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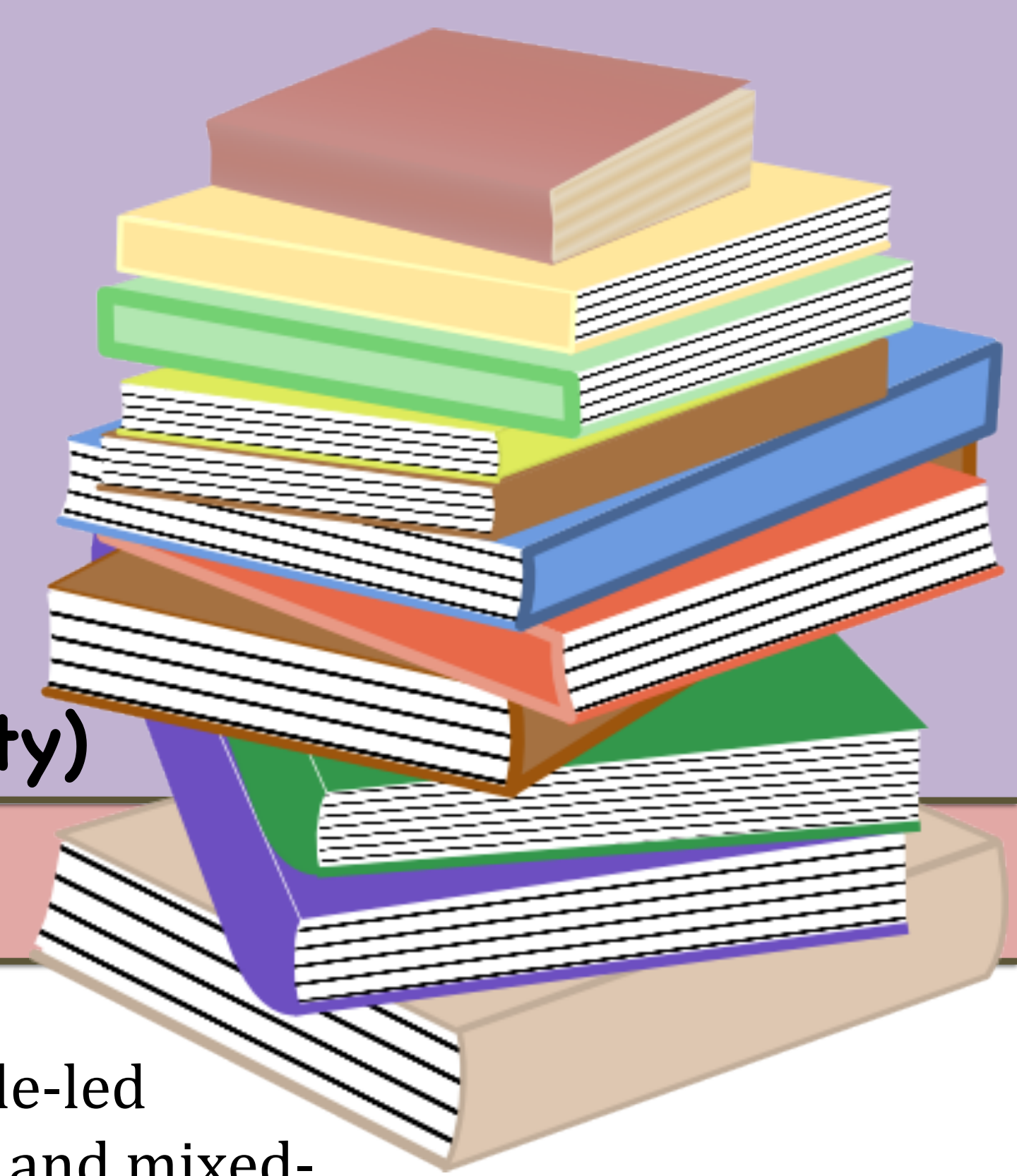
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# The Role of Gender in the Secondary English Classroom

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## Research Question/Purpose:

1. How does gender connect to student involvement in the secondary English classroom?
2. How can a teacher effectively facilitate discussions that encourage both genders to participate and allows them to thrive?
3. How does gender of instructor influence involvement of male and female students and how do group settings influence participation?

Why is this topic important?

The backdrop in which this study was conducted demonstrates significance:

- ✓ High School English department: 4 out of 14 male.
- ✓ District-wide level: 81 percent female and 19 percent male.
- ✓ State level: 77 percent are female and 23 percent are male.
- ✓ In 2011, in writing 37 percent of male students were below standards, in comparison to only 25 percent of females, which is an increased gap compared to 2007 when only a 5 percent difference existed.

## Literature Review:

Biklen and Pollard, authors of *Gender and Education* (1993), define gender as a “category of analysis that refers to the social constructions of sex” including men and women’s “behaviors, attitudes, presentation of self... social relationships” (p. 2). Key themes from the literature include:

**Societal Stereotypes:** Gender roles in the classroom, for both teachers and students, are greatly influenced by societal stereotypes about gender, and these gender stereotypes account for patterns seen in the style of participation and involvement of male and female students.

- ✓ Zapata/Gallard (2007)
- ✓ Thornton and Patricia Bricheno (2009)
- ✓ Davison/Frank (2006)
- ✓ Arnot (2006)

**Influence of Same-Sex Teaching:** Students’ participation in a classroom depends heavily on the level of comfort they feel with the instructor, which is usually correlated with the gender of the teacher.

- ✓ Skelton (2009)
- ✓ Zapata/Gallard (2007)
- ✓ Grossman/Grossman(1994)

**Influences of Content Area:** Content-area in school greatly affects the participation of male and female students.

- ✓ Cappon (2011)
- ✓ Grossman/Grossman (1994)
- ✓ Sadkers/Sadkers (1991)
- ✓ Gurian (2001)

**Small-group verse Large-group Settings:** Females feel more comfortable participating in small-group settings, while males are more participative in large-group settings.

- ✓ Gurian (2001)
- ✓ Grossman/Grossman (1994)

## Context:

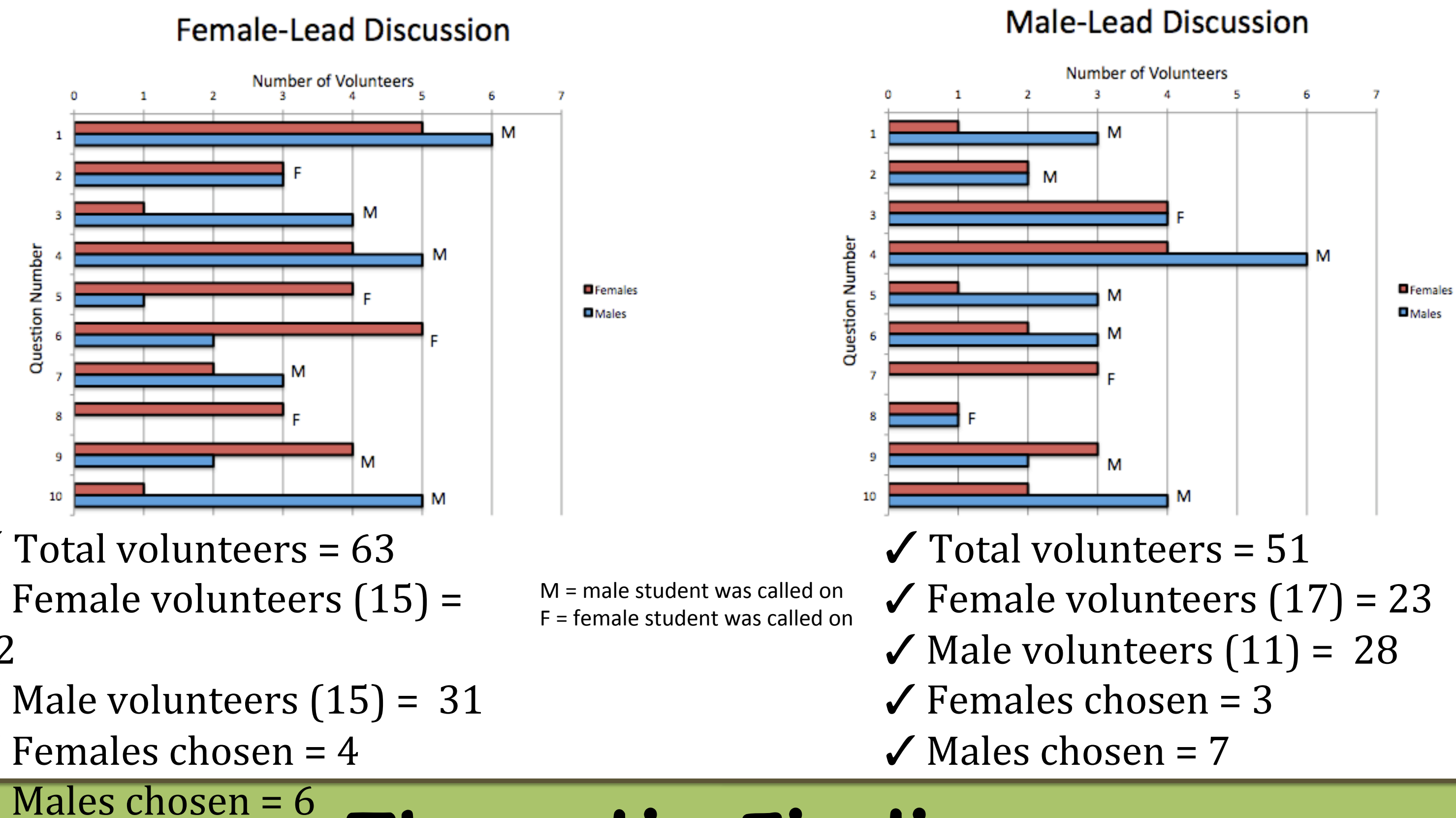
- ✓ School: 1,800 students (grades 9-12) and 150 faculty and staff, agricultural school in a fringe district in Central Illinois, 23% low income, and 67% meet/exceed state standards
- ✓ Classroom 1: First hour freshmen honors level, female-led, 30 students (15 male, 15 female)
- ✓ Classroom 2: Fourth hour sophomore regular level, male-led, 28 students (11 male, 17 female)

## Method:

- ✓ Recorded discussion involvement of students in female-led large group, male-led large group, same-gender small group, and mixed-gender small group.
- ✓ Recorded teacher tendencies when calling on students during large group discussion.
- ✓ Recorded number of questions asked by students in all settings.
- ✓ Took extensive field notes during all discussions.

## Data:

Asked 10 reading-comprehension questions in large group discussion in male-led classroom and female-led classroom.



## Thematic Findings:

- ✓ **Societal Stereotypes:** Teaching style and students’ participation in class seemed to be influenced by stereotypical gender roles
- ✓ In general, boys tended to be more competitive and dominated large group discussions (Field Notes, Various Dates).
- ✓ I (the female teacher) tended to be more nurturing towards students (Field Notes, Various Dates).
- ✓ **Same-Sex Teaching:** In general, students felt more comfortable participating in the classroom with a teacher of the same sex.
- ✓ Percentage-wise, females participated more in female-led discussion and males participated more in male-led discussion (Charts).
- ✓ **Influences of Content Area:** The concentration area of English yielded more female participation, in general. Interestingly, when another subject was introduced into the lesson male participation increased.
- ✓ “Today during an inter-disciplinary lesson that involved history content, several of the quieter male students were especially active and engaged during discussion and activities” (Field Notes, 11/21/11).
- ✓ **Small-group verse Large-group Settings:** Males were more participative in large group settings and less active in small groups, and females were more active during small groups and less participative in large group settings.
- ✓ “Girls who are typically non-participatory during whole-class discussions are especially active in their small groups” (Field Notes, 11/1/11).
- ✓ “A. and B. (both males) are working independently on the activity and are not conversing with their group members at all” (Field Notes, 11/4/11).

## Conclusion:

For teachers, it is important to recognize how the teacher’s gender and students’ genders impact the learning environment and student participation. To foster gender equity, the teacher should consider gender dynamics and create activities that engage all students.