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Issues of Gender and Social Identity in Classroom Disputes and Collaboration

Abstract

In this paper I examine two instances of gendered classroom interaction. The first is an instance of conflict when one strong group of girls attempts to push a collectively-written text in the direction of teen romance fiction. Another girl in the class loudly voices her disapproval of this trend, while the teacher finds it hard to arbitrate effectively without condemning the genre of romance fiction. The second is an example of collaboration when a high-achieving middle-class boy and a low-achieving working-class girl work together on the writing of textual dialogue. The teacher is not present on this occasion. These two examples illustrate that issues of social class positioning and related orientations to the consumption and production of written texts may be at least as significant as gender in explicating interactional phenomena. The question of effective feminist pedagogy is briefly addressed in the light of these considerations.

Introduction

A great many investigations of gender relations in co-educational classrooms have been conducted over the past decade or so. In most, the aim has been to establish how social relations between girls, boys and teachers in classrooms reinforce inequalities between men and women still visible in the public and private spheres of social life. An important focus has been on how teachers contribute, either consciously, or unconsciously, to the subordination of girls by paying far more attention to boys (see for example, Gill & Dyer, 1987). Another is the extent to which girls have been disadvantaged in learning environments such as co-educational Maths and Science classes with regard to curriculum materials and pedagogy (see Kruse, 1992). This paper also addresses the topic of gender relations in co-educational school classrooms, but attempts to do so differently. Boys as well as girls need to be carefully considered if we wish to understand how gender relations in classroom contexts arise, are maintained, and might be transformed. Authors such as Spender (1982) and even Gilbert and Taylor (1991), have tended to treat boys as a kind of analytical "black box". This tendency has been reflected in gender equity documents in Australian education since 1975. Yet I believe we cannot hope to alter gender relations in the classroom without a rigorous examination of what boys actually say and do in co-educational classrooms and whether they directly benefit or not from the consequences of their behaviour.

It is certainly not the case that all male students are egotistical oppressors of girls and that all female students are innocent (passive) victims of the aggression of boys and the neglect of teachers. These

heavy-handed characterisations ignore the fine detail of what actually happens in co-educational classrooms. Not only are female students active in the construction of themselves as possessing a viable feminine identity, but boys are likely to be as much pre-occupied with establishing their claims to masculinity in the eyes of other boys as with the establishment of superiority over girls. Furthermore, a great many girls and boys do not fit either stereotype. Idiosyncratic personality variations aside, the social construction of gendered identity is invariably complicated by social class positioning (as well as by race and ethnicity, which are not issues in this paper). Social class distinctions are profound, not superficial distinctions. We would probably not need a Disadvantaged Schools Program if they were. Issues of gender and social class are both significant factors in offering explanations as to why certain kinds of

texts are preferred (read and written) by different groups of school students.

Schools themselves are active agents in the construction of gendered stereotypes. For example, schools routinely offer gender-specific elective subject choices to students in the belief that the students of the "right" sex will inevitably pick them. For the most part this expectation is met, thereby demonstrating the strength of textual affinities articulated as "masculine" and "feminine" subject groupings. This paper, in contrast to accounts of girls' lack of confident behaviour with texts and other curricular items in so-called "masculine" subjects, looks at girls' and boys' interaction in a subject which has traditionally been defined as a "feminine" subject - Drama.

In 1990 I undertook a case study of six months of Drama lessons and script production work at Kennedy Catholic Secondary School in rural New South Wales, Australia. I was both classroom teacher and researcher in the case study. The eleven female and male students in the Drama class were aged between thirteen and fifteen. The research was conducted with the aim of making a significant further contribution to what is already known about the social construction of gender in schooling. The objective of the data analysis was to generate insights which might be useful in the formulation of future gender equity strategies, and also towards improving pedagogic practices in relation to boys. The forms of data collection for the case study included tape-recordings and video-recordings of classroom talk and interaction, as well as written texts and video-tapes of performance. During the project the data were analysed using a number of qualitative research procedures. This paper makes use of discourse analysis of talk which went on during two Drama lessons in which the aim was to create a script outline through the brainstorming of ideas.

The term "discourse analysis" refers to a range of analytic and theoretical approaches to text and talk. The accounts of data generated by these modes of analysis consider instances of talk and text in their cognitive, social and cultural contexts. Techniques of discourse analysis developed through

the work of sociolinguists such as Gumperz (1982). Since then, the sociopolitical function of this approach has been greatly expanded, quite notably in the area of feminist research (Cameron, 1985; Coates, 1986; West & Zimmerman, 1985, 1987; Tannen, 1990; Nilan, 1991a). In this paper, discourse analysis is employed to show how "power as action" (Foucault, 1980) operates when female and male students talk and interact in the classroom. Foucault's redefinition of power involves the recognition that power relations are located in material practices and tactics, rather than somehow existing in structures external to the lived reality of everyday existence. In this view of the relationship between power and language, power is considered to reside with people and in situations, rather than inhering in specific linguistic forms and codes (Fairclough 1990; Corson, 1992). The mode of discourse analysis I employ here includes some of the traditional conversational analysis/ethnomethodology notions employed by Sacks (1974) and Jayyusi (1984), such as membership and categorisation, but it also makes use of the notions of inclusion and exclusion as social processes whereby positions of power are maintained or challenged (Nilan, 1991b).

Gendered Patterns in the Lesson Talk

In Australian secondary schools Drama has traditionally been regarded as a "girls'" subject, just as the performing Arts tend to be regarded as a "feminine" or "effeminate" field of endeavour. Boys who take Drama have therefore already chosen (or been unwillingly placed in) a marginal position with regard to the dominant societal discourse of masculinity as it is expressed through "correct" subject choice. It would probably be

fair to say that boys do not choose Drama as a lower-school elective subject in great numbers. Therefore boys in Drama lessons do not tend to "dominate" classroom talk as they might if their numbers were greater, or if they were taking a class in a more "masculine" discipline such as Mathematics. For example, a boy called Mark who had been involuntarily placed by the school authorities "for his own good" in the Drama class examined here, hardly spoke at all.

The first Drama lesson to be considered proceeded as follows: the teacher cued the students to start making suggestions for script ideas which were quickly written up on the blackboard. The first cue was for characters, the second was for settings, and so on. When a number of ideas had been assembled, each set of ideas was discussed and the topic for each short editorial discussion was cued by the teacher. This sequence gave rise to a pattern of talk in which the teacher dominated, then the students dominated. While the students were calling out suggestions, or discussing, the teacher was usually engaged in writing up new suggestions, modifying suggestions, or re-arranging previous suggestions into lists or summaries. During this process, the boys in the class did not dominate the talk in terms of quantity or length of utterances. Of 1026 utterances, the girls took 613 turns at talk, of which 174 were over six words in length. The

boys, on the other hand, took only 139 turns, of which only 27 were over six words in length.

Although the boys in the class did not dominate the talk, a gender skewed pattern was observable in that the three boys who did make verbal contributions during the lesson were the students who most often engaged in whispered conversations. Furthermore, in proportional terms, the boys most frequently contributed evaluative comments, rather than original suggestions. The girls appeared to take more responsibility for keeping the brainstorming activity going by making suggestions which could be written up on the board. It is possible to interpret the girls' commitment to maintaining the brainstorming activity as supporting claims made by feminist sociolinguistic researchers that women do the hard work of keeping conversations, and other speech events, moving along (Fishman, 1978, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Also, Crump (1990) claims that female students in mixed classes are frequently more attuned to the purpose of a lesson. He maintains that girls have a clearer idea of what is required and are able to continue their work while boys disrupt or waste time. However, in the lesson with which the first part of this paper is concerned, this was not the full story. In fact the most significant source of disruption was a girl, and the boys could not really be said to be "wasting time".

The Teen Romance Text and How it was Challenged

In this lesson four girls; Skye, Jane, Lucy and Fiona, did most of the work of script creation through making suggestions as a collaborative group. They were therefore able to strongly influence the first draft of the evolving script. A large number of the suggestions they made concerned "normal", tanned, pretty teenage girls who were well-liked and for whom romantic love was the major life script. The four girls appeared to be referring to their favoured popular cultural texts; teen romance fiction and teen television serials. From a feminist point of view the scenarios offered in such texts offer only a severely limited view of life's options to adolescent girl readers. Yet ironically it is also the case that the four girls' knowledge of, and preference for, these texts, was a major source of their solidarity with each other and their domination of the script creation process. The following excerpt demonstrates the rhythmic intensity of their collaborative talk around romance:

Fiona: how about marriage?

Jane: love

Lucy: marriage

Jane: lo-ve

Skye: [lo-ve

Lucy: [love

Fiona: [ho-ney-moon

Jane: [honeymoon

Skye: love

Teacher writes love up on the board.

Lucy: honeymoon

Fiona: no no romance

Teacher: what are you saying?

Fiona: romance - honeymoon

Teacher: honeymoon (writes honeymoon on board)

Fiona: honeymoon

Lucy: (quietly) love

Skye: (quietly) marriage - um

Jane: CHELSEA (a female character)

Note the chorus-like quality of the girls' talk as they repeat and intone the key terms love, romance and honeymoon. Each term is a significant element in a narrative structure central to the "textually-mediated discourse of femininity" (Smith, 1988): teen love. Note also that Jane links the two words love and honeymoon to the female character CHELSEA. And she shouts the name. The four girls appear to be drawing on a common stock of knowledge about the feminine popular cultural texts they all prefer to read and view. Jane's naming of the character CHELSEA also draws upon this textual knowledge, since both teen and adult texts of this kind are constructed around the romantic experiences of one central female character.

In terms of interactional processes and the exercising of power, the girls' collaborative talk categorises them as members of girls' popular teen culture. It is an inclusionary process linked to a specific kind of cultural knowledge. However, it is notable that not all the girls in the class included themselves in this category by enthusiastically joining in the making of "romantic" suggestions. Immediately afterwards a girl called Emma made the suggestion "fight". Tom followed this with the critical comment:

Tom: murder on a honeymoon wow - (laughs) - I hope
he took out an insurance policy

Tom then contributed two further suggestions "murder" and "incest". Since insurance policies, fights, murder and incest are not elements of feminine popular cultural texts, the suggestions made by Tom and Emma can be seen as oppositional to the romantic ideas being put forward by the four girls. These new suggestions generated the vision of a very different kind of text to that which the four girls appeared to prefer.

This sense of opposition between genres of narrative characterised discussions about the evolving script during this lesson. The group consisting of Lucy, Skye, Fiona and Jane continued to draw heavily on romance fiction and prime-time teen television serials. Drew, Emma, Rohan and Tom kept objecting to this trend both by making critical and sarcastic comments, and by implying other kinds of texts such as thrillers in their suggestions. In this way, they too constituted themselves as group whose membership was dependent upon a specific kind of cultural knowledge,

although this knowledge was of a different order to that of the four girls. In the following exchange, one can see the two groups in direct opposition. The column on the right indicates that the conversation was conducted sotto voce and simultaneously with the mainstream talk in the left column:

Teacher: who's tanned

Lucy: Chelsea

Skye: Chelsea yeah

Teacher: tanned

Teacher writes up tanned near CHELSEA

Jane: oh no

Skye: yeah

Fiona: yeah yeah yeah yeah

Jane: no Kathy's just -

normal

Lucy: Kathy's got a good
humour

Jane: no Kathy's

Fiona: Kathy's got a good
humour and she's

always laughing and happy

Jane: normal - normal -

please - normal

Teach: who who who

Fiona: Kathy

Teach writes up pretty normal below KATHY.

Skye: she's just a normal
human

Emma: (sarcastically) suave -

sophisticated -

pretty lovely -

desirable

Rohan: mmm

Emma: God I hate this

stereotyped Sweet

Dreams shit -

Tom laughs.

it just makes me sick

Tom: Princess Pure (laughs)

In the conversation taking place in the left-hand column between the girls'

group and the teacher, there are minor points of disagreement, but these are quickly resolved. However, the comments voiced sotto voce by Emma and Tom are of a far more profoundly oppositional and critical nature. Emma initiated the whispered conversation with the two boys between whom she was sitting. By her own admission Emma did not like girls. Tom and Rohan were her closest friends both inside and outside the classroom. Emma was the ringleader and the three of them cultivated a superior and critical air in all their classes. This air of superiority was built upon a common social class background - all three were the children of quite wealthy parents. In contrast to Fiona, Skye, Lucy and Jane, these three were achieving excellent results in their academic classes.

In the excerpt above, Emma whispers a number of adjectives which are obviously intended as some form of sarcasm. Rohan agrees by a minimal sound conveying solidarity. Emma then elaborates upon her previous comment, stating in strong terms what she thinks of the genre of teen romance texts, while naming one, the Sweet Dreams series. Tom's appreciative laugh signals both solidarity and perhaps pleasure at the way

she phrases her opinion. Emma then says she finds the genre physically offensive. After a brief pause Tom whispers to her "Princess Pure". His comment adds a new element to the critique and emphasises one aspect of the classic teen romance heroine which Emma did not mention, her dutifully-preserved but always threatened virginity (see Christian-Smith, 1987). Tom may be indicating that sexual purity is a significant characteristic of such heroines as far as he is concerned.

Emma's oppositional commentary can be read as both a sustained objection to the romance genre of text, and also as a claim on her part for a particular kind of gendered social identity. There is a certain resonance between the opinion Emma expresses and the way she expresses it. She blasphemes, she expresses very strong disagreement and she swears. In other words she constructs her own gender identity in this moment of speaking as antithetical to the representations of idealised romantic femininity emerging from the suggestions of the girls' group. The strength of Emma's opinion regarding representations of femininity is demonstrated by the fact that Emma broke out of her sotto voce conversation with her friends to speak directly to the teacher on this matter as follows:

Emma: (to the teacher) all of this you realise all of this is all out of Sweet Dreams books - like (...)

Teacher: is it?

Emma: yeah

Teacher: all out of Sweet Dreams books?

Emma: teenage Mills and Boon

Emma's choice of words here implies that the teacher may not have recognised the textual origin of the girls' suggestions. Emma then went on to offer some comparative information on Sweet Dreams books "teenage Mills

and Boon", as if this comparison would enlighten the teacher.

It seems likely that Emma did accurately identify the source of the suggestions being made by the girls' group. According to Gilbert and Taylor (1991), Sweet Dreams books are published by Bantam and are one of only two American young adult romance series to have achieved commercial success in Australia. In 1990 Sweet Dreams books were readily available from chain stores and supermarkets. As Emma says, like Mills and Boon novels, the narratives in Sweet Dreams books revolve around the interior emotional life of a heroine who is specifically constructed so as to be "any girl". Attractive, or at least potentially so, but as yet untransformed by love (Christian-Smith, 1987) and "usually not doing well at school" (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p. 89), the heroines spend most of their time talking to their girlfriends, planning what to wear, or what to say, in their next encounter with a boy. Such a heroine could not be more at odds with the kind of girl Emma appeared to be. Emma was succeeding academically and her friends were exclusively male. It may be that what Emma finds offensive is not only the form of teen romance texts and the saccharine personas of the heroines, but the proffered instruction in a particular life script for teenage girls which is antithetical to her own sense of how she will live her life.

This was a difficult moment for the teacher. She did not know exactly how to deal with this interruption to the lesson activity, nor to the information Emma had given her:

Teacher: well it might be out of Sweet Dreams books but -
what we do with it might not be - quite

Teacher turns back to board.

This is a difficult issue for any teacher to arbitrate successfully and the

teacher here avoids saying anything which might have offended either of the two groups of students. Had she validated Emma's implication that the four girls' ideas were derivative and represented stereotypical femininity, she might have applied a worthy feminist intervention which coincidentally belittled the suggestions of girls who did not possess the "cultural capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) of Emma. On the other hand, if she had taken Emma to task for implying the other girls' ideas were unworthy, she might well have provoked Emma to make even more overtly disparaging comments. Instead, she compromised by offering Emma a kind of lame half-promise that, despite the acknowledged source of these ideas, the eventual script might turn out more intellectually satisfying. The implication is that Emma should keep calm and wait and see. To some extent this parrying was effective. Emma did not interrupt again immediately. She did, however, instantly engage Tom in a whispered conversation in which she expanded further upon the reasons for her objection to the genre of teen romance texts.

"Really Good Books"

Emma and Tom went on to justify their objections to the teen romance genre of text in terms of the discourse of "high culture" (Willis, 1990). They demonstrated to each other their mutual capacity to distinguish between "really good books" and "crap":

Jane: I like the name - um
Teach points to the board.
Teach: Kathy is normal
Fiona: she's got a sense of
humour she's really
funny
Skye: no that's Toni
Fiona: she's a dork and
she's really funny
Skye: yeah but she keeps
everyone laughing
Teacher writes humorous beside
TONI on the board.
Tom: you you familiar with
them are you
Emma: no I never - I never read
Sweet Dreams books (...)
- they're - so - crap
CRAP CRAP CRAP -
there are really good
books - there's The
Lord of the Rings
Tom: yeah I know - really
good book
Emma: have you actually
read the trilogy

The cultural distinction between the two groups of students is particularly well demonstrated in these parallel conversations. Skye, Fiona, Jane and Lucy are reaching consensus on what they wanted to see in a young (romantic) female character "really funny" and "keeps everyone laughing". Meanwhile Emma and Tom are creating solidarity around the "good books" they prefer. It does not seem coincidental that Emma and Tom came from more economically and culturally privileged homes than Lucy, Skye, Fiona and Jane, nor that Emma and Tom were both achieving much higher academic results at school than these four girls.

In a study conducted by Gilbert and Taylor, girls from culturally and economically privileged backgrounds rated Dolly Fiction books as "trash"

and "pathetic" (1991, p. 98). Referring to a contrasting study of girls from non-English speaking backgrounds conducted by Taylor (1986), which

found quite the reverse, they surmise as follows:

It could be argued that the lived social and cultural experiences of girls as members of oppressed and disadvantaged groups may be significant in positioning some girls more readily to accept romance ideology - and to accept romance fiction - as the most promising method of resolving the contradictions of becoming feminine (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p. 95).

Christian-Smith (1993) also makes the claim that working class girls are the keenest readers of romance and do not tend to view these texts in a critical light. It would seem that the reading of teen romance fiction provides pleasure to such readers (Modleski, 1982), and may be significant in the creative adaptation of working-class adolescent girls to the prospect of unsatisfactory and circumscribed lives (Moss, 1989).

If this is indeed the case then the claims of Fiona, Lucy, Jane and Skye, and the critical counter-claims of Emma and Tom, can be seen as a struggle between different class-based positions on the subject of teen romance fiction. For example, when Emma asked Tom during their whispered conversation whether he had read the "trilogy", presumably the three volumes which comprise *The Lord of the Rings*, her use of the term "trilogy" was telling. It is doubtful whether Fiona, Jane, Lucy or Skye would have been able to correctly define this term. As Gramsci points out, those who come from intellectually-oriented families, not only "know" literature, but know how to talk about it (1971). The whispered talk between Emma and Tom about the inherent superiority of "good" books over cultural "crap" like *Sweet Dreams* books, constitutes a form of social closure (Parkin, 1979; Bourdieu, 1989), in which the literary tastes of certain girls in the class are effectively deplored and their own, more culturally enlightened tastes are extolled. *The Lord of the Rings*, like most other "classics" constitutes part of the "selective tradition" (Williams 1965, 1989), by which cultural hegemony is maintained and reproduced (Wald, 1989; Willis, 1990). The critical distinction made by Emma and Tom between "really good books" and "crap" therefore involves the operation of inclusionary processes around culturally privileged knowledge. It simultaneously excludes Fiona, Skye, Lucy and Jane who are demonstrating possession of far less culturally refined aesthetic tastes. Although the topic here is that of feminine popular cultural texts, the categorisation has as much to do with social class as with gender.

Collaborative Writing by a Girl-Boy Pair

In the lessons which followed the brainstorming session above, the process of script-writing continued. Three weeks later, the draft scenario had been completed. The students then worked in pairs or threes to flesh out the dialogue for each scene. In order to avoid habitual groupings, the teacher established the rule that each student should try to work once with every other student in the class. This meant that at times dialogue came to be written by girl-boy pairs. When the pair consisted of Tom and Emma, there was no observable cultural dissonance, but on other occasions one

could observe the two writers drawing upon different sets of cultural/textual resources, not only for creating texts, but also for engaging in conversation. One of the most illuminating of these interactions took place between Fiona and Rohan when they worked together to create dialogue for the second part of the first scene of the play. According to the draft scenario, two brothers, GREG and DWAYNE, were starting another day on the family farm where they lived with their parents. They were meant to be getting up, having breakfast and discussing the imminent arrival of three emotionally disturbed orphaned teenagers who were going to be fostered by the family:

T: so try and get some stuff down

Fiona and Rohan sit down together and take out their workbooks and pens.

Fiona: I'll be Greg and you be Dwayne

Rohan: mmm

Fiona: Greg has a big dog - so does Dwayne - so

both dogs are in love with each other (she laughs, Rohan laughs) - no um - the alarm goes off

Rohan: what they get up and the alarm goes off (he laughs)

Fiona: (laughing) yeah

Rohan: great organisation

Initially we can see that Fiona took up a practical organising role. She proposed that they should each take a character in order to produce dialogue. Rohan's response to this directive was non-verbal, but indicated agreement. Fiona then made a suggestion which operated as a kind of ice-breaker. Certainly both Fiona and Rohan laughed. Fiona then went straight on to make a "real" suggestion, one which conformed to the draft outline of the scene. The relevant stage direction in the scene from which they were meant to be working was GREG and DWAYNE get up.

Rohan's response to Fiona's suggestion is basically evaluative. His question demonstrates that there is a certain lack of logic in Fiona's suggestion the alarm goes off because it implies the alarm went off after the brothers had already risen. Fiona does not deny it, but agrees that this is the sequence, perhaps sensing a comic potential in this unexpected reversal. With some sarcasm, Rohan then makes a further evaluative comment "great organisation", but it is not clear whether he meant Fiona, or the brothers in the script. As their collaboration continued it was notable that Fiona had a tendency to defer to Rohan's judgement. In other words she invited evaluation and checking of her ideas, even when Rohan did not offer it:

Rohan: he could ask - what time are these people arriving

Fiona: (writing) so Dwayne - what time are these kids

arriving (long pause as she writes) will I say these runaways?

Rohan: yeah (writing)

Fiona: OK - (writing) runaways

Although it was always good-humoured, the pattern of interaction we can see illustrated here between Fiona and Rohan recurred in various forms as the two students went on creating dialogue. Fiona tended to make more suggestions and Rohan continued to maintain a more critical and evaluative position. He frequently reformulated Fiona's suggestions, but the reverse situation never occurred. Often they would appear to agree on a piece of dialogue and Fiona would begin writing, then Rohan would interrupt with a new modification. The following excerpt demonstrates this:

Fiona: (writing) Dwayne - what will you say
Rohan: me um - we should - oh no 'cos they're parents aren't they - I was going to say if it wasn't for Greg and whoever - you might be running as well? - or - um
Fiona: how about um -they're comin' at about nine o'clock so you better get ready 'cos dad and mum will want you there
Rohan: yeah - oh rightio - yeah um
Fiona: errh (writing)
Rohan: no couldn't he say hang on um - about nine what's it to you?
Fiona: (crossing out) oh yeah - at about nine - what's it to you
They both write in their books.

Note that when required to speak as DWAYNE, Rohan seems unable to improvise successfully. The line of dialogue he eventually produced was rather incomprehensible and did not match the draft outline of the scene. Fiona's suggestion, however, is both coherent and appropriate. Rohan appears to acquiesce, and Fiona begins to write. However, Rohan interrupts with a reformulation. Whereas Fiona's line for DWAYNE implies a harmonious fraternal relationship between the two brothers (DWAYNE attempting to ensure his brother does not incur the wrath of their parents), Rohan's line implies antagonism between the two. Fiona then crosses out what she has just written down, and starts again. At the end of the lesson their two workbooks exhibited the results of this skewed interactional pattern. The writing in Fiona's book showed much evidence of crossing-out and false starts, whereas Rohan's version of scene one flowed smoothly without many alterations. However, it is also the case that Fiona took much longer to write things down than Rohan, because her hand-writing was meticulously neat in comparison to Rohan's rapid but untidy scrawl.

As collaborative activity continued between these two, some convergence did take place. The work of dialogue creation did move into some kind of dramatic improvisational structure. Fiona kept prompting Rohan to speak as DWAYNE and this strategy produced some workable dialogue. Rohan started prompting Fiona to speak as GREG. As shown below it was sometimes Fiona who could not find an appropriate line for GREG to say:

Rohan: Greg?

Long pause.

Rohan: just curious? or

Fiona: no not curious

Rohan: um - you could say something about I thought that
there would be some nice chicks for me
or something?

Fiona: yeah - ohhh (she starts to write)

Rohan: um - a smart answer (laughs)

Fiona: (stops writing) hey?

Rohan: what's a smart answer

We can see here that when Fiona fails to produce a line of dialogue Rohan makes a suggestion and Fiona evaluates it negatively, objecting to the word curious. This constitutes a reversal of the dominant pattern of their conversational interaction, but it was not common for this to occur. Rohan then offers a further suggestion, one that is quite different from the rather inconclusive lines of dialogue which had been produced so far. The line he suggests constitutes GREG as an arrogant male, accomplished by the phrase nice chicks for me. This implies that GREG is significantly older than DWAYNE because he demonstrates a predatory and objectifying attitude towards girls and women. Fiona makes no objection. She begins to write down the line. However, Rohan goes on talking. Fiona obviously thought at first that he was reformulating the line she was engaged in writing down, but in fact Rohan was trying to think of "a smart answer", that is, something DWAYNE could say which would be an acerbic and witty response to GREG's comment about nice chicks.

We can see that not only are there differences in the conversational styles and sets of cultural resources which Rohan and Fiona are operating during this collaboration, but quite different agendas. Rohan's conversational style during this encounter can be described as dominant, since he talks over Fiona, interrupts her writing, reformulates her suggestions and provides a critical filter for the emerging dialogue. Fiona's style of talk, by contrast, is basically deferential. She does make suggestions, but is always prepared, even eager, for Rohan's evaluations and reformulations of these. She readily erases an established line of dialogue in order to replace it with a new idea of Rohan's.

In terms of cultural resources, Fiona's suggestions for dialogue between the brothers imply harmony and caring, which may bear an intertextual relationship to the romance novels she prefers to read. It may also be that her creation of an imaginative storyworld is bound up with a desire to represent consensus and collaboration, where care for the welfare of others (see Gilligan, 1982) characterises interaction. Rohan, on the other hand, appears to be constructing a relationship of conflict between DWAYNE and GREG, an imaginative storyworld of arrogant male posturing and smart answers. This may also reflect his preferred choice in reading material and audio-visual media, but it may also be related to the wider cultural

ethos of male competitiveness and bravado.

Fiona appears intent on completing the given task in the allocated time period of the lesson, and strictly in accordance with the parameters of the possibilities for dramatic dialogue outlined in the scene draft. Rohan, on the other hand, gives no impression of concern about the due completion of the task within the given time frame. The suggestions, reformulations and evaluations he makes all indicate that he considers the business of writing this dialogue to be far less tied to the parameters of the draft scene outline than Fiona. However, it is also the case that Fiona never argues against his suggestions when they do appear to diverge from the scene outline. To fully comprehend what is really going on in this collaborative activity, it is necessary to examine the way Rohan and Fiona were positioned within the societal discourses of class and gender as they functioned within the school. Although one could interpret the pattern of interaction in this collaboration as solely constitutive of gender distinction, that would be to ignore the significance of the different relationships these two students had to academic schoolwork, and beyond that to socio-cultural privilege.

Rohan was considered an exemplary student by the staff at Kennedy High. He came from a wealthy and long-established family in the district. He was achieving excellent academic results at school, and as we saw earlier, allied himself with Emma and Tom regarding the lowly status of popular cultural texts. Fiona came from a very different kind of socio-cultural background to Rohan and she was achieving low grades in all academic subjects. Her textual preferences were for the kinds of popular cultural texts not treated seriously by the English syllabus, as she had indicated during the earlier brainstorming lesson. She disliked academic work, although she excelled at sport. She enjoyed a reputation being a "trouble-maker" in the school. Often on detention for giving cheek to teachers, swearing, smoking in the toilets and kissing boys in the playground, she eventually left school at fifteen to join the Australian Navy.

A paradigmatic point of contrast between Rohan and Fiona was the difference in their Australian accents. Rohan, the son of a wealthy grazier, spoke with what is often referred to as an "educated" Australian accent. He spoke very correctly and rounded his vowels, which made him sound rather as though he came from the British upper class, except that he had never been outside New South Wales. This was clearly the way a reflection on the way his parents spoke. By contrast, Fiona, a working class Catholic girl, spoke with flat, nasal vowels. She dropped the last consonant on some verbs, for example "goin'" and "comin'", and used a variety of colourful colloquialisms. She swore frequently.

In the light of these socio-cultural differences between Fiona and Rohan, differences which were powerfully reinforced by the school in a variety of ways, it is possible to read Fiona's unquestioning acceptance of Rohan's critical and reformulative stance towards her suggestions in terms of deference not so much to him in terms of gender but in terms of his

superior cultural and academic status. Although the gender difference

between them probably did intensify this pattern of dominance-deference to some degree, it is the case that Fiona was a very assertive and popular girl, whereas Rohan did not enjoy high status in the hierarchy of masculinities which operated in the boys' peer network. He certainly lacked a powerful masculine identity in the rough and tumble of the playground and the sportsfield. He was short and slight in stature and avoided sport, choosing Drama and Cooking as elective areas of study. He suffered many jibes from other students about alleged homosexuality, which is rather a phobic obsession among adolescent Australian schoolboys (see Walker, 1988).

Rohan's pre-occupation with what DWAYNE could give as a "smart answer " to GREG in the excerpt above might well have derived from his own strategies for maintaining a very precarious position in the hierarchy of masculinities in the boys' peer group of the school. As far as his agenda within the collaborative script-writing activity was concerned, it is possible that his pre-occupation with representing masculine conflict between the brothers was a subtle claim for a particular kind of gendered identity on his part. That is, by textually representing a believable account of masculinity in competition, he achieves some credible masculine identity for himself. However, it is also the case that he conducted himself during the collaboration with Fiona in a way which indicated his own assumption of academic superiority over her. In the following excerpt from the end of the lesson, we can see how he tells Fiona to show the teacher her workbook but withholds his own:

Fiona: (writing) end of scene one

Rohan: (whispering) show her

Fiona: (showing the teacher) is this good enough for scene one?

T: ooh yes (reads what has been written, pause)

it could be quite good

Fiona: (appreciatively clapping her hands) ohhhh

T: OK

Fiona: it starts so confused

T: alright - I'll take it home and read it actually - give me your books

The teacher moves about, collecting books from all the student pairs.

Fiona's attitude to her own written work is very well illustrated here. She asks anxiously whether it is "good enough". She also apologises to the teacher because it starts "so confused". However, by not explaining how this confusion arose, she gives the impression that the confusion is her fault. In this way, Fiona's deference to the sanctioning gaze of the teacher upon her work resembles the deference she showed to Rohan throughout the collaboration. She is obviously very pleased with the teacher's positive evaluation of what she wrote in her workbook. Perhaps this was not a very common experience for her in lessons involving written

work.

The pattern of talk and collaborative text creation in the excerpt above can therefore be understood as Rohan and Fiona constituting themselves not only in relation to the way they are positioned as masculine and feminine respectively, but also in relation to the way they are differently positioned in terms of membership of social class groupings, positions which are so effectively reinforced by the competitive academic curriculum of schools. This is most likely the reason why Rohan's, rather than Fiona's rendering of dialogue prevailed. However, it was also the case that they were engaged in writing dialogue for male characters to say. This was obviously a significant factor in terms of the patterns of talk and text which were produced. To some extent, Rohan was the "expert" here because he was male. Had the two of them been engaged in writing dialogue for female characters it might have been a different story since Fiona, as

a girl, would have been positioned more powerfully to arbitrate on what female characters were likely to say.

Conclusion

In the excerpts of lesson talk and activity discussed in this paper, it is possible to see illustrated how power is that which individuals simultaneously undergo and exercise (Foucault, 1980). In the dispute over Sweet Dreams books Skye, Lucy, Jane and Fiona show the extent to which they are subject to the objectifying ideology of feminine popular cultural texts. At the same time, however, this cultural common ground empowers them to act as a collective force during the business of collaboratively negotiating a script outline along the lines they prefer, that of teen romance genres. Emma, who does not appear to be subject to the ideological codes of teen romance, or at least not to the same extent, puts up resistance to this script direction, but does so through her alliance with some of the boys in the class. It would seem that she is positioned more powerfully than the other girls in the class to articulate her dissatisfaction with the genre because of her membership of a more privileged social class and the status of her academic achievement. In making her protest she attempts an alliance with the teacher who had signalled feminist sympathies earlier in the term. However, the teacher did not form an alliance with Emma on this occasion because that would have implied the denigration of the textual preferences shown by the less academically oriented girls in the classroom.

As far as the boys were concerned, boys tend to be marginalised to some extent in a Drama class because Drama has traditionally been defined as a "feminine" school subject. In the brainstorming lesson discussed in the first part of this paper they were particularly marginalised by the dominance of the four girls who were pushing for a teen romance theme in the script, as this is most definably a "girls'" genre. However, the lowly status of the teen romance genre within the academic curriculum of schools,

and the wider culture, positioned two academically successful boys (Tom and Rohan) to take a superior and sarcastic attitude to the ideas which were put forward by Lucy, Jane, Skye and Fiona.

In the latter part of the paper, the collaboration between Rohan and Fiona illustrates the extent to which Rohan's high status position within the meritocracy of the school worked to his advantage in paired script-writing with a girl who was very well aware that she was not an academic high achiever. However, his preoccupation with competitiveness and bravado in representing male-male relations, the search for a "smart answer", betray his anxiety over his relatively powerless position within the hierarchy of masculinities which operated outside the formal classroom situation. Disempowered in the "real" world of male-male informal gender relations, he attempted to create a powerful representation of these within the storyworld.

The two instances of lived gender relations in the secondary school classroom which I have chosen to discuss in this paper indicate, at the most basic level, the sheer complexity of relations between female and male students who are positioned in multiple and often contradictory ways within societal discourses of gender and class. The compelling question for feminist educators who wish to change the "gender regimes" (Connell, 1987) of schools is just how to deal with students like Emma and Rohan, or indeed Fiona. As we saw above, on at least one occasion, the teacher literally did not seem to know what to do. In fact as the teacher I opted to deal with Emma's disruptive behaviour rather than arbitrate between competing textual claims with loaded ideological agendas.

There are no easy answers to finding an appropriate feminist pedagogy which

would work to empower both boys and girls to consider the constraining nature of their gender positions. In the first place, a school operates as a meritocracy. Schools are involved in a sorting and sifting process which inevitably positions culturally privileged students above the rest and lays the ground for a stratified labour force. One could say that it is only if one suspends an awareness of questions of social class, race and ethnicity that a purely "feminist" pedagogy is imaginable. Secondly, as Gore (1992) has shown, feminist pedagogy, like critical pedagogy, runs the risk of instituting yet another ideological "regime of truth" to which students must show allegiance if they wish to please the teacher and get high grades.

In a recent edited collection, Taylor (1993) and Davies (1993) both advance ideas for feminist classroom practice. Although their theoretical approaches differ markedly both suggest, among other strategies, that a critical deconstructive approach be taken to the reading and writing of texts. During the series of Drama lessons from which I chose the two I have discussed above, the students were engaged in the collaborative construction of a scripted play. As we can see, this process involved both

group discussion and paired writing. Later on in the school term the students were involved in ensemble-style rehearsal of the play they had written. If we agree that:

Students learn about ideologies when they actually have to confront them in a practical situation and can never understand these issues purely intellectually. They need to bump up against ideologies in the course of practical productive work, and in cultural production they can play with dominant cultural representations and become involved in producing new alternative versions (Taylor, 1993, p. 139).

The collective, rather than individual creation of cultural texts necessarily involves students in reflective and analytical activity, about language, about texts and about their relationships with each other. The collaborative "making" of a storyworld in the excerpts above necessitated the deployment of the same practical knowledge of gender distinction, social order and the ideological production of meaning which inheres in the "making" of the everyday world by the students as members of culture.

In this kind of process there could never be a completely specified and predictable political outcome. The role of the teacher here is to guide and facilitate the critical reflection undertaken by the students as a group, to assist in this process, and to offer informed commentary where necessary. A guiding principle of this kind of pedagogic intervention is the recognition that a dialectic already exists in the assertive and dissenting voices within a group of students (Doyle, 1993). The pedagogic practice implied is therefore one in which feminist theory can be used by a teacher to inform and expand upon the practical, and to some extent critical, knowledge the students already possess as members of culture. Through this kind of project, female and male students are invited to consider thoughtfully not only the ideological constitution of the gendered social world, but also how the collective practices of everyday talk and behaviour activate the construction, reconstruction, and potentially also the deconstruction, of their gendered social world.

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