them.

Boy 1: I think she would love them a little bit.

Teacher: If Cinderella was a boy would he love his step-mother and step-sisters?

Girl 2: He wouldn't.

Girl 3: Because if Cinderella was a boy the step-sisters will just let him do the housework.

Girl 1: Um...it's just like my brother. Because if he was a step mother or step sister he would just boss me around [...] I meant they do love...it will love their step mum and step sisters they just wont care for them.

Boy 1: If she was a boy, he will love her step-mother. (Teacher: Would he love his step-mum more or less than girl Cinderella would?) A little bit less. I think less. Because if if um the boy Cinderella didn't have to do all the house work he would like it but if he did then um he would get more distracted because he doesn't like it.

Girl 2: If there was a boy Cinderella he really really wouldn't like his mummy or sisters. Because his mummy is a girl and his sisters is a girl.

Girl 1: My brother does not like me. He hates me. Sometimes he doesn't like me. He bosses me around, he gets me out of his way. He says "Go away I hate you".

Teacher: Do boys not like girls?

Girl 2: No

Teacher: So boys and girls can't be friends?

Girl 2: No. They can be boyfriend and girlfriend.

Boy 1: Um...well sometimes boys don't like girls because sometimes girls distract boys when they are trying to talk to each other.

Girl 2: Boys do that but girls don't! Because (boy's name) did that once to me and Girl 1.

Teacher: Do you think the story of Cinderella would be different if Cinderella was a boy?

Girl 1: It would just be different.

Girl 2: Worse because I don't like boys.

Girl 3: I don't like it like that. Because it's worse when Cinderella being a boy except from a girl. (Teacher: Cinderella should be a girl?) Yes.

Boy 1: Um, well, if um, if the story was changed then it would be more good because you could see what the Prince has done instead of Cinderella. Better because if we didn't watch...if we had already seen the first video of it we could have seen the second so we could see what the other one does.

Girl 1: Um I think it's worse. Because its its Cinderella that gets the magic. Because the girls always get the magic and I hate boys but I still love them. Because um my mummy is nice to me, my daddy sticks his tongue out and then I stick it back.

Boy 1: Well if it was a girl Cinderella which is the normal one I would like it a little bit because it is a little bit better. I would like the boy version because I don't know what it's like.

Girl 2: I know why boys think Cinderella should be a boy and I know why girls think Cinderella should be a girl. Because **boys like boys** so they want Cinderella to be a boy and **girls like girls** so they want Cinderella to be a girl.

Session 4

Teacher: Would it be ok for Cinderella to ask the Prince to marry her?

Boy 1: If she said to the Prince to marry her then he will say yes but if he was worn out he might say no. Yes it's ok.

Boy 2: They wont because they wont be the other way round. **Cinderella should be a boy to do that.**

Girl 1: Yes. Because the Prince is a boy and Cinderella's a girl and if she was a boy...Cinderella is not a name for a boy. If I was a boy and I was called Girl 1 (giggles). But my **brother's** called Charlie* and Charlie* can be a girl's name.

Boy 2: Er...I think it's ok now because when we said some boys and called Daniel and some girls are called Charlie* I now think it's ok because Charlie* is a girl name and we said it's a boy so it's ok. If Cinderella asked the Prince it's ok because he's still Prince Charming!

Girl 3: If Cinderella's a boy then the Prince will be a girl and that would be a different story.

Teacher: Would it be ok for a girl to ask a boy to marry them?

Girl 3: Yeah ok ok!

* Names have been changed.

Appendix 4 - Transcript showing pupil perception of sporting ability.

KEY
Girls +ve Boys -ve
Boys +ve Girls -ve
Equal/same

Teacher: Are boys better than girls?

Boy 2: Me! Because I can run faster than my mummy.

Boy 3: Me! All the boys. Because boys run faster than girls.

Girl 2: Boys are better than girls because they can run really fast. (Teacher: Is there anything girls are better at?) No.

Boy 2: Because I can run super fast right to the door.

Girl 2: And boys are better at reading.

Boy 2: But I can't read!

Boy 1: Well, girls are better at speed because they have got a lot of power. (Teacher: Anything else?) Doing writing. Well, boys are better at girls because sometime they can do the egg and spoon race in sports. (Teacher: Are boys better at some sports than girls?). Yes

Girl 1: The same as last time, they are both better, because all of the girls can run really fast and they try their best and the boys try their best, like at sports day when we were in Early Years, I won the egg and spoon race and the running race.

Girl 3: They're really both the same. Because sometimes uh boys and girls get it wrong and uh sometimes they are right. (Teacher: Who's better at sport?) Both of them.

Appendix 5 - Transcript showing pupil perceptions of intelligence.

KEY
Girls +ve Boys -ve
Boys +ve Girls -ve
Equal/same

Teacher: I have the speaking stone at the moment, and then I'm going to ask a question and pass the speaking stone to the person that wants to speak first. So my question is "Are girls cleverer than boys?"

Girl 1: It doesn't matter who is. If girls are better than boys they say it's not and if boys are better than girls the girls say it's not right so both of them are not right so all of the people are good.

Boy 2: I think it might be because I sometimes...I sometimes...because I sometimes can't do the work.

Girl 3: They are really quite the same. Because uh...because uh... they're both better

Girl 2: Girls are cleverer than boys because teachers are girls and they know a lot. Girls are better than boys.

Girl 1: Teachers can be boys.

Boy 1: Well (headteacher's name) is clever as well. (Teacher: And he is your...? What type of teacher?) Head master.

Girl 2: He's the boss of us.

Boy 3: It's not true. Cause boys are not better than girls and girls are not better than boys. They're the same.

Boy 1: Well they're not really because my sisters are not really good at playing games on the computer. (Teacher: Does that mean boys are cleverer than girls at computers?) Well sometimes.

Boy 1: Well it doesn't matter. I'm not very good at saying my colours, but girls do. It's because I don't know if the rainbow has more colours.

Boy 2: Well... I think boys are better than girls because I know all my colours.

Girl 3: Girls and boys. They're both the same. Sometimes girls and boys are wrong and sometimes they are right.

Girl 1: I think girls are better than boys and than boys are better than girls. They are both sometimes. Girls know all of the colours of the rainbow. And boys...they know lots of insects names.

Boy 2: Boys know their writing but not me. Because I don't know my writing. Girls are better at knowing all the colours of the rainbow.

Boy 1: They're both the same.

Teacher: Are boys better than girls?

Boy 2: Me! Because I can run faster than my mummy.

Boy 3: Me! All the boys. Because boys run faster than girls.

Girl 2: Boys are better than girls because they can run really fast. (Teacher: Is there anything girls are better at?) No.

Boy 2: Because I can run super fast right to the door.

Girl 2: And boys are better at reading.

Boy 2: But I can't read!

Boy 1: Well, girls are better at speed because they have got a lot of power. (Teacher: Anything else?) Doing writing. Well, boys are better at girls because sometime they can do the egg and spoon race in sports. (Teacher: Are boys better at some sports than girls?). Yes

Girl 1: The same as last time, they are both better, because all of the girls can run really fast and they try their best and the boys try their best, like at sports day when we were in Early Years, I won the egg and spoon race and the running race.

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Girl 3: They're really both the same. Because sometimes uh boys and girls get it wrong and uh sometimes they are right. (Teacher: Who's better at sport?) Both of them.