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ABSTRACT

A case study examined the processes by which girls and boys in their first month of primary school assume particular, highly gendered subjectivities within the school setting. Subjects, 28 children of diverse multicultural origins entering a suburban primary school in a large regional center in southern Victoria, Australia, were observed in the classroom and on the playground. Selected transcripts of over 100 hours of classroom talk were compiled. Analysis of transcripts of classroom talk was conducted at the microanalytic level. The teacher was also interviewed. Results indicated that, although the teacher worked against such positioning in a number of settings, her interaction in morning talk in relation to gendered doll-objects stands out as a contradiction to her usual non-gendered practice. Findings suggest that feminist poststructuralist analysis is a way of reading teacher discourse and action that locates contradictions and inconsistencies as an effect of discourse rather than as a personal failure of individual teachers. Findings also suggest that while issues of subjectivity in relation to discourse have been an important recent theme of feminist poststructuralist work in education, such theoretical understandings have not had much impact on projects of nonsexist education. (Contains 21 references.) (RS)

'Oh you beautiful doll': Gendered language practices in the first month of school

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This paper is part of a DEET Gender Equity Curriculum Reform Project conducted with Jo-anne Reid, Rod Maclean, Alison Simpson

This paper is part of a study which focuses on the experiences of girls and boys as they enter the first month of their first year at primary school and examines the processes by which they assume particular, highly gendered subjectivities within the school setting. Two premises inform the study: (1) that gender differences are more intense and far-reaching in schools than in other areas of children's lives (Thorne 1993); (2) that some of the processes of gendering will be more visible in early school encounters than at a later stage when they have become transparent and taken for granted. In examining how the language practices of schooling operate in the first month of school to construct gender, our research team attempted a full representation of the minutiae of daily school life: of peer interactions and teacher pupil interactions, of time spent learning in curriculum areas as well as time spent in 'limbo,' when 'nothing official' is happening for children.

In each of these contexts, we found that children's initial interactions with the discourse of school and schooling remained highly gendered, despite the best efforts of the classroom teacher who was selected as an exemplary worker for gender equity within her school and region. Within her gender inclusive classroom practice, she worked hard to avoid gendered pupil selection and allocation of tasks; she used non-gendered terms to refer to children and resisted positioning girls and boys within maternal domestic discourses typical of early childhood classrooms. However, there were a number of areas in which she appeared powerless to resist the gendering of her classroom discourse, either because she was herself subject to powerful discourses or because there were subtler underlying gender issues of which she (like the research team, before our analysis of video and audio data) was unaware.

This paper examines one such area, the teacher talk surrounding dolls, when these objects were brought to the classroom by girls for morning talk sessions. These doll talk interactions are highlighted, not because they were the norm or because the object is to scrutinise teacher words for their failings; but because they raise the extraordinarily difficult problem of how it is possible to critique a discourse and be part of it at the same time. How can teachers work for change when they unwittingly position themselves and girls in marginal ways that may undermine that critique? If we are to mount any worthwhile challenge to the inequity of gender relationships in the school curriculum and culture, it is essential that the contradictory nature of this task facing teachers be better understood.

Theoretical and Social Context of the Study

This study operates within the framework of feminist poststructuralism (e g. Davies 1989, Walkerdine 1981, Weedon 1987) and social semiotics (e.g. Halliday 1985, Poynton 1990). The analytic of systemic linguistics (Halliday 1985) and critical linguistics (Kress 1985; Fairclough 1992) provides an important part of the method of this investigation of gendering, while feminist and poststructuralist theories of the subject and discourse supply a political context and a way to theorise about the construction of schoolgirl subjectivities as these relate to the broader socio-political context of gender/ power relations and schooling.

From a feminist poststructuralist perspective 'the schoolgirl', just like 'the schoolboy' or 'the teacher' is seen to be a changing, multiply-constituted and contradictory *effect* of the discourse and practices in place at particular social sites. Becoming a schoolgirl is not a matter of taking on a unitary or received identity. Rather, she is produced as a 'nexus of subjectivities, in relations of power which are constantly shifting' so that she is rendered 'at one moment powerful and at another powerless' (Walkerdine 1981:14). Such notions are extremely useful as they permit this study to highlight the sense in which the schoolgirl subject is positioned within the discourses of education and the fact that schoolgirl subjectivities do not necessarily have to be structured the way they currently are. Such notions also enable a critical examination of teacher-

controlled discourse and activity as a contradictory site; of teachers as both subject and object of a variety of discourses which produce the individual as sometimes powerful and sometimes powerless to resist gendering, even where classroom curriculum and practice is gender inclusive.

The research reported here adopted case study methodology to focus on one class group of twenty-eight Prep children entering a suburban primary school in a large regional centre in southern Victoria, Australia. Prep is the first year of school in Victoria, alternately named Kindergarten and Reception in other states. The school draws on a population from a middle - lower socioeconomic area consisting of diverse multicultural origins, including Serbian, Croatian, Greek, Japanese and Chinese. The classroom and playground experience of the children and their teacher was observed and recorded on videotape, audiotape and in field notes during the first four weeks of school in January and February 1993. Selected transcripts of over 100 hours of classroom talk were compiled, with at least two full days per week fully transcribed. At least two members of the research team of four were present at all times during the study, and an outside, professional team of video and sound recordists were present on one full day of each week. In this way, we compiled as detailed and multifaceted a representation as possible of the practices that comprise the first month of school.

An analysis of transcripts of classroom talk was conducted at a microanalytic level using systemic linguistics (Halliday 1985, Poynton 1990) and critical discourse analysis (Kress 1985; Fairclough 1992). Close analysis of selected videotape segments was also undertaken in order to document what Threadgold (1992:9) calls the role of 'embodied subjectivity' in the making of all texts. An interactive analysis which detailed both the visual and linguistic was developed, reading the body as text, and mapping bodily postures and movements as these worked in concert with and in opposition to the verbal. This was particularly important as much of the young children's interaction, resistance and compliance was accomplished without words.

In making morning talk the object of study in this paper, three data sources have been utilised: summary field notes for all morning talk sessions during the first month of school; four morning talk transcripts (February 3,4,16,26) representing roughly the beginning, middle and end point of our observations; and an interview with the classroom teacher, Mrs T, in August, 1993, six months after the conclusion of the data collection.

The context of doll talk: Morning talk

The transcripts of doll talk examined here come from morning talk sessions which occurred first thing each morning after the children gathered on the rug. (For a fuller analysis of morning talk see Kamler at al 1993). Like the sharing time described by Michaels (1986), morning talk was a clearly bounded speech event, with a defined beginning and ending. Throughout the session Mrs T took undisputed control. She decided when to start and when to conclude, how much digression or interruption to allow, freely interjecting questions and comments to the newsgiver and the group.

The children sat in a circle on the floor, with Mrs. T at one end of the circle on a chair. The procedure was to move around the circle and give all twenty-seven children an opportunity to speak. This meant that children did not bid for turns as in other classrooms (e.g. Michaels 1986, Christie 1989, Kantor 1988), nor did they have to raise their hands and compete for the teacher's attention. The circle signified a fairly relaxed set of speaking rules: children could refuse an invitation to speak or volunteer comments without being explicitly invited. While the circle gave greater power to speak, it also gave greater responsibility. A child whose turn it was must either speak or refuse to speak, she could not respond; all eyes were on her, she was the sole focus of the collective gaze.

Although Mrs. T, like most early childhood educators, justified morning talk as an activity which fosters oral language development, a number of studies have shown that other ideological purposes are also accomplished. Christie's (1989) systemic linguistic analysis in a first grade Australian classroom described morning news as a curriculum genre which produced a particular kind of child text, far less open to student topic nomination and structuring than is commonly believed. Michaels' (1986) analysis of sharing time in a first grade American classroom differentiated two narrative styles adopted by children, topic-centred styles approved by the teacher and topic-associating styles less favoured but more characteristic of black students in the classroom. Baker and Perrot's (1988) conversational analyses of morning talk in nine Australian infants and primary classrooms, demonstrated that children's everyday life interests are subordinated to and appropriated by the culture of the school and organised to legitimate school knowledge. A more recent analysis of morning talk by Luke et al (1993) in an Aboriginal and Islander grade one classroom, revealed that morning news positions and constructs children and children's culture in ways which both mark and silence difference.

The analysis in this paper builds on these studies, but addresses a notable absence by investigating morning talk for the kind of gendered work it accomplishes. It deliberately shifts its focus to the linguistic and bodily processes which are part of the social occasion of morning talk and which position and construct schoolgirl subjectivities. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus, a set of embodied predispositions that structure and are structured by social interaction, we have come to see that it is through the everyday practices of schooling, such as Mrs. T's interactions around dolls, that the social group 'structures in' to children's bodies and minds enduring ways of behaving and thinking as girls and boys in school.

We have called the process of shaping the student habitus 'disciplinary work' following Foucault's (1979) view of the 'internalisation of the gaze' of authority to produce social power relations. Foucault's emphasis on discourse as a form of power which inscribes the collective and individual social body has been particularly helpful in understanding the ways in which children are shaped as students and the ways in which this shaping occurs differently for girls and boys. Discourse operates not as an abstract set of ideas but as Grosz (1990:63) suggests as 'a material series of processes, where power actively marks or brands bodies as social, and inscribes them, as an effect of this, with differentiated 'attributes of subjectivity'. This paper examines one of many regulatory practices associated with teacher discourse and action that shape the good schoolgirl subject during the first four weeks of school.

The doll as morning talk object

The housekeeping corner in Mrs T's classroom was exceptional for the absence of any dolls. Her objection to the way dolls position girls and create unrealistic body images was stated strongly in an interview following data collection:

> Has it come through that I can't stand dolls. I hate them. It's not nice of me probably, but I never played with dolls. I hate them and my daughter didn't play with dolls ... To me dolls really do say, especially the Barbie dolls, hey this is what we look like. No I don't look like that and I wouldn't like the girls to really think that they should ... and I think that's where they really do get wrong ideas about it. We don't look like that and I find it insulting that they put things out and say this is women.
> (Interview with Mrs T, August 1993)

Although Mrs T questioned the value of dolls, she did not wish to devalue what girls valued. If they brought dolls to school and dolls created a space for girls to speak, this was to be affirmed. Potential discursive conflict arose, therefore, when girls brought

dolls to morning talk, which they did with great regularity. An inspection of morning talk items for the first month revealed, in fact, that the 'content field' of morning talk was strongly gendered, both in its portrayal of family life, and through the children's representation of their own activities and interests. Girls brought along more objects than boys, primarily dolls, toy animals, soft toys - well over thirty in the month - while boys brought just four (two troll dolls, a plaster rabbit and a dinosaur). Boys brought other objects, such as cars, a water pistol, a squirt camera, a watch, a boat, but in nowhere near the quantity as girls. Boys talked about things their fathers did -a wheelie in the car, belting a dog in the face-, about boogie boards, skate boards, cricket playing, whereas girls were less likely to refer to active physical activity.

While it is possible that such differences reflect the different lives lived by five-year-old girls and boys, it is difficult to regard such oppositional portrayals of masculinity and femininity as accurate representations. A number of the girls were physically active but only talked about their activity when prompted by the teacher. Many of the boys had soft toys at home, but never brought these to school. Rather it appeared children shaped their morning talk items to topics which they considered, and which they considered others would consider, appropriate to their gender. The 'symbolic property' (Bourdieu 1984) of morning talk symbolised, among other things, the child's gender positioning.

Although Mrs T worked against such positioning in a number of settings, her interaction in morning talk in relation to the gendered doll-objects stands out as a contradiction to her usual non-gendered practice. Through the construction of doll talk, in fact, Mrs T unwittingly produced gendered texts that positioned herself and the girls in marginal ways. Two features of this talk will be highlighted in the remainder of this paper. The first concerns the way Mrs. T equates doll behaviour with good school girl behaviour, so that the good schoolgirl is constructed as a pretty, well-behaved and silent doll. The second emerges from the tension between Mrs. T's desire to both critique and accept the doll objects, so that girls are made object of the male gaze and defined in terms of their appearance.

The doll as schoolgirl

One interesting feature of Mrs. T's doll talk concerns the positioning of the doll in relation to the child, in particular the way in which Mrs T addresses the dolls, as though they were schoolgirls and members of the class. This can be illustrated in morning talk from February 3, where Mrs T addresses and acknowledges the doll Nikola has brought to class.

Text 1: 'This lovely doll who's come to school'

1	Mrs T	By the way whose doll is up there? I can see this lovely doll who's come to school and ...	Nikola sits between Justine and Gillian. Nikola takes the doll from Justine who was holding it.
2	Gillian	Nikola's	Nikola holds the doll, positioning her so she faces Mrs T. She places one arm around her legs, the other around her middle.
3	Mrs T	Oh Nikola isn't she lovely, tell me about her Nikola.	Nikola nods yes.
4	Nikola	I put her on her tummy she cries.	Nikola drops the doll's head to the ground so she makes a crying sound

5	Mrs T	She is a bit noisy isn't she?	
6	Nikola		Nikola nods. Justine leans over and taps the doll's back three times so she makes 3 sharp cries.
7	Mrs T	I hope you don't do that to her do you?	
8	Nikola		Nikola smiles, Justine nods yes.
9	Mrs T	Oh dear, what's her name, does she have a name Nikola ? What's her name?	Nikola bobs her back and forth 2 times. Nikola pulls the doll close and nods.
6	Nikola	Amy.	
7	Mrs T	Oh that's a pretty name. Amy's actually very well behaved in school isn't she? She sits there very quietly.	Nikola holds the doll by her feet.
8	Nikola		Nikola takes the doll by her arms and lowers the doll's head to the floor.

Linguistically, the doll is given agency by Mrs T. It is the doll who has come to school, rather than Nikola who has brought her. Nikola embodies this linguistic representation by continually moving the doll and giving her life, turning her to face Mrs T, moving her to the ground, holding her close. The doll is named (*name* is repeated four times), and hence given identity and power. She is not an anonymous object, she is a person, a child, a girl. Further, she is evaluated positively by the teacher with the feminine attributes *lovely* (1, 3) and *pretty* (7). She is not, however, perfect, because she is *a bit noisy* (5). Through the tag question, *isn't she* (7), Mrs T attempts to gain Nikola's agreement that it is important for the doll to be quiet in school, quietness being a highly valued behaviour for dolls, and by association for well-behaved girls.

Later in the morning talk session, as the children grow restless waiting for each class member to have their turn at morning news, Mrs. T. directly addresses the doll by name in an attempt to gain control over the disruption caused by her crying.

Text 2: 'She really looks like a schoolgirl really'

1			A loud crying sound is heard Nikola holds the doll on her side.
2	Mrs T	Amy could you just be a little bit quieter please. Do you think she can be?	
3	Nikola		Nikola holds the doll upright in front of her, so that her own face is obscured by the doll who turns to face Mrs T.
4	Mrs T	She's been very well behaved so far Nikola hasn't she?	Nikola moves the doll to a reclining position so Amy's head rests against her chest
		She really looks like a schoolgirl, really.	Nikola moves both the doll's hands and moves her head.

Having established the identity of the doll, Mrs T reprimands Amy, as though she were the one crying. While Mrs T is obviously aware that Nikola is creating the disturbance, she chooses not to criticise Nikola directly in negative terms; rather she warns her to conform to appropriate schoolgirl behaviour through the doll object. As an indirect form of control this appears to be effective, but it simultaneously achieves gendered positionings for child, object, and teacher in ways that Mrs T seems unaware of. Nikola works with Mrs T to produce this construction by holding the doll in front of her own face, creating a doll-mask persona which faces the teacher. Mrs. T's direct question, *Do you think she can be?* (2) and tag question, *hasn't she* ? (4) shift the addressee (*you* is Nikola, *she* is the doll) and function to reposition Nikola as caretaker or mother of the doll. The questions assume Nikola's agreement; she is asked to stand outside herself and take up the teacher evaluation that being a well behaved schoolgirl/doll requires quiet, while the repetition of *really* (4) adds final authority to the judgment.

Clearly this is not a deliberate ploy on Mrs. T's part to diminish what it means to be a schoolgirl; although she overtly rejects pretty dolliness as a schoolgirl norm, her statement is remarkable nonetheless for its disciplinary shaping. If the doll looks like a schoolgirl, *really*, than girls who wish to be good schoolgirls must in turn look like dolls. An examination of transcripts outside morning talk sessions, revealed that this construction of the good schoolgirl in doll-like terms also occured at other times during the school day, when for example on February 4, Mrs T selected girls to take the lunch orders to the canteen:

> I think I'm going to choose Justine because Justine's been sitting up so beautifully this morning, and Justine, let's see if we can find a friend to go with you, um someone who's been doing the right thing all morning and there's lots here, lots of you. Um, perhaps Sheela, would you like to go over to the canteen and take this over? Sheela's been sitting up so beautifully and quiet.
>
> (February 4)

Like the doll Amy, the girl Sheela is named as the good schoolgirl subject who sits up beautifully and quietly. Both Sheela and Justine are new to the school and don't know their way around very well; by choosing them Mrs T signals they are responsible students who are to be trusted to find their way to the canteen and back. Linguistically, however, they are not constructed as responsible, only as quiet. It is silence and upright posture which are valorised here as good schoolgirl behaviour. The girls are discursively positioned as good dolls, their compliance and malleability publically rewarded.

The schoolgirl as doll

A second feature of Mrs. T's doll talk emerges from the struggle between her wish to appropriate the girl's objects for the purpose of critique, and to talk to the girls in their own terms about the dolls, at the risk of reaffirming values to which she is opposed. A contradictory effect of the teacher discourse in this instance is to position girls as objects of the disciplinary gaze. This is exemplified in a morning talk session on February 16 with Sheela and her doll Ariel. Sheela is a quiet Muslim girl who is compact, agile and alert. She is attentive to Mrs. T and diligent in accomplishing school tasks. Although she speaks softly and infrequently in public forums, she was observed to be active, voluble and lively in her interactions with peers in the playground and at her work-table. On the morning in question, Sheela had been out of the room and missed her turn around the circle. On her return Mrs T invites her to come to the front of the room to show the doll she has brought that morning.

Text 3: 'You've got beautiful hair'

1	Mrs T	Give me a look at this.	
2			Sheela hands Mrs T the doll.
3	Mrs T	Oh wow!	Mrs T touches the doll's hair, pulling her veil back and smoothing her hair.
		What lovely hair!	(rising intonation)
		How would you like to have hair that colour?	(very high pitched, rising) turning the doll to face the class so all can see. Interruption re hot dog notices having to go to the office.
4	Mrs T	I reckon hair this colour would be terrific, what do you think Sheela?	Turning her body towards Sheela.
5	Sheela		Sheela moves her body back but it is unclear if she is nodding in agreement.
6	Mrs T	They'd see you coming wouldn't they if you had hair like that, they'd certainly notice you in the street.	Mrs T turns the doll to herself, touches her veil, smooths her hair.
		Would you like to have hair like that? I think I'd rather have your hair Sheela. I think yours is a nicer colour, let me look at yours. You've got beautiful hair. Come and let's have a look.	Looking at Sheela. Mrs. T reaches to touch Sheela's hair. and pulls Sheela closer to her right side. She gently touches a few strands of Sheela's hair.
		Lovely dark hair. It's beautiful hair. What's this one's name? Does she have---	She faces Sheela.
7	Sheela	Ariel.	
8	Mrs T	Oh is that Ariel from the book is it? Oh I didn't know that and she's got feet, she's got her legs.	She turns the doll from side to side and picks up her skirt.
9	Student	I've got (inaudible)	
10	Mrs T	Have you? This isn't the one that you can put a mermaid's tail on is it? It is, no no. OK thank you very much Sheela.	Sheela returns to her place in the circle.

One of Mrs. T's stated reservations about morning talk was the pressure it imposed on quieter children to perform. Accordingly, she took particular care in the first month to scaffold the silence of quieter children and create a space for them to engage in the discourse structure of the classroom. This often meant, as is evident in this interaction with Sheela, that Mrs. T did most of the talking and interactional work. Here, Sheela stands shyly by Mrs T's side, hands behind her back and only speaks one word, the doll's name (7). She is, however, made subject and object through the teacher discourse; both spoken for and spoken of.

Sheela's doll Ariel has shocking-pink-reddish-shoulder length hair, a long puffy white bridal dress and a tuille veil, the kind of girl object Mrs T dislikes. Her overexaggerated

exclamation *oh wow* (3) and high pitched rising intonation *what lovely hair* (3) can be read as sending up the doll's appearance while simultaneously trying to accept Sheela's offering. Throughout Mrs T alternates her body orientation and comments between Sheela and the class, so that *How would you like to have hair like that?* (3) is directed at the class, while *I reckon hair this colour would be terrific, what do you think Sheela?* (4) is directed at Sheela. In both instances questions are used to implicate the class in her critique of the doll's rather outlandish hair. Interestingly, Mrs T continues to pull and touch the doll's hair throughout, almost as if she were playing with it.

That Mrs T's focus is on the doll's hair is indicated by the fact that she repeats the word *hair* nine times in this short space of time. Linguistically, the attributes associated with the doll's hair can be evaluated as positive (*lovely, terrific)*, attention getting (*see you coming, notice you in the street*) and somewhat ambiguous (*that colour, like that*). As adult researchers we read Mrs T 's comments as sarcastic; as simultaneously overexaggerating the doll's beauty and understating the outrageousness of her hair; as signalling her conflict between critiquing and affirming the child's contribution. It is not clear however, how the children read her comments, in particular Sheela.

Somewhat paradoxically, despite Mrs T's objections to the doll's appearance, her discourse fixes the children's attention on the doll's appearance, particularly her hair. The fact that she is dressed as a bride is ignored or at least not commented on. She is, however, later identified by Sheela as Ariel of the mermaid narrative, a fact verified by Mrs T when she holds the doll upside down (8), and looks under her skirt perusing for a tail or feet.

This attention to hair is interesting given Frigga Haug's work in *Female Sexualization* (1987), where she and a group of women collectively explore the processes through which womens' bodies become sexualised. Working through memories of childhood, their stories document how individual parts of the body are linked with sexuality, how routines of home and school position girls within patriarchy as objects of male desire and construct an overexaggerated concern with external appearance. Within this work the relation between hair and gender positioning, between hair and sexuality is explored: the sensuality and danger of free-flowing, long, untamed hair, the tidiness and orderliness of schoolgirl plaits as opposed to the naive, frivolous, flirtatious pony tail or the short hair cut which is marked as masculine.

Mrs T's focus on the doll's hair may be one of a million moments in the children's lives which work to construct relations between hair and gender positioning. The shift in teacher discourse from the doll's hair to Sheela's hair, however, seems particularly problematic as it linguistically and bodily positions Sheela as doll and as object of the children's gaze. The attributes used to evaluate Sheela's hair are unambiguously positive: her hair is a *nicer colour*, it's *beautiful hair, lovely dark hair* (6). Mrs T is affirming Sheela's real hair compared to the doll's artificial hair. This is the only point where she uses the pronominal *I* to assert her teacher-authorised version of attractiveness *I think I'd rather have your hair Sheela, I think yours is a nicer colour* (6). The shift to the process *look* marks Sheela's hair as object and echoes the wording used by Mrs T throughout the transcripts to encourage children to show their morning talk objects (e.g. *let me look at yours, come and let's have a look).* When Mrs T reaches out to bring Sheela in closer (6), she touches her hair and plays absently with a few strands, just as she had done moment's earlier with the doll's hair.

Mrs T's attention to Sheela's hair can be read as an affirmation of Sheela's darkness rather than blondeness. Sheela has shiny, black hair, her skin is dark. She does not look like the white, blue-eyed, bride-doll which Mrs T rejects as a norm for girls to measure themselves against, or for that matter like any of the other girls in the class. By marking Sheela's difference, however, Mrs. T's discourse defines Sheela as 'other' in terms of gender and ethnicity. The contradiction of course is that by affirming Sheela's appearance as an individual, she is simultaneously positioned as doll, as

something to be looked at. In discussion with Mrs T about this interaction, she indicated she was trying to affirm Sheela's difference and work against doll-stereotyped appearance, but could see that her discourse might be undermining her intention.

In attempting to make sense of such contradictions in Mrs T's interactions, we came to understand the power of gendered objects from worlds outside the classroom to activate gendered discourses within. While Mrs. T did not value the objects of girls and boys differently, she sometimes used them differently. Although we observed that boys were not discursively positioned as object when presenting to the group, on closer inspection we found this had more to do with the nature of the object than the gender of the child. Two morning talk interactions with Allan and Justine illustrate the point.

The interaction with Allan from morning talk on February 16, constructs a very different positioning than Sheela's. Although Mrs T asks Allan to bring his watch to the front of the room to show the group, it is not held up for group scrutiny and there is no blurring in the teacher discourse between child and object.

Text 4: 'That's a lovely watch'

1	Mrs T	Oh good morning Allan.	
2	Allan	Good morning Mrs T.	
3	Mrs T	Ah don't do that please boys you know better than that.	Thomas and Rohan sitting to Allan's left are pointing at the boom microphone which is held over the children's heads as they speak their turns in morning talk.
4	Mrs T	What are you going to tell us about Allan? Ah Rohan you know better. Put your hands in your lap and don't do it.	Rohan ties to reach up and touch the microphone. Allan watches him.
5	Allan	I've got a watch.	He smiles at Mrs T, holding his left hand up and pointing to the watch with his right hand.
6	Mrs T	And has it got the real time on it?	
7	Allan	Yep	
8	Mrs T	Give me a look.	
9	Alan		Allan gets up and moves to the front of the room to Mrs T. holding out his hand.
10	Mrs T	I always like to know when there's another watch.	Mrs T takes his hand as if they were dancing.
		What a beauty.	She pulls his hand closer. He faces her and keeps his back to the classroom.
		That's a lovely watch. Where did that come from Allan?	Allan drops his hand to his side.
11	Allan	My birthday.	

12	Mrs T	Oh you're a lucky person, aren't you? That's great.	She touches his hand again.
13	Allan	And there's a bear.	He lifts the watch up again closer to Mrs T's face.
14	Mrs T	Where?	She holds his hand between her two hands.
15	Allan	In there.	
16	Mrs T	A bear in there right. OK thanks Allan.	She laughs. Allan returns to his seat in the circle.

Although Mrs. T uses the process *look* (8) as she did with Sheela, here it is the watch which becomes the object of Mrs T's gaze, not Allan. The watch is evaluated positively, it's *a beauty, a lovely watch (10),* it's *great* (12), but there is no blurring of these attributes with the child. Allan is not, for example, a beautiful boy with a lovely arm. He is positioned in fact as a person of responsibility. He is the owner of the watch and gains status as a potential time keeper, *another watch* (10) other than Mrs T's. He is affirmed but not made object of the class gaze.

Throughout his turn, in fact, Allan faces Mrs T and keeps his back to the class; it is she who is his primary audience and she who closely examines the watch. Physically there is greater distance between Allan and Mrs T than there was with Sheela. They are literally an arm's length apart; she touches his arm and brings his hand closer so she can peruse his object more closely. It is a private interaction with a private joke about the bear. *A bear in there* (16) is an allusion to a line from a favourite *Play School* theme song (a popular Australian early childhood television program) which Mrs T appreciates with laughter.

An interaction with Justine, from morning talk on February 26, similarly privileges the object without positioning the child as object. That is, although Justine is a girl, gendered discourses are not activated when the object being shown is more gender neutral than a doll, in this instance a pen and pad.

Text 5: 'Is it a real pen?'

1	Mrs T	Good morning Jus.	
2	Justine		Justine holds up the pad in her right hand and the pen in her left and smiles widely.
3	Mrs T	What are you going to tell us about Justine?	
4	Justine	A pen and a pad.	She whispers as she is sitting very close to Mrs T and presses the pen and pad against her chest.
5	Mrs T	Oh that's wonderful and you're taking notes today are you?	Mrs T laughs.
6	Justine		Justine puts the pen in her mouth and shakes her head no
7	Mrs T		Laughs.

8	Justine		She pulls the top off the pen and reaches out to hand it to Mrs T.
9	Mrs T	I might be able to borrow that, you know how I'm always losing my pens, always losing them I could perhaps borrow that I like that one, is it a real pen?	Mrs T leans over and takes the pen in her hands. She turns it over as she speaks. Justine watches her, taps her right fingers against her mouth.
10			Justine nods.
11	Mrs T	Oh well that's great, look at it, a little Australian koala on top, what a lovely one where did that come from Justine? Where did the pen come from?	Mrs T touches the koala. Mrs T hands the p ack to Justine.
12	Justine		Justine holds up the pad so Mrs T can see it and takes the pen back
		Mummy bought it for me, Lindy's got a pink one.	Justine hands the pad to Mrs T.
13	Mrs T	Oh, well you'll be able to do, oh yes you've done lots of writing in there too, good on you, great.	Mrs T flicks through the pages. Justine watches and smiles. Mrs T hands back the pad.

As with Allan, the evaluations of Justine's objects are unambiguously positive. The pen is *a lovely one* (11). Pen and pencil are constructed as highly valued school objects and there is no tension between the teacher's desire to affirm the child and authorise the values represented by the object. Accordingly, Justine is positioned as: (a) a responsible person, much like Allan, who can help the teacher when she loses her pens. The process *borrow*, used twice (9), signifies that Justine has something of value that the teacher wants; (b) a literate person, one who authorises school values by writing outside the classroom and hence whose possession is worthy of direct teacher approval, *I like that one* (9).

Unlike Sheela, bringer of dolls, Justine as writer is not objectified in the discourse. There is no confusion between her and her literate objects. While the use of the diminutive *little Australian koala* (11) makes the object cuter than might have occurred in a boy's turn, Justine is evaluated positively in direct terms, *good on you* (13), that is 'good on you for engaging in literate work and for bringing objects the teacher values, unlike the dolls.' Such interactions demonstrated to us, that when morning talk objects were more neutral, gendered discourses were not activated; whereas, when objects were highly gendered, boys and girls alike were positioned within what Davies (1989) calls the 'incorrigibility' of the male female dualism.

Conclusions

This paper and the study of which it is a part promote an awareness of the initiation into schooling as a gendered practice. The analysis of the practices surrounding Mrs. T's doll talk demonstrate the contradictory spaces in which teachers working for gender equity often find themselves. Powerful gendered practices from peer or domestic discourses, which are valued by children, enter the classroom, and teachers must decide how to deal with them. Simple rejection of these practices is not an option; accordingly teachers are constantly making difficult decisions about how far to accommodate and sustain these practices without compromising their own values.

Taken as a whole, Mrs. T's doll interactions constructed a number of contradictory and gendered subject positions, including schoolgirl as doll and mother. Her discourse appears to be produced out of conflicting desires to acknowledge girls' contributions and ridicule the gendered body images dolls represent. In the end, however, Mrs. T does position dolls as girls and girls as dolls, as objects of the classroom gaze. It is in particular the slippage between girl, doll and woman that remains problematic and demonstrates the power of gendered objects from outside the classroom, to activate and authorise marginal and negative discursive positionings for girls and women alike, within the classroom. Although unintentional and incidental, the power of such teacher discourse to discipline the schoolgirl subject and inscribe her with attributes of goodness and passivity should not be underestimated.

The feminist poststructuralist analysis used in this paper, with its focus on subjectivity and its discursive constitution, raises a number of issues in relation to projects of gender equity reform. Firstly, it demonstrates a way of reading teacher discourse and action that locates contradictions and inconsistencies as an effect of discourse rather than as a personal failure of individual teachers. Teachers are themselves constituted by discourses that produce contradictions and difficulties about how they might carry out projects of reform; as the case of Mrs T demonstrates, it is not a simple matter to critique a discourse and be part of it at the same time.

Secondly, it suggests that while issues of subjectivity in relation to discourse have been an important recent theme of feminist poststructuralist work in education, such theoretical understandings may not have had much impact on projects of non sexist education (Yates 1993:3). Teacher discourse may continue to reproduce gendered meanings out of 'habit' and thereby contradict official discourses of gender equity and reform. This certainly suggests that teachers need an increased awareness of the ways in which the discursive and bodily practices of schooling constitute children differentially as *either* female or male. Inservice work with teachers that develops a discourse for examining subjectivity and the discursive forces which shape classroom talk is essential, and certainly a higher priority than the production of gender-inclusive materials. For without a way of making visible the gendered and contradictory ways we interact with children as schoolgirls and schoolboys from the very beginning of school, it is difficult to envisage transformation.

And finally a word about contradictions. Contradictions are a sign of struggle and struggles are ultimately hopeful; they indicate discourse in flux, shifting subjectivities and hence enable us to imagine the possibilities of change. Analyses which allow contradictions to emerge rather than remain transparent as the natural way of operating are important. The fact that the process of regulation appears to be so deeply and yet invisibly gendered needs serious consideration by the teaching and research communities. This paper takes one step in the process by attempting to describe and name these practices so that we may begin to envisage others.

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