Study on the Nature and Perceptions of Single-Gender Education

by McKenzie Weed

BACKGROUND

Regis Jesuit High School is a private Catholic high school in Colorado. Most courses are taught in a single-gender format. There is a "Girls Division" and "Boys Division."

Regis Jesuit strives to "become a leader in single-gender education" as part of its *Strategic Vision* for the year 2025.

As a teacher at Regis Jesuit, I taught both all-boys and all-girls single-gender science classes.

PURPOSE

The purpose of my action research study was to (1) describe the perceived differences in teaching in an all-boys vs. all-girls class setting, (2) uncover student and teacher perspectives towards single-gender education, and (3) improve on my ability to teach in a single-gender environment,.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS and KEY FINDINGS

What differences, if any, exist in all-boys vs. all-girls classrooms and to what extent do these differences influence teaching strategies?

- Largely depends on each teacher and their own personal perceptions of gender-based pedagogy
- All-boys classes typically described as "louder" and involved more classroom management; whereas all-girls classes were described as "quieter" and "more focused" with less need for classroom management

What are the perceptions and attitudes towards single-gender education of students and teachers in single-gender classrooms?

- Overall positive perceptions of single-gender education among students and teachers as evidenced by mean composite score above 3 (on a 5-point scale) on Likert surveys
- Girls' mean scores were significantly higher than the boys' for each survey item, indicating that girls have a more positive perception
- Positive perceptions generally related to academic benefits
- Negative perceptions generally related to limited socialization and lack of diverse perspective
- Generally, students expressed desire for more mixed-gender classes and activities
- Generally, teachers expressed desire for more professional development opportunities related to single-gender pedagogy

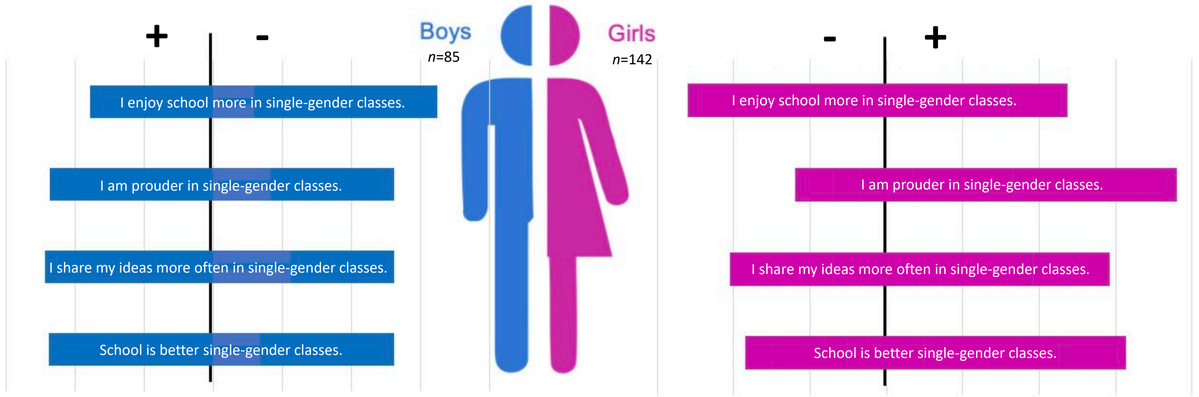
How can these findings help me improve my own teaching in a single-gender classroom?

- Unique personalities of students matter more than the gender of the students
  - Focus on learning needs of individual students in the class
- Be mindful of comparisons made between all-girls and all-boys classes to avoid perpetuating gender-based stereotypes

"I share my ideas more often in all-boys class, because I feel if I make a dumb idea, me and the boys would just laugh about it, but if there was girls I would feel like sharing things less just so I have a less chance of not being judge just in case if I do say something dumb."

"I feel like we need different views from other people. Maybe people from a different gender have different views or will understand something more and explain it better."

"I think being co-ed is better because it prepares you more for the real world because the real world is not separated based off gender."



Student Perceptions of Single-Gender Education (*N*=227)

"I feel as though I have missed out on some friendships, social skills, and experiences…"

"I think I pay attention more and learn more overall."

"I've felt comfortable just like showing up and not having to worry about anything other than learning. And also I feel like I'm participating a bit more without the fear of judgement from like, my male peers. You know, I just feel like I'm a bit more confident."

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Teacher and Student Surveys

Teacher and Student Focus Group Interviews

Personal Teacher Journal