BOYS DON'T WRITE ROMANCE
The construction of knowledge and social gender identities in English classrooms

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Social and political context of the study
The chapter reports part of a wider study that has been investigating how schools in the United Kingdom have been reacting to the moral panic about boys 'under achievement', particularly in English. . . Local education authorities and schools have been obliged to respond to this by introducing ameliorative strategies to support boys' learning (Murphy and Ivinson, 2000). These strategies advocated at policy level treat boys and girls as homogeneous groups, and only differentiate between them in terms of achievement. We have been investigating the impact of some of these strategies, such as gendered seating (boy-girl-boy) and single sex teaching from a sociocultural perspective, in order to make visible the intended and unintended effects on students' access to subject knowledge of treating boys and girls in this way. [. . .]

The study
Monks Secondary School, where the comparative case study took place, had instigated what they called, 'The Year of the Boy'. The two English teachers in the study had employed different, but related ameliorative strategies that focused attention on the needs of low achieving boys and assumed for girls an unproblematic peer-tutoring role. In classroom A, all the average and high achieving boys had been placed together. In classroom B, the other boys in the year had been dispersed with mixed ability girls in a ratio of 2 : 1 girls to boys. Gendered seating (boy-girl-boy) was also introduced. Both teachers agreed to teach the same creative writing activity to their year 10 classes (students aged 14–15). This chapter describes how each setting influenced the way teachers using the same activity realised (recontextualised) subject knowledge.

Understanding learning and settings
Sociocultural perspectives view learning as a social practice that takes place within social settings. Learning involves 'understanding and participation in on-going activity' (Lave, 1996, p. 9) in social settings. Each learning instance involves a process of active appropriation that builds on what went on before. The process transforms participants and settings according to a dialectical relationship
The social world of gender

We understand gender as a hegemonic social representation (Moscovici, 1976, 1984, 2001; Duveen and Lloyd, 1990; Lloyd and Duveen, 1992; Ivinson, 2002) that circulates as a set of ideas, social norms, conventions and associations within societies. Social representations of gender ensure that practices can become marked as masculine or feminine, and therefore entail legitimate ways to be a boy/man or a girl/woman. As individuals participate in social arenas and their practices, they develop social identities of which subject or gender identities are parts. Duveen elaborated social identities by referring to ‘the transition from extended identities as children are incorporated into the social world through the actions of others, to internalised identities as children become independent actors in the field of gender’ (Duveen, 2001, p. 264). As Fivush observes ‘gender [thus] moves beyond knowing which behaviours are deemed appropriate for females and males to become a self-regulating system’ (1998, p. 60): a system that needs to be understood as an evolving set of values and activities. Research suggests that as a consequence of this self-regulating process, boys and girls develop common sense knowledge, attitudes and interests that differ in significant respects. The common sense knowledge that is available to boys on the one hand, and girls on the other, has common characteristics (Browne and Ross, 1991; Kimbell et al., 1991; Davies and Brember, 1995; Murphy, 1996, 1997, 1999; White, 1996; Cooper and Dunne, 2000).

Within classroom settings, social representations such as gender are actively reconstructed through the activities of teachers and students; they are not given (Connell, 1987). Classroom settings therefore present students with an edited version of the gender arena. As students participate in classroom practice they experience gender as a range of social possibilities or constraints about what they can legitimately say, do, write and behave as a boy or as a girl, as they attempt to realise the skills, know-how and practices that make up subject knowledge. We focused on the interaction between individual student’s knowledge about gender and their need to negotiate a social gender identity within the setting.

Activity within classroom settings, situated within matrices of other social contexts, can either reinforce or resist the social norms that are maintained in other social arenas. Hegemonic social representations of gender may be reinforced, challenged or transformed through classroom practice. We were interested in how students resolved and managed social gender identities that can become fractured and transformed as they encounter multiple arenas, such as families, peer groups, leisure activities and classrooms. We were concerned with how students’ experiences of classroom settings facilitated or disallowed their participation in English (disciplinary) practices.

We consider the transformation of social identities to be the very foundation of learning. For example, the production of a creative writing text can be seen, at least in part, as the expression of a social gender identity (Pennel and Wertsch, 1995; Duveen, 2001) within a classroom setting. The individual trajectories in the final section of the chapter demonstrate a range of ways that students managed and expressed social gender identities in the production of subject knowledge.

Method and design

The activity

Prior to observation teachers were asked to select an activity from their ‘normal’ practice that had an identifiable end product. The activity they chose was for students to write three different types of novel openings. These would be submitted as a piece of coursework for the continuous assessment component of the public examination in English at age 16. The activity was planned to cover three lessons. Both teachers agreed to teach the same three lessons to their classes.

We applied our methodology to two parallel English classroom settings with year 10 students (aged 14—15 years) in the same school. Setting A involved boys
with average and above average achievements in the subject. Setting B involved a mixed ability group of girls and a group of boys judged to be 'low achievers' in the subject. In this setting gendered seating had been introduced as a strategy to improve the boys' participation and, therefore, their achievement. Thus, there were 'good' boys to be nurtured, and 'problem' boys to be controlled and changed. Alongside these characterisations of 'boys' is the characterisation of the 'successful' girl to be emulated.

Data collection
Conceptually, Lave's notion of a 'setting' required us to focus in our data collection on the embedded nature of classroom settings. Therefore, we consider teachers' pedagogic practice as forms of mediation that regulate the boundary between the classroom settings and the other settings that students negotiate in the course of a school day. The regularities that we observed as researchers allowed us to describe how teachers orchestrated settings and made subject knowledge visible.

We observed each of the three lessons in each setting.

- **Lesson 1.** This introduced students to literary techniques relating to different genres. Extracts from novel openings were read out in a whole-class forum from a booklet (an 'in-house' production) on creative writing. Exercises from the booklet were discussed in pairs and/or groups. Feedback from the group work was discussed in whole-class interaction.
- **Lesson 2.** The students undertook further exercises from the creative writing booklet. The focus was on individual work and so there was less group work than in lesson 1. Novel openings were drafted and read out in class. The teachers provided feedback and then students continued with their individual writing.
- **Lesson 3.** Most of the lesson was spent doing individual writing.

The data collection mapped out how the teachers orchestrated settings in each classroom. We employed non-participant classroom observation and used field notes to record:

- classroom layout;
- seating arrangements;
- movements around the classroom;
- peer group interaction;
- material culture;
- samples of classroom discourse.

Lesson 2 was video recorded and a sample of students was radio-miked to capture their discourse as they undertook the task. Teachers were interviewed before and after the series of lessons. Specific questions asked teachers about the purpose of the lessons, and what might institute successful and less successful creative writing.

Data were also collected from students to find out how they understood and experienced settings.

Having observed the lessons, four boys and four girls from the mixed setting, and four boys from the single sex setting were chosen in terms of teachers' judgements about their participation in the lessons and the quality of their work generally. Students were presented in individual interviews with stimulus material from the lessons and asked to explain what the teacher expected them to learn. They were also asked about their own texts, what they perceived to be successful writing and, separately, what they thought the teacher perceived to be successful writing. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full. We collected and photocopied the English texts produced by each student in both classroom settings.

Analysing learning
In order to recognise and account for the influence of multiple participation frameworks in the construction of knowledge, we draw upon Rogoff's distinction between three planes of analysis (Rogoff, 1995). Rogoff (p. 141) distinguished three planes that she later termed lenses of analysis (Rogoff, 2001) that are mutually constituting and inseparable. These are community/institutional, interpersonal and personal.

A 'plane' indicates a different grain of focus within sociocultural activity. Rogoff's three planes provide analytic distinctions, which allow cultural practices and representations to be investigated in local settings, while maintaining an awareness of the way local settings are embedded within wider sociocultural arenas. To understand the teachers' orchestration of settings we focus on the interpersonal plane. To understand how individual students experienced settings we re-adjust the analytical lens to the personal plane. Rogoff described this plane as the personal process by which, through engagement in activity, individuals change and 'become prepared for subsequent involvement in related activities' (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142). We first present findings from the interpersonal plane before turning to our investigation of the personal plane.

Interpersonal plane of analysis
We analysed field notes and video footage of classroom observation in order to describe differences and similarities in organisation, practice and discourse between the two classroom settings. We paid particular attention to aspects of teachers' everyday classroom practice in order to suggest how social, verbal and physical interactions mediate gender as a hegemonic social representation. We considered which students' work was legitimated and made visible through teachers' commendations of 'good' work. By comparing teachers' responses to boys and girls within and between settings, we were able to describe how gender was influencing the construction of subject knowledge.

Classroom A: 'all boys' setting
The boys in this group were not considered to have difficulties with English in contrast to the boys in classroom B. The boys sat in a horseshoe-shaped seating arrangement. There was no restriction on who sat next to whom. The boys sat in loose friendship groups at the beginning. During the first lesson a great deal of discussion was carried out in pairs and groups. The teacher asked boys to change seats three times to allow the possibility for paired work with a range of other boys. She told the boys this was a challenge for them commenting: 'I want you to work with everyone in this room'. This pattern of movement provided support for interaction between boys. The interaction was buoyant irrespective of which boys were paired or sat together.
During the first lesson the teacher worked through a booklet that contained the first paragraphs from novels in a range of genres. Teacher A asked questions of the boys about atmosphere, character and description. During these sessions boys replied to the teacher readily and noisily. They seemed to vie for her attention. There were no lulls or quiet periods. There was no identifiable pattern to how she chose boys to answer her questions. No group of boys dominated this session.

Following the introductory exercises boys were asked to draft a novel opening in a genre of their choice. They were asked to discuss their ideas with the boy beside them and were told they would be required to read their novel opening to the class. At the end of the time limit the teacher asked every boy in turn to read out his novel opening. When a boy was about to read the teacher moved so that she was standing in front of him. She often bent her head forwards as if listening. The boy was speaking she insisting on complete silence, and she did not turn away or speak to anyone else. She responded to each boy's contribution with a positive and often a complimentary comment. Her manner seemed to suggest that each boy's contribution was special and that every boy was equal. The boys' openings covered a range of content: horror, war, crime, adventure, science fiction and fantasy, involving humour and action. The teacher allowed all these reconstructions to be made visible and gave value to them equally.

Throughout that and subsequent lessons boys received an almost equal amount of attention from the teacher. Every boy spoke during the course of the first two lessons. It was clear that the teacher was not selecting one individual in preference to another in seeking responses. Some boys did try to speak more than other boys and interrupted. The teacher had a difficult job keeping order so that she could listen to each boy's contribution.

Classroom B: mixed with gendered seating

Students in the mixed setting were allocated places to sit by the teacher. They sat in groups and in a horseshoe shape in a boy-girl-boy sequence. In general, no boy sat beside another boy, although a few girls sat beside each other. They had been allocated places according to the alphabetic order of their second names. Students remained in the same places throughout the sequence of lessons.

The gendered seating produced a different range of possibilities for interaction in comparison to classroom A. The class was instructed to consider the variety of novel openings. Teacher B asked similar question to teacher A about atmosphere, characterisation and style. Students put their hands up to answer and there was no obvious pattern to the way they were chosen to respond. The atmosphere was subdued in comparison to classroom A and the teacher did not need to use any techniques to control or quieten the class. Some students were visibly ill at ease in their places, although some groups and pairs were not.

When students came to draft their first novel openings they were directed to discuss their ideas with their immediate neighbours. For some students, the gendered seating strategy was empowering and altered their perceived status in the subject culture. The boys were 'low' achievers in English, yet some found their ideas being validated by the girls seated around them during group discussions. For others, the seating arrangement kept them from participating more fully. Thus, the intention to influence boys' performance had an immediate impact on some girls. We observed a number of boys and a number of girls who failed to interact with their neighbour, even when the teacher instructed them to undertake small group or paired discussion. The teacher's instruction to 'Talk to the person beside you', was ineffective in overcoming some students' discomfort at having to discuss ideas with an unfamiliar boy or girl. This meant that some students engaged in lively exchanges, while others remained completely silent. In this setting, Keiko (a girl), for example, worked in isolation throughout all three lessons.

While the students were preparing their first draft, the teacher circulated around the class and read their first attempts. When she came to ask for volunteers to read out she had already decided which selected students would be chosen in contrast to teacher A. The majority of students chosen to read were high achieving girls and many had drafted Romance novel openings. By choosing the writing of high achieving girls the teacher was making visible what she considered to be a successful reconstruction of English knowledge as a piece of creative writing. The content and style that was legitimated differed from that legitimated by teacher A and the range was narrower. Throughout the three lessons there was uneven treatment of students in the setting.

Summary of the teachers' orchestration of settings

In setting A the teacher's even-handed approach meant that it was not easy to differentiate what she considered successful and less successful reconstructions. Through her response to boys' texts and her practices that supported boys' preferred ways of interacting, the teacher realised a subject culture that was congruent with and not in conflict with boys' common sense ways of knowing. The teacher's manner suggested that every idea the 'high achieving' boys had to offer was valued, and no one genre emerged as high status knowledge. It seemed that each boy had an equal right to the semi-public classroom space.

In setting B the teacher consciously regulated students' participation in order to shape the emergent subject culture. Her practices were in conflict with boys' preferred ways of interacting. The seating arrangements and lack of movement limited the opportunities for students to participate compared with classroom A.

Students' experience of setting A

In classroom A boys spoke at length of the way rituals of masculinity were recognised and reacted to within the peer group. Competing for the teachers' attention and challenging other boys' ideas were key characteristics that they spoke about. There was a general recognition that one had to appear as independent and autonomous, and if possible to have good ideas. The boys considered that their male peers judged ideas as a measure of masculinity. Male peer group culture
maintained and amplified hegemonic masculinity through the ways boys policed other boys' behaviour, practices and texts.

We asked the boys in classroom A why no boys had written in the Romance genre. We wished to explore this absence. James, from the single sex classroom, spoke about the vulnerability that boys would feel if they revealed personal concerns through their writing:

**James:** I don't know, I think it's harder to write about real things because if you were writing about them, then if people read them they would like know what your thoughts were about, things that were actually happening to you. But whereas if it is just a fantasy thing it is not going to really reveal anything unless you want to reveal it through it, so you could like choose what does not really matter.

The potential cost to a boy's reputation within the peer group culture of producing a piece of 'Romance' was high. James's comments demonstrated that certain practices were constantly and actively excluded as legitimate practice for boys by boys. In this sense, setting A supported an emergent subject culture that did not suppress the influence of the male peer group as the primary audience for draft productions. Boys policed the range of legitimate ways of being, ways of writing and ways of doing things. The reasons given by James, which was substantiated in interviews with other boys, was to avoid becoming vulnerable, being exposed or letting anyone know what you were really like.

Students in the mixed classroom spoke, during interviews, of the setting in gender terms. The higher ratio of girls to boys was perceived by some boys to exaggerate the gender marking of the subject culture. Some boys spoke about having to defend their views against a dominant 'girl culture'. However the dominant 'girl culture' provided some boys with opportunities for reconstructing English in ways that they reported would not have been possible in the 'all boys' class.

Boys and girls recognised that Romance was a high status reconstruction of English knowledge. Boys and girls agreed that girls in general, were good at writing romance and boys were not. We explored with the girls their understanding of gender and of knowledge. The Romance genre was associated with a dedicated femininity. Katie recognised the kinds of writing that were socially acceptable for boys and for girls, and she brought this knowledge about gender to the activity.

Lawrence from the same class explained why boys do not write that 'kind of stuff':

**Lawrence:** I think it is because they [boys] have no interest or if they did like some of it but they are embarrassed of what their friends will say and of what other girls might say they are like.

We asked who made him feel embarrassed, the teacher, the girls or the other boys?

**Lawrence:** I think it would be a mixture of both - because if you write something that is not good and it is bad but he's tried it as a Romantic novel and it is pretty bad and the girls think it is bad then they are going to think that he did not have any clue at all about relationships, and the boys are going to crack up at him and they are just going to really, really embarrass him.

Lawrence suggested that the problem for boys in writing Romance was that peers would be able to judge whether or not they had experienced what they were writing about. Lawrence pinpointed the element of authenticity as the problematic area, a point reiterated frequently by boys.

**Summary remarks**

It emerged from students' interviews that they had common sense understandings of boys' and girls' ways of knowing and acting. As we mentioned before these are brought into settings by students, and shape their experience of the setting and their reconstructions of social representations of gender that manifest themselves in behaviour, practice, texts and social identities. In classroom A boys joked with each other, vied for the teacher's attention and challenged each other's ideas. When creating their first drafts some boys constructed them specifically for the audience of peers rather than for the teacher. In classroom B, we saw boys strain ing in their seats to communicate with other boys across the classroom. Yet, we also observed boys settle into effective working relationships with girls. In interviews, students confirmed our observation that some boys tried to use
were three such characteristics. The genres that boys tended to choose to write have called 'self-masking' styles of writing. These styles dealt with emotion and for girls' we noted the dominance of the Romance genre, although this was not used exclusively by girls or by all girls. Boys stated that they tended to prefer what we have called 'self-masking' styles of writing. These styles dealt with emotion and 'real life situations' through distancing mechanisms. These allowed some boys to manage their identities within the male peer culture and protected them from exposing their social identity in the female peer culture. For girls exposing their emotions and feelings was associated with success in the subject, culture and accepted behaviour within the male and female peer culture. As Tom observed 'it is different for girls... there isn't the same pressure on them to be kind'.

We consider the characteristic manifestations that we have identified to be the products of social pressure that students encounter in a range of social arenas, and which classroom settings either disrupt or reinforce. To understand the process that leads to these resolutions for individuals and how the settings mediate this process we move next to the personal plane.

**Personal plane of analysis**

To investigate how individual students' resolved the tensions that emerged between values anchored in different social contexts, we focused on how students censored their own and others writing at different phases of production. We investigated their perceptions of audience and the impact of this on the process of self-censorship. We present stories from four students, one from setting A and three from setting B.

**Steven: from deformed bananas to serious writing**

Steven, from setting A, said that for the work to be read out in class he had deliberately chosen a story that would appeal to the other boys because it was so ridiculous and therefore would ensure laughter:

Steven: Yeah I wanted to get a reaction from somebody who was reading it you know... You understand that well when someone says 'Oh that's really good' or somebody's laughing... you know.

The story involved a banana that had no friends because it was deformed. The other boys in the class laughed out loud as he read out his first draft. Steven managed his identity as a popular boy within the boys' class by reconstructing text in a different scenario. He rejected the 'banana' text for his examination coursework folder, and selected instead a science fiction story, a crime story and a diary extract of a scientist as novel openings. Steven knew that these were suitable topics for boys to write about. Steven can be seen as a sophisticated social actor within the 'all boys' classroom setting. He was able to reconstruct English in a form that would be considered high status by the teacher and that preserved his social gender identity as a popular boy. In his interview he showed a detailed awareness of the principle features of the Romance genre, but he also recognised the danger to his standing as a popular boy if he had written a romance. As Duveen observes 'Membership in particular social categories provides individuals with both a social location and a value relative to other socially categorized individuals. These are among the most basic prerequisites for participation in social life' (Duveen, 1997, p. 21). We could note two things about Steven's writing. First, by complying with representations of gender appropriate texts he was excluded from exploring other genres. Hence, there were constraints imposed on his access to the subject culture. In developing texts to maintain his gender identity in the peer group he was learning about how to analyse and create texts to produce particular effects – effects that remained invisible to the teacher and therefore unrecognised in her reconstruction of the subject culture.
Josie writes romance

Josie was one of the 'higher achieving girls' in the mixed class and her mother was a poet. She was one of the girls chosen by the teacher in the mixed class to read out the draft of her first novel opening, which was titled 'Love Train'. Later she submitted the final draft of this text for assessment. During the interview she described in detail how she had drawn on the film 'Titanic' to reconstruct her Romance story:

Josie: Yeah that's the eye contact comes between the two but she's actually (well instead of Jack), instead of him feeling what he was obviously feeling by the look she actually saw, she was feeling what he was feeling and not him.

In the mixed class, boys and girls mentioned Josie's novel opening as a good piece of writing. When we asked if she was pleased with her work she spoke about having read her Romance to her mum:

Josie: And – yeah I was happy because I read them out to my Mum and she thought, the first one which is called 'Love Train' – She thought it was very good, so very good.

R: Tell me what she liked about it?

Josie: She just liked the feel of what I was writing, she is a great romantic herself it was a bit like the Titanic 1 suppose, except that it was on a train instead and it was right at the beginning where she sees him on the balcony.

Josie experienced no tension between the reconstruction of feminine marked English knowledge, and her social gender identity maintained in society, in school and in her home. The classroom setting had made Romance visible as a legitimate realisation of English and Josie had her texts validated across a range of in-school and out-of-school settings. She received an 'A' grade for her assessed work. Like Steven, Josie's compliance limited the range of genres she engaged with, but to an even greater degree. The high status accorded to emotive responses also meant that her engagement in a limited style of writing was treated as unproblematic for her learning and for her understanding of the English subject culture. Success for Josie limited her access to English.

Adam from romance to war stories

Adam's presence in setting B identified him as a 'low' achiever in English, and in our observations influenced his participation in the setting and the emergent subject culture. At one point in the first lesson he called out to the teacher, 'I don't write'. However, after the section in the lesson when students had been asked to read out drafts, we noticed that Adam suddenly started to write. In interview Adam explained that he was 'actually getting into it' suggesting that the ameliorating strategy was having its intended effect.

Adam started to experiment with the Romance genre after he had heard the pieces that the girls had read out. During the lesson, while he was writing, the teacher came and read what he had written, Adam told us later: 'The teacher read it and said, “Make sure it doesn't get into an X-rated sort of thing” because it was actually starting to get a bit rough in there with the writing so…' We mentioned this to the teacher afterwards and she suggested that Adam had started to write Romance because he had found out that he could write 'naughty things'. However, during the same lesson Katie was chosen to read out her Romance novel opening, which the teacher described during feedback as 'A rather steamy Mills and Boon piece [popular romantic fiction]'. The students did not interpret this as a negative comment as the writing met the conventions of the genre that the teacher had also praised. Adam recognised the model of high status English constructed by the teacher's practice. He said, 'Katie's was pretty good because in hers she described how she thought she was being watched by a man… and she was writing stuff like, “I could feel his eyes against my body… burning through my skin” and stuff like that.'

Adam's writing was about an event in a romance, but not the authentic feelings and emotions typically considered romantic. Consequently, Adam did not reconstruct romance in the style that was conventionally recognised. Instead, it was action-orientated and included humour. The story recounted an event when Tom, Adam's friend, invited his girlfriend, Anna around purportedly to play scrabble. Tom managed to dispose of the scrabble board in order to initiate other activities with Anna. For someone with limited experience of the written Romance genre and no experience of reconstructing it, this was a starting point that could be developed with the support of the teacher and other students. This support was not forthcoming. Katie handed in her piece of Romance text as part of her assessed coursework. Adam did not. Consequently, through his engagement with the English task, Adam came to a renewed understanding that certain practices were not legitimate for boys. In interview, Adam explained that boys prefer action and horror writing to Romance:

Adam: Cause action is more masculine – you don't see really an action film or a martial arts film with a lady if you know what I mean. In Romance it is more the ladies and their feelings of relationships and stuff… they are not going to do the action stuff.

Because the classroom setting in the mixed class made Romance visible, a space was opened up for boys to experiment with writing Romance. We have argued that the requirements of the Romance genre are in conflict with hegemonic masculinity, so Adam's draft can be interpreted as a brave move and his reconstruction of Romance according to masculine writing characteristics was understandable. His reconstruction of English through a genre that was marked by peers and society as feminine suggests that Adam was on the verge of crossing a boundary into a new way of writing. According to sociocultural perspectives, such crossings may entail a change in identity that, if successful, is the very foundation of learning and, therefore, the very process that teachers need to support. In order to overcome the tension that boys are likely to experience when they experiment with Romance, teachers have to provide a setting where crossing boundaries is legitimate and safe to counteract prevailing social forces.

This is extremely challenging and makes considerable demands on teachers to first understand learning in this way and second to be able to practice in the way that such a view of learning entails. In our view the teacher had neither and projected a social representation of masculinity onto the 'low ability' boys that made it essential for her to police and maintain the boundary for Adam by steering him away from femininely marked writing practices. She extended to Adam a...
heterogmonic masculine identity wherein it was only possible to reconstruct Romance as pornography. Adam had no option in this setting, if he wished to succeed, to forgo his text and to fall back and comply with this extended identity. For his submitted coursework Adam produced gender appropriate texts such as a war story and a crime story.

**Martin: a rejected Romance ‘a bit close to the bone’**

After students in the mixed classroom had handed in their final texts for assessment, the teacher tore up one of Martin’s three submitted pieces and gave him a grade based on the remaining two pieces only. We found out about the incident from a range of sources: from the teacher, from a number of students from the mixed class that we interviewed and from Martin himself. The teacher told us that the piece of writing verged on the pornographic. She had consulted with two other English colleagues to check that her reaction to the text was justified. She had taken Martin aside outside the classroom and had told him that his Romance novel opening was unacceptable.

Martin did not experiment with Romance in the classroom setting. He explained that he had been a bit stuck for a third novel opening and that his mum had suggested Romance. He had asked her for a book to help him with the writing style and she had lent him one of her Jackie Collins’s novels. He submitted the piece, as coursework after his mum had read it and told him it was ‘a bit close to the bone’. Therefore, in out-of-school settings Martin encountered a reconstruction of the Romance genre as a legitimate writing form, from which he modelled his piece. In school he showed his work to a few students, all girls. He described the way they commented ‘Oh this bit is really good’ or ‘Oh this bit is too extreme’. From these reactions he said he thought of changing the piece, but not rejecting it ‘I just handed it in praying that it would be quite good but well you all have your own opinions about that’. It was the teachers who censored Martin’s text and through them he found out that his reconstruction of Romance was not a legitimate realisation in the schooled English subject culture. Reports from other students and from Martin himself stressed that he had not intended to be provocative. Martin said that there were far worse bits in the novel and that he had attempted to tone them down a bit.

Martin, in interview, revealed that he recognised masculine and feminine interpretations of Romance and understood both. He did not accept for himself, however, the constraints of a hegemonic masculine interpretation. Josie defended Martin during her interview. She objected to the teacher’s reactions. She described Martin as a boy who preferred to talk to the girls in the class, rather than to the boys. Martin also told us of the bullying he had received and of his separation from the male peer culture as a consequence, and how he valued female company. He could see that Martin was able to maintain an emancipated social gender identity outside school and with some of the girls in the mixed classroom. He, more than Adam was positioned in the setting to take risks and experiment with the genre in the space the teacher had created for Romance by making it visible and high status. His Romance text was an expression of his emancipated gender identity. However what he hoped might be a good piece of work was not even worthy of a grade. The teacher’s reaction created a boundary that prevented his identity from being maintained within the setting. The teacher’s intent was to maintain the subject culture and her actions were to reject the work but in so doing she rejected Martin’s creative/expressive identity and limited the opportunities available to him to learn.

Adam was left with an extended identity that made sense to him in terms of what was legitimate behaviour for him to succeed in the subject although this limited the access to the subject culture allowed to him. The same identity was extended to Martin, it represented him and located him socially in particular ways, ways that were in conflict with his emancipated gender identity. He was left still searching for understanding of the subject culture armed only with the knowledge and the associated fear that, in his own words, he must not ‘go overboard’, be ‘too extreme’ or ‘over the top’.

**Concluding remarks**

In our research we were concerned to challenge essentialist generalisations and recommendations about pedagogy. We have argued that a sociocultural approach, in particular the concept of a setting as orchestrated by teachers and experienced by students embedded in the institutional and social arena of school, provides a way of analysing learning and understanding pedagogy. A way that helps to understand how gender as hegemonic social representations mediates learning. Teachers need insights into this mediation process to understand students’ decisions about their subject knowledge reconstructions and the role that they play in these.

The orchestration of essentialist pedagogic strategies heightened awareness of gender in the teacher’s in the study. We found that teachers projected social representations of gender onto boys and girls, and then onto high and low achieving boys differently. This manifested itself first through the orchestration of the setting, such that high achieving boys in setting A were granted autonomy and all their ideas were accepted equally. We suggest that the teacher colluded in this because the social representation of high achieving boys conforms to an association that links the mind, rationality and the intellect with masculinity (Walkerdine, 1988).

We found that both teachers focused on their interpretations of students’ attributes (as male – female, high – low achievers) and not on the texts they were producing. When students’ presented the ideas they had produced through draft and final copies of written text, teachers reacted to high and low achieving boys differently. High achieving boys received praise irrespective of the content and style of their writing. The teacher in setting A did not question Steven about his deformed banana reconstruction. By reacting to the boy and not the text, she failed to recognise the hidden writing technique that we have called ‘self-masking’ and therefore did not realise that Steven was on the verge of exploring the difficult emotion of rejection. Had she interpreted his text according to the conventions of English that include skills of description, characterisation and plot, she could have shifted the frame from rituals of masculinity to rituals of writing. Had she achieved this she could have helped Steven to escape the constraints of having to perform hegemonic masculinity and given him permission to be, in public, the person who explored emotions and fictional scenarios in private. This would have provided one instance of pedagogic strategy that would have shifted the production of hegemonic masculinity in the modern gender order (Connell, 1995).

‘Low achieving boys’ represent an opposite form of masculinity to high achieving boys, one associated with the body. The gendered seating was a part of the teacher’s orchestration intended to ‘control’ the low achieving boys physically. When boys in setting B chose Romance as a genre, they wrote according to ‘masculine’ writing characteristics. The teacher interpreted their ideas as a form of out-of-control sexuality. She read their texts not in terms of their skills in producing stories, but as manifestations of attributes and intentions associated with ‘bad masculinity’. It is important to recognise that, through their actions, these boys were not performing
Martin nor Adam was able to articulate why the teacher had reacted to their texts as 'pornographic'. However, they expressed vague thoughts about having 'gone over the top', 'been too extreme' and of 'getting a bit rough'. Each of these phrases relates to issues of masculinity and not issues about writing techniques. Both boys read the teacher's reaction as a reflection on their character and not of their skills in writing. They were given no tools or techniques to produce the kinds of writing that teachers value so highly at GCSE level.

Teacher B used the girls to provide a model of good writing. Instead she could have articulated the techniques that make up successful writing at that level, and then drawn on a range of students' texts to demonstrate to what extent each measured up to her model. In this way all kinds of text can be used for pedagogic purposes. Girls were being used to control boys physically too and therefore, they were constrained in movement of ideas and we noted this in the isolation of individual girls throughout the three lessons. Girls were also used by the teacher in the production of ideas to support her reconstruction of English. Consequently the opportunities made available for them to learn in the setting were constrained, as they could not explore topics and genres that were marked as 'masculine' according to hegemonic social representations of gender. They were also being encouraged to use a writing technique we labelled as 'self-exposing'. This technique though valued at this level is increasingly devalued in the assessment of the subject culture in the later phases of education.

Strategies that have been motivated by a heightened awareness to gender and are not backed up by research into how students learn are in danger of reproducing hegemonic social representations of gender. Furthermore, classroom settings orchestrated in this way police the boundary between classrooms and other social contexts in conservative ways that exclude ways of being, acting and writing that cross gender boundaries...[a]ameliorative strategies are effective when they build on the cultural capital and know-how that students bring with them into classrooms. However, educational policies need to hand back autonomy to teachers in order to allow them to build on students' know-how through pedagogic guidance that is based on (disciplinary) subject orientated skills and tools, and not on policing attributes of boys or of girls.

References
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