Summary:

This article is about the comparison of the reactions of children in the fourth grade, both from the time periods of 1975 and 1977, to the book “William’s doll.” The researchers wanted to see if children have become a little bit more aware about “gender equity” and their idea of “gender roles” (324).

If you don’t know anything about the book or haven’t’ heard of it, the story was mainly about a boy who wanted a doll. His father wanted to get him toys that were considered normal for boys. His brother and his neighbor made fun of him. The only person that supported him was his grandmother, who had got him the doll and explained to William’s father why it was all right to give him a doll.

The article states four theories that try to give and explanation of how children see the roles and ideas of gender. The theories are social learning, the theory of cognitive development, gender schema processing theory, and a theory that combines all of the previous theories.

The first portion of the article goes on saying that it is the people around the child that are responsible for influencing children’s views and ideas of gender. Although these sources should reassure children that it is all right to get out of or go against these gender-stereotyped norms, they discourage children from choosing sides or living life in a non-stereotypical manner. And this is evident in the kid of toys that parents buy their children’ William’s father rejected a doll for his boy, and pushed on a basketball and train as ideal toys for his son.
How it can be used:

One of the statements that would be helpful in the essay on gender is the quote that was describing the social learning theory and its idea that “children are influenced by their awareness of personally significant people and their daily activities…” (325). This statement could be tied into the prompt because it can push the idea that teachers are responsible for influencing the children’s interpretation of gender considering that the children spend a significant amount of time with their teachers in the classroom. At the same time this can be used to describe how it is the parent’s responsibility to teach their children about gender.

Another quote that that can be useful stated that “Even the most open minded parents fall into the habit of buying gender-stereotyped toys, thereby perpetuating gender stereotypes” (325). This quote can be used against the idea that parents should be the only ones responsible for guiding children’s interpretation of gender. It explains why it is also important for teachers to get involved in their student’s ideas of the subject of gender.

One of the most important quotes in this portion of the article states that gender roles are presented directly and indirectly though “language, behavior, and visual representations, and they are major components necessary for the formation of perceptions relating to gender” (325). This quote can be used either way to show how both parents and teachers can influence the way children view gender.

Another useful quote in the article states that “For children, the possible sources of information on gender-role expectations in society include parents and other family members, peers, the media, and educational settings including personnel and instructional
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This quote can be used to show how parents are not the only ones responsible for guiding children’s interpretation of gender roles.

After researching about the study done in 1975, they decided to go back to the school and gather data from a fourth grade class from the same school. They learned that the school became more diverse. In 1975 it was primarily white with only 15% African Americans, but in 1997 it was still dominantly white but had African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Indian students. To present the study to the class, they first read the book to them and asked them to write “what [they] thought of William’s Doll.” In addition to the 1975 responses, and pulling out four irrelevant ones, they had a total of 46 responses to analyze. They categorized the “favorable idea to William having a doll” into four categories: “Respondent addressed attitudes of adults in the story, …attitudes of peers in the story… importance of learning to care for babies [or]… the importance of people making their own choices.” And the unfavorable into three categories: “Respondent addressed attitudes of adults in the story… attitudes of peers in the story… [or] attitude or behavior that boys don’t play with dolls.”

The chart concludes that a total of 29 students (19 from 1975 and 10 from 1997) were “favorable to the idea of William having a doll,” while 17 (7 from 1975 and 10 from 1997) were against it.

The data presented can help for an argument that the gap is not really closing. By looking at the chart, in 1975 more than half of the students agreed that there was nothing wrong with William having a doll, but in 1997 the responses were split. One can also conclude that the gap widened because the number that were unfavorable of William having a doll actually increased in 1997, even though there were more responses in 1975.
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Also, there were more girls than boys that responded to the attitudes of peers or adults, which shows Gilligan’s theory that “girls develop their sense of morality with more concern for relationships and the feelings of others…” One girl even wrote, “I think his brother and his neighbor were very very wrong.” The child did not recognize that it is okay for William to be playing with dolls, she focused more on the fact that the neighbor and brother were wrong to tease him. Although one of the responses in 1975 indicates “women have the primary responsibility for child care… Only one of the boys in the 1997 group articulated this idea.” You can use this as a counterargument because the gap has closed in the sense that some children may believe fathers have equal responsibility for childcare, but there was still more children in 1975 responded about childcare.

What does it all mean and implications for the classroom.

“Teachers send messages to children about gender through their own behavior, their language in the classroom, and the documented differential treatment given to boys and girls.” This quote can be used for people who are agreeing that teachers have the responsibility to help children close the gender gap. This quote talks about how teachers sometimes send messages to their children without even being aware that they do it.

“Teachers, however, are in an ideal position to address children’s stereotypical perceptions of gender on a personal level in authentic situations where perceptions can be discussed openly.” This is another quote that captures the importance of a teacher figure in the classroom attempting to close the gender gap between boys and girls. It proves that teacher above any other role model, is fit to the job. In order to help our children feel
more comfortable with gender issues the article discusses the possibility of presenting
“situations to children that promote authentic discussion about gender perceptions.”
These gender discussions can be directed the use of literature because it “affords students
the opportunity to talk about issues in other people’s lives while maintaining distance
from their own, teachers may want to seek out children’s books and develop
consciousness-raising activities.” Boys and girls both go through a lot of emotional pain
when kept or discouraged from playing with non-traditional toys and activities. When
boys desire objects that are “typically feminine” it can “lead to a distorted and unhealthy
view of what it means to be male.” Teachers sometimes think that this only happens in
the home, but it’s not true. Teachers are often guilty of being biased towards a certain
gender and most are “unaware and typically deny that they perpetuate biased perceptions
of males and females.” We as teachers even forget that we make gender biases in the
classroom and it could be used as an argument that we need to set an example. If we
deny that we do that, then it becomes dangerous for our students, because we become
unaware that we are hurting their feelings or being insensitive.