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## The construction of gendered contexts in single sex and coeducational education lessons

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## ABSTRACT

### **The construction of gendered contexts in single sex and coeducational physical education lessons**

With the 'linguistic turn' in contemporary social theory there has been an increased interest in looking more closely at pedagogical practices in physical education as they construct social relations. Initially, and within a rather different theoretical framework this took the form of counting the number and kind of interactions teachers had with boys as compared to girls. More recently researchers have begun to look closely at how language choices construct relations of power between teacher and students and produce contexts for learning. This paper examines how these contexts may be very different for girls as compared to boys in single sex as well as coeducational physical education lessons. Systemic functional linguistics and semiotic theory have provided the methodology and analytical tools to make visible the system of meanings expressed through teachers choices in language. The analysis has been further informed by the work of poststructuralist and particularly feminist poststructuralist writers who link language, consciousness and gender.

## **The construction of gendered contexts in single sex and coeducational physical education lessons**

### **Approaches to classroom interaction research**

Recently a number of theories and methodologies have come together to make possible a close analysis of pedagogical practice which recognises that the meaning making practices of the classroom are integral to the success and failure of students and to their social and cultural positioning. Although there has been a close interest in classroom interaction by classroom ethnographers, ethnomethodologists and socio-linguists for some time (see for instance, Cazden et al, 1972; Delamont, 1976; Edwards, 1981; Edwards & Westgate, 1994), these have not gone far beyond the immediate context of the classroom and the interpersonal relations between teachers and students. Some of this research has certainly taken ethnicity, race and gender into account but rarely has there been any close attention to how language creates a social reality and positions those engaged in speaking and listening differently in relation to valued systems of meaning.

It is primarily through the influence of poststructuralist theory that the relationship between language and the formation of individual subjectivities has been taken up empirically through the detailed analysis of spoken and written texts. In the United Kingdom, the work of Basil Bernstein has been influential in directing attention to pedagogical practice "as a key to understanding not only how children and young people succeed and fail in classrooms, ie how they are positioned in relation to knowledge and their peers, but also the class and cultural assumptions and consequences of teaching PE" (Evans et al, forthcoming 1997, p.5). Although Bernstein and those who write about him (Sadonovnik, 1995) are more likely to locate Bernstein within a structuralist tradition, his interest in the discursive construction of individual consciousness and social reality has many commonalities with poststructuralist writers such as Michel Foucault.

Writers in social semiotics, linguistics and critical discourse analysis such as Michael Halliday (1978; 1985) Norman Fairclough (1989), Gunther Kress (1988) and Alan Luke (1993) in their different ways have been influential in providing the methodologies and linguistic tools to analyses how language functions to construct meanings, ideological positionings and texts. In particular in education researchers drawing on systemic functional linguistics as developed by Michael Halliday as an analytical methodology have demonstrated how teacher interactions classrooms construct content knowledge, social relations and particular orientations to learning (eg Christie, 1990; Lemke, 1985; 1990; Wright, 1993; Wright & King, 1991)

In physical education, there has recently been an increased interest in looking more closely at the nature of teaching through an analysis of the talk between teachers and students. In different ways this has usually been couched within a critical perspective which examines how language use constructs relations of power between teachers and students and/or positions students and teachers in relation to the discourses informing the pedagogical practices of physical education (Clarke, 1992; Evans & Clarke, 1988; Evans, et al., forthcoming 1997; Prain & Hickey, 1995) The general purpose of these studies seems to be to move beyond the technicist notion of 'effective' teaching to explore how teaching in physical education may challenge dominant discourses and social relations.

As yet such analyses have only begun to explore these issues. Much of the research thus far has concentrated primarily on the broader features of the exchange such as the ways in which teachers control knowledge and regulate behaviour through the amount of talk, their close control of the pacing of the lessons, the direction of learning through closed question-answer-evaluation sequences and the frequency of regulatory statements about how students should participate in lessons. Evans and Clarke (1988) show how these traditional patterns persist despite innovations in the curriculum and organisation of physical education. Some attention has been paid to the contribution of language use to the construction of gender but issues of social class, sexuality, ethnicity and intercultural communication and the ways in which particular orientations to the body and to movement are constructed in physical education remain unexplored.

This paper draws on poststructuralist, feminist and linguistic theories and methodologies to examine the ways in which teachers' choices in language contribute to the production of gender relations and different orientations to physical activity and physical education for female and male secondary students. As a study informed by poststructuralist theory, the meanings negotiated through teacher and student are taken to be the result of social practices located in a specific social and cultural context. A discussion about this larger context, the model developed to interpret classroom language as a situated social practice and the expectations that students and teachers bring to their interactions in physical education lessons is discussed in Wright (1995; Wright, 1996a; Wright, 1996b). The scope of this paper precludes detailed references to the wider social context of the analysis, rather it focuses primarily on the language use itself. The first section of the paper however will provide a brief introduction to theories of language, subjectivity and discourses as they inform this paper.

### **Language discourses, subjectivity**

The linguist, Whorf (1956), and those influenced by his work (for instance, Bernstein, 1971, Halliday, 1982) argue that it is not only through individual words but through the grammatical patternings of a language that different world views are encoded; a process that occurs at the unconscious level of awareness. For Bernstein (1971), this has meant the encoding

of cultural differences that have to do with class; for feminists, it implies grammatical patternings that encode social relations that position women as subordinate to men. While Michel Foucault himself was not interested in and in fact eschewed any analysis that took account of the grammatical patterns in language, his notions of discourses as historical and cultural productions of systems of knowledge and beliefs (encoded in language and other meaning making practices) which regulate the behaviour of individuals lends itself to an understanding of how language constitutes subjectivity (Foucault, 1981).

An important tenet of the Foucauldian notion of discourse is that discourses are themselves produced in and through the practices of individuals in relation to each other. Individuals in their everyday practices continue to produce and to reproduce social formations, behaviours, spaces, bodies, sexualities, beliefs, knowledges and so on - the discursive and non-discursive practices of a culture (Foucault, 1979; 1981). In doing so they, in turn, are produced as subjects of these cultural practices (Hall et al, 1980).

In summary, individuals are not the creators or source of meanings, rather they draw on discourses already circulating in a particular social and cultural context to make meaning and to make sense of their world (Weedon, 1987). Individuals are constrained in what they can say, and hence what they can mean, by the linguistic choices (made) available in the language that they use and which is in turn, limited by their positioning in relation to the knowledge and practices (the discourses) of the culture from which they speak or write. It can thus be said that the interactions of teachers and students in physical education lessons are to a large extent determined by the cultural baggage (subjectivities) they bring to the situation and the constraints of the social occasion or genre in which the interactions take place. There is, however, room for resistance, for drawing on oppositional discourses which challenge what has been taken for granted.

To more fully understand how and why the physical education lesson takes the form that it does, it is necessary to understand the cultural and historical conditions which produced it. This enables us to predict which cultural as well as institutional discourses and social relations are likely to be dominant or hegemonic in comparison to others. As has been documented elsewhere (Wright 1995; 1996a) the development of the physical education lesson genre is the product of the dominance of pedagogic discourses of skill acquisition and motor learning embedding instructional discourses from organised competitive sport and medical models of cardiovascular health as fitness. These are discourses that privilege patriarchal positionings. Thus the genre itself, the discourses and subject positions which it makes possible/probable are already predisposed to a particular range of practices and social relations that are oppressive to girls and women. In a society where sport achievement and participation continues to be associated with masculinity, the positions available to women and girls continue to locate them as secondary, as lacking, as the “weaker sex”.

### **"Readership": Interpreting the text**

The analysis of transcripts from physical education lessons which follows below, identifies possible/preferred positionings available from the teachers', and less often, from students' talk<sup>1</sup>. The concept of readership from semiotics alerts us to the dangers of assuming that such positions are necessarily taken up (see Cranny-Francis, 1992). Rather it must be acknowledged that those to whom talk is addressed may reject or actively resist, rather than comply with, the way in which they are being positioned. Readers or in the case of this study the recipients of spoken language, bring to their understanding and interpretation of such language their experience of other texts, discourses, genres, institutions. The dynamic interaction of their existing subjectivities with new positionings allows for a negotiation which can result in the compliant acceptance of the present positioning, rejection of it or even a partial rejection and partial compliance. The extent to which resistance or compliance is possible will rely largely on the congruence between the acceptance of previous similar positionings, exposure to alternatives and also importantly on how such a positioning fits with the recipients desires, needs and interests. However as Cranny-Francis (1992) goes on to point out in the following quote a fair degree of compliance can be assumed with patriarchal positionings.

Individual readers have too many other experiences, too many other inter(textual) relations in which their subjectivity is negotiated to be totally compliant with the reading position constructed in a particular text. Nevertheless in a patriarchal society we would expect a fairly high degree of compliance with patriarchal positioning in texts. (p.188)

To take a concrete example: students in a physical education class bring to their understanding and evaluation of their teacher, their previous experiences of good/bad liked/disliked teachers with whom they have already associated some value. The degree to which this teacher is evaluated positively as teacher, as male/female as well as on other constellations of characteristics is likely to affect the degree to which the student is willing to accept the positions s/he offers. For instance, if the teacher is regarded as unfair and sexist a female student may already have at her disposal the means at least to make a resistant response to a patriarchal feminine positioning. This could range from a quiet non acceptance of negative comments about

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<sup>1</sup>The researcher is also of course a 'reader' in this sense. The readings, I make are those which fit within the notion of 'resistant' or critical reader (Cranny-Francis), My reading is not proposed as neutral rather as a reading from a feminist position, rather the interpretations which follow are made in the context of the dominant and oppositional discourses circulating in the culture - as these discourses have been identified in the considerable writing on gender and on gender and physical education.

her physical competence or her appearance to a verbal or nonverbal response which vociferously declares her rejection of the way in which she has been positioned. On the other hand, while the teacher's comments about her physical appearance may be recognised as sexist, they may so accord with the student's beliefs about herself, which are themselves likely to be the result of an accumulation of comparisons with dominant cultural descriptions of the ideal body, that she at least partly accepts his/her evaluation.

In relation to the dominant discourses of sport and physical education, it is the boys who are more likely to be compliant readers to the extent that their masculine subjectivity accords with physical education teachers' and particularly male teachers' values and knowledge about physical activity and physical education (Connell, 1995). Their acceptance is also more likely because these discourses offer them powerful positions in the discourse and in relation to others. A compliant reading means accepting not only their own positioning but the complementary positions afforded to others by the discourse. Thus sports discourse as expressed in physical education positions the boys as powerful but in doing so, while leaving some options for the more skilled girls to be positioned as 'pseudo' boys, positions most girls as less powerful and inferior to the boys in terms of the attributes that it values (see Wright 1996a for a more detailed discussion of this). It also marginalise those boys who are not willing or able to take up the dominant masculine position as skilled, competitive and daring.

### **Constructing male and female subjects in physical education lessons**

There has been considerable debate in the UK and Australia about the merits of single sex versus coeducational lessons and vice versa (Deem, 1984). This paper will use examples from both single sex and coeducational lesson to argue that both in their different ways construct different social realities for girls as compared to boys. The purpose of this analysis is not to provide a no-win situation but to argue that what is said and done in physical education lessons needs far more attention than it has hereto been given. Teachers and students through their talk create meanings, gender relations and subjectivities; they create particular contexts for learning. A starting point is to recognise with (Evans, et al., forthcoming 1997) that there are different approaches to physical education, which go beyond the organisation of classes and the curriculum and these approaches have consequences for student learning and for the production of social relations. Nor is it the intention of this paper to make generalised statements about female and male language use, rather it is to discuss how particular teachers position themselves and their students in relation to cultural discourses that produce but may also challenge patriarchal notions of masculinity and femininity.

### **The context of the study**

Three schools, two government secondary schools and one catholic college participated in the study. Only one of the government schools had co-education physical education although the other government school included some co-educational recreational activities in its program as well as co-educational social dance. From these schools, six male teachers and three female teachers consented to be videoed and to wear lapel microphones. Of the nine teachers who were recorded, selected lessons of six of these were the subject of detailed descriptions and analysis. Selection of lessons was made on the basis of technical quality of the audio and video recording, the variety of the lessons, possibilities for comparison in the content of the lessons and intrinsic interest and appropriateness to the theme of the study.

### **A coeducational basic skills class taught by a male teacher**

In this first example, the interactions of one male teacher with individual female and male students in the same lesson - a year 7 co-educational basic skills lesson - are compared. The lesson had two main parts: skill practices using a softball and bat in pairs and two modified games, an Aussie Rules Softball game and a modified softball game where students batted balls off stands. In the Aussie Rules Softball game, the skills and strategies which involved long passes over a wide area, running with the ball and tackling were alien to most of the girls but familiar to the boys. Permission to tackle meant that at least some girls would have avoided contact with the ball in order to avoid being tackled by other players. As one girl said, "I don't want to be tackled by a boy". At least five of the girls spent this game hovering around the middle of the field or clustered around the male teacher. Although the softball style game was less unfamiliar and everyone had a turn at bat due to a strategy of boy/girl/boy/girl, the girls had to face the ignominy of failing to hit the ball or being 'out' in front of the whole class as well as 'letting their team down'. From my position, videoing next to the batting team, I observed the attempts of various female students to avoid their turn at bat and the enthusiasm with which male students volunteered to replace them. The captains of both teams were male and the goal keepers in the passing game were male. Except for one reference to "he or she", all references to the participants in the games were male.

Because there were so many students and so much activity and because the teacher was often addressing students who were some distance from him, in this lesson he usually addressed students by name. This made it possible to single out the interactions between individual students and the teacher for analysis.

There were quite clear differences in the choices of language made by the teacher and the female students in their interactions as compared to the choices made by the same teacher and the male students. These differences in language encoded differences both in social relations and in the discourses that constituted the content of the exchanges. The exchanges with the female students were often extended interactions (see quote below), characterised by an initiating

instruction from the teacher which was challenged and then rechallenged by a female student. In contrast, the exchanges with male students were usually very short, often one task-related instruction by the teacher, followed up with the appropriate action on the part of the student. The male students rarely spoke to the teacher and when they did it related to the task at hand, or, in isolated instances, to the behaviour of the girls.

The boys were praised more often than the girls. During the game segment of the lesson there were six clear examples of praise to the boys (for example, "good catch", "well done") and only one to a girl. On the other hand the girls were more likely to be subject of "out", and "bad luck". To a large extent, this is because the boys were positioned more favourably by the nature of the activity to warrant praise. They were more likely to be involved in the game, they did not get 'out' as often as the girls and they demonstrated far superior skills than most of the girls. In the same lesson girls were also more likely to be associated statements or commands modified by the negative - that is, directions on how or what not to do ("Jenny don't stand there and look at that. It's not going to come to you if you don't chase the ball"). Far fewer negatives were used with the male students and three of these were used to prohibit behaviour in relation to female students (for example, "Don't listen to her").

In contrast to their construction as physically less competent and less enthusiastic than the boys, female students were constructed by male and female teachers as talkers and as the recipients of talk. They were allowed, and appropriated for themselves, the verbal and the interpersonal as their sphere of competence. The students subverted the purpose of the lessons through their employment of familiar interpersonal and heterosexual genres in which their competence lies in their ability to play subtle verbal games. The following exchange is only one of several similar exchanges between a female student and the male teacher in this lesson.

- Teacher: Righto, who doesn't understand the game?
- Girl: Me.
- Teacher: Why don't you understand the game Bec?
- Girl: Cause you didn't understand it.
- Teacher: I understood. I explained it properly. I can understand it. I explained it well enough that other people understood it
- Girl: (Unclear)
- Teacher: D'you understand.
- Girl: Yes.
- (Two people talking together)
- Teacher: Look, the main reasons why people don't understand this, people at the moment like Corinne and Jenny are talking while I'm trying to explain the things, and they get out there and they think 'What's going on'.
- Girl: We know what's going on Sir.

- Girl: Excuse me sir, with the two balls and that, like just say, like just say one team gets the ball, are we supposed to get the two balls into the same thing.
- Teacher: No, its just that, its just that we're playing with two balls. So two games are going on at the one time.
- Girl: Oh God. What happens if you get, you go to catch a ball and the other ball comes and hits you on the head.
- (laughter)
- (girl laughing)

This exchange is not about the giving and receiving of information but about scoring points, about challenging social relations and defending positions that are attacked. The authority of the teacher is attacked through the student initiating and reciprocating familiarity and by her directly challenging the teacher as the information source until he 'cracks' - that is, in defending his position as authoritative and competent, he succumbs and is complicit in shifting the discourse from the task-oriented to the interpersonal. The students themselves respond personally to what began as a task-oriented exchange.

In this and similar exchanges in the lesson the teacher seemed to expect to interact with the girls within the interpersonal mode - at times he seemed to facilitate it, even in some ways to encourage it. This is in contrast to the discouragement they receive in relation to their task performance. Through these interactions he developed a relationship with the girls in the class that was quite different from that which he developed with the boys. With the boys the relationship was one of solidarity - shared understanding of the meanings and attitudes to do with playing the game and, in this lesson, a shared frustration with the girls' obstructiveness ("Women, Colin, women!"), apparent lack of skill and passivity in playing the game. With the girls, on one hand, there was much more of a struggle for authority through reciprocity of sarcasm, direct verbal challenges by students to instructions which then shift the discourse. On the other hand, there were also language choices that suggest intimacy, such as the shortened forms of names, pejorative terms, insults, sarcasm. Many of the girls also spent more of the lesson physically close to the teacher, clustering around him at changes from one lesson stage to another, sitting in the front of lines or the class group when listening to instructions and hovering around him during the passing game. The boys were too busy getting on with the game to be involved in these interpersonal kinds of interactions. When two boys did briefly initiate chat with the teacher it was about the sport that they did outside school. And while the girls were being sarcastic to the point of rudeness they were never taken directly to task. However, when a boy made reference to another boy being hit in his *keg* (which I believe to be slang for testicles), he was immediately pulled up and disciplined.

The female students were marginalised and marginalised themselves from the discourse and material practices that were central to the purpose of the lesson. This is a discourse that

describes and prescribes practices that regulate physical activity and sport and in which the boys and the male teacher are comfortably positioned, albeit frustrated, with the intrusion of the girls in this domain. In relation to this discourse the female students had very little in the way of power. As described above some of the girls were not entirely submissive to this process. Their resistance, however, did not contest their positioning in relation to the dominant discourses and genre of the lesson. It is hard to see how in the circumstances this would have been possible. Instead their resistance should be seen as an attempt to subvert the student teacher relationship through their flirting with the teacher. This is a mode of interaction with which the female students were very familiar and in which they have more control over the discourses and social relations that it realises (cf Scraton, 1986).

Lessons like the one just described seem only to exacerbate and highlight skill differences between girls and boys. In doing so they maintain the expectations of difference in male and female behaviour that reinforce hegemonic masculinity and femininity. Many of the girls come into the lesson reticent and it would seem leave the lesson both confirmed in their negative attitudes to physical education lessons, perhaps physical activity in general, and with certainly no more skill than that which they had at the beginning of the lesson. There is certainly no substantial evidence from this particular lesson to offer support to the claim that co-educational groups facilitate better attitudes.

### **Single sex lessons taught by female and male teachers**

In the first section of the paper, the ways in which the teacher and the students constructed exchanges within a coed physical education lesson which positioned girls and boys differently was examined. In the following examples it will be demonstrated that very different contexts for learning and for the formation of social relations can also be constructed in single sex lessons. In this second section of the paper I will concentrate on specific language features which seem to offer useful ways of describing the differences between lessons taught by female and male teachers and to male and female students. As was the case in other analyses of teacher talk (Evans & Clarke, 1988; Prain & Hickey, 1995; Wright & King, 1991) the most obvious feature of all of the physical education lessons analysed was the overwhelming prominence of didactic teacher talk. The teachers constructed themselves as experts, they asked few questions except to clarify organisational arrangements or to regulate student behaviour. In most of the boys' games lessons, however, it was also clear that the teacher expected the students to bring sufficient resources to participate in skill practices and the game with little direct instruction by the teacher (more instruction was provided in gymnastics lessons). A closer analysis of patterns of language use in relation to speech functions, modality, the construction of explanations through clause complexes and the use of personal pronouns helps to demonstrate how, within what seems on the

surface to be very similarly constructed physical education lessons, there are differences which construct a different social reality for female and male students and their teachers.

Speech functions (together with modality) in grammatical terms allow us to determine how participants are positioned in and by an exchange - that is, to distinguish between the one who expresses a command, statement, question or makes an offer and the recipient of that command, statement, question or offer. Modality provides the grammatical means to express uncertainty through modal adjuncts (eg "just", "only", "probably", "maybe") and modal auxiliaries ("may", "might" "could" etc) and metaphorically through ("I think..."). Other language uses may also function metaphorically to avoid being definite. For example, "Could you move those mats please", while intended to be responded to as a command, may also function to express reticence at being overtly authoritarian by expressing that command grammatically as an interrogative (as though it were a question).

In keeping with the notion of the physical education as genre and thus a powerful determinant of the discourses, practices and social relations that are possible, it is not surprising that the teachers' language use of speech functions was at first glance very similar with commands predominating. These could be expressed on a continuum of directness with differing degrees of modality (from "Run to the end of the field", "I want you to run to the end of the field" to "Could you please run to the end of the field"). Male and female teachers with female students were more likely to use the more indirect form of command and to make a greater use of modality

While the predominance of commands is not unexpected in sections of the lessons such as the warm-up ("Stand, legs apart") or when teachers are offering teaching points during a practicing skills, it is more surprising (perhaps disturbing) that commands should be found to dominate the sections of the lesson which serve to introduce students to a skills practice. Rather than statements about how a skill (or even why) a skill might be performed, the language was more likely to be about what students would do in the next section of the lesson. Where statements did occur they often encoded the dominant values of sport and physical education: for instance, statements about effort, quality of performance and safety which were reiterated throughout the other stages of the lesson - statements such as "You aim for perfection", "Form is important" and utterances that realise the common moral imperative 'practice makes perfect'.

In the skills practice which followed the explanation, where the male teachers were teaching boys, there were long pauses while the boys practised without any commentary. However in lessons where female students were being taught by either male or female teachers the talk was much more constant, explaining skills and encouraging the students. Again both male and female teachers in the girls lessons were more likely to use modality or forms of language use which shifted the social relations in ways that were less likely to position the teacher at least overtly as highly directive and authoritarian. For instance, the use of forms such

as "You *just* throw it to her" rather than the imperative form "Throw it to her" so that the utterance seems to function more as a suggestion to be followed or to be ignored. The tentativeness of the clause is increased by the use "just". Some such directions were made even more conditional by the addition of "if" as in "Girls, if one just throws it while one person tries to do it".

A similar pattern of use was carried through into the last section of the lesson where students had the opportunity to apply the skills learned in the rest of the lesson to a game, to create or learn a sequence in dance, or to use the large equipment in gymnastics. Many of the differences here depended on the field of physical education in which the lesson was located. The boys were usually organised by their male teachers and then left to play the game with minimal teacher intervention except as the teacher took the role of umpire.

For the girls, however, the close regulation and encouragement through constant teacher talk that occurred in other sections of the girls' lessons continued. For the boys it seemed that playing a game in the lesson signified a shift away from the pedagogic purpose of the lesson to the purposes, practices and social relations associated with the playing of team sports in wider social contexts. They became team players and the teacher became the referee or umpire (or sometimes a player as well). For the girls the didactic purpose continued to be foregrounded, with the playing of a game providing new understandings like those of strategic play or appropriate and proper attitudes and conduct to the game. This emphasis on the process of learning, of knowing "how" and "why" skills need to be learned and practised becomes more evident with an analysis of the relationships between clauses.

One of the main features which stood out when teachers explanations of skill were analysed was the very different organisation of what in grammatical terms are called clause complexes - that is, the way sentences are organised to talk about how, where and when a main event will happen. One of the main feature that stood out in the explanations by the female teachers was firstly the length of their explanations and secondly the complex structure of relationships between clauses in comparison to most of the male teachers. The following examples were fairly characteristic of the long sequences of dependent (clauses joined by "if", 'when', 'because' etc and (Halliday, 1985) which characterised the female teachers' explanations throughout their lessons. These sentence structures serve to situate skill performance in terms of specific conditions; they instruct the students in how and why skills need to be performed in a certain way. The first two examples are from a girls' hockey lesson and a girls' gymnastics lesson taught by different female teachers.

Now there's two sides.  
If you have a look at your stick,  
there's two sides,

now one's flat  
 and the other is curved.  
 Obviously if we were to hit it with that side, the curved side,  
 it's awfully difficult,  
 cause it could hit at any angle and go off.  
 So we use the flat side.  
 In fact if you start using the other side  
 you'll get pulled up for obstruction,  
 so you're not allowed to use that side there.  
 Okay so you always use that side.  
 So you might say  
 well what happens  
 if you're left handed  
 and (if) you like to have it, you know hold it that way  
 and hit it there.  
 What you have to do is turn the head of the stick over.

and from the second teacher

Last week, when we did back arches  
 I explained  
 how your stomach muscles were really being stretched much more  
 than they probably had been  
 (small pause)  
 since the last time you did back arches,  
 and that you were compressing this area here,  
 and you would end up with a little bit of soreness, muscle soreness  
 the same as when we start cross country running  
 and you know  
 that you can't get down the stairs after Maths or whatever else, because your legs are sore;  
 its the same type of thing.

This is in comparison to the independent single clause structures (existing as single sentences or joined by "and" and "but") which characterised the boys' lessons where the preparation for skills practice was more likely to consist of a series of statements with little explanation or contextualising. The following example is taken from a boys' gymnastics lesson..

Before you start, make sure that your area is smooth.  
 Secondly, make sure that your spotter's in the correct position before you start.  
 There were a number of guys yesterday who were going through and saying 'oh where's the padder after they've vaulted?'.  
 Your padder has to be in position first.  
 Safety is most important all the time.  
 I don't care whether you've done the skill five, fifteen, a hundred times;  
 you always have a padder there first!

and from a boys' baseball, the entire introduction to the next skill practice,

What [[I'm going to get you all to do in a moment]] is, [[about that far apart, just practising pitching to each other nice easy throws]].

You'll all be throwing in the same direction, one partner along this line the other along that line.

Next pair please, grab a glove and a ball,  
and line up.

You guys can start.

Work out right hand left hand.

Once you've got a glove and a ball

move up

and start going.

Alright the rest of you, play.

Where the female teachers' language seems to suggest that they were more likely to take into account the girls' reactions, their experiences and needs; the male teachers in their talk to boys were more likely to establish what had to be done and how and then let the boys get on with their tasks. On the other hand when the preparation for skills practice from a girls volleyball lesson taught by a male teacher was analysed, the patterns of language use were closer to those of the female teachers than to the male teachers teaching the boys. The section before the practice itself was very lengthy and included explanations for two different skills, only the first half as been quoted in full below.

Matt: Alright listening. In a moment we're going to just break up into pairs As a few of you have said that you haven't done much volleyball or the skills at volleyball when it's that good, what are you asking to do newcombe ball and things like that, we've done that in er Year 7 Year 8. Now you've developed the skills a little bit and that's what we'll spend a few minutes on now. The two basic shots in volleyball, the overhead set shot which is where the ball's high you play the shot and the dig where it's low, and we'll practise those two in a moment. The overhead if the ball's up high. So ideally you always try and get under it. Girls! I know your not doing it but just keep that ball still please. You try and get underneath it if possible. Always get two hands to the ball so the set shots or the overhead shots, all shots in volleyball, particularly those you're using the fingertips. It's not coming down and going smack on the hands, it's a push with the fingertips. The shape or the best way to do it is not just over this way, you've gotta get right underneath the ball, and the hand and fingers spread. Just try it and have a look up and you should see a spade shape. One of them cards with your fingers spread up. That's the actual action. And you don't just stand there and hit it. It's getting down low and you use your knees and a push. So in your pairs in a moment you'll be going over. One person can just throw it up, and the other person can just push it back to them, and then you can swap roles.

This suggests that it is not simply a case of the gender of the teacher although I would still want to argue that a male teacher's own central location in relation to the discourses of physical education and sport strongly influences the position he takes up in relation to the girls and to the

activity. Rather the language use above suggests that the female students, their expectations and subjectivities must also be taken into account in interpreting the difference between the female and ,male teachers' patterns of language use.

A comparison between the male teacher's girls' volleyball lesson with the girls and his baseball lesson with the boys indicates that he did spend much more time explaining skill practices to the girls than the boys. This seems to be primarily explicable by the lack of experience, skill and enthusiasm of the girls and the contrasting enthusiasm and desire to get on with the activity demonstrated by the boys. On the other hand, an analysis of his explanations to the female students reveals interesting differences (and similarities) from that of the female teachers quoted above. In contrast to the series of clause complexes characterised by dependency relations used by the female teachers in their explanations, this explanation consists of a long series of independent clauses that elaborate on one another:

It's not coming down  
and going smack on the hands,  
it's a push with the fingertips.  
The shape or the best way to do it is not just over this way,  
you've gotta get right underneath the ball, and the hand and fingers spread.

These are not explanations why but descriptions of how to do the skills. They are stated as undebatable propositions about how things are. Where there are possibilities that the description could be expressed in ways that make reasons for doing a particular movement more explicit, appropriate conjunctions (such as because, if) are omitted, so that the clauses appear to stand independently of one another. For instance, from the second half of the explanation:

The other one (I want you to practise) is the dig, which is down low.  
For any low balls you've gotta get down to it.  
Now a lot of people have trouble (knowing) how to hold their hands together.  
The best way is to just cradle one hand in the other.  
and it's not hitting it with your fist or your hand,  
Where you hit is on the wrist.  
So you should be making a sort of a cradle.

What is apparent here are the frequent incidences of modality - that is, expressions of uncertainty or lack of definiteness, such as are expressed by "just", "only", "ideally" and "can" and "should" as in "you should see a spade shape". I would argue that expressions such as "try and get underneath" in the context of this example, also serve to imply an approximation rather than a definite achievement of a goal. As has been argued elsewhere (Wright & King, 1991) in relation to a female teacher teaching female students, the use of modality in this context is used

to encourage or cajole anticipated (and actual) reluctant students. This also fits with the first few lines of this example, where the teacher, by referring to the students past experience and their existing competencies, appears to be reassuring them that this lesson will not be difficult but will extend skills that they already have.

Thus there are similarities but also differences when comparing the male teacher's pattern of language use with the girls with those of the female teachers in the study. These differences however are far greater when compared with his or other male teachers' language use when teaching boys. Unfortunately it was not possible to record a female teacher teaching boys

When personal pronoun use - that is the use of 'I' and 'we' was examined in all of the lessons, similar differences emerged as those described above (see Wright, 1990 for a more detailed analysis). Categories of pronoun use were arrived at on the basis of the ways in which the pronouns functioned in the teachers' talk. With the boys, the male teachers' use of personal pronouns was generally restricted to an 'I' signifying the authority of the teacher as the expert and the one who could tell the students what to do (eg "I told you ...", "I explained to you ..." "I want you to ..."). The second person "you" was used to refer to specific boys or to the boys collectively. Such choices signify an ambiguous relationship between the male teachers and their students - their power to control the students' behaviour is clearly signalled. However, the male teacher's pronoun use in his volleyball lesson with the girls, again points to a difference in positioning. He continued to use the "I" as authority but he also used a communal form of the first person plural "we" ("we're just going to break up in pairs" and "we'll spend a few minutes on this now"). These appear as alternatives to "You will practice..", "You will spend .." or "I want you to practice ...". The choice of the "we" form is very common in teacher talk usually with the future or past tense signifying activity that will be or has been performed. Sometimes it more clearly indicates activity or experience that has been or will be shared by the students and the teacher as a class, signalling a sense of solidarity which provides the teacher with a context in which the teachers' intentions and desires are coupled at least in language with the students. Thus it potentially creates an environment in which it is more difficult to identify oneself as opposed to both teachers and peers, rather than to one individual authority. This is more apparent when the "we" is much more clearly exclusive of the teacher. The use of the communal "we" also provides a way of ameliorating direct authority - "we are all going to do this" rather than "I", as the authority, want you to do this activity.

The female teachers used a wide range of personal pronouns including all those mentioned so far for the male teachers. In addition they used the first person singular as the subject of a material (action) processes (... "let's say I was trying to quickly pick it up" and "...if I was batting it") as they created scenarios of conditions and consequences. They also used first person plural with the present tense ("unfortunately we don't throw always the best passes") in a way which seems to signify an identification with situations that occur to all of us - that is, 'even

the teacher as a skilled physical education teacher, like the girls in the class, does not always get it right'. The solidarity/intimacy of this clause is reinforced by the colloquial use of "a pretty rotten pass" in the next. The utterance "so its a bit difficult over here without a mitt, isn't it" provides a further example of language used to signify the teacher's identification with the students' experience.

While the male teacher's use of personal pronouns expanded in the context of the girls lesson, the female teachers generally used personal pronouns to express a wider variety of meanings. In particular, they frequently used "I" in a way which referred to their specific experiences and actions and in association with mental processes as in "I know" and "I realise" and "I think". In Bernstein's terms it would seem that the female teachers are more likely to employ personal pronouns "for the transmission of their unique experience" (1965: p.161) whereas the male teachers' use of pronouns while signalling clearly skewed relations of power also assumed a shared understanding and acceptance of that relationship together with a shared relationship to the knowledge and beliefs about sport which underpin the lesson.

### **Different social realities**

Teachers' choices in language in terms of patterns of person pronouns, speech functions, modality and clause complex structures from the evidence described above construct very different social realities for the boys as compared to the girls in the study in single sex lessons. A partial interpretation suggests that whereas boys are positioned as central to the discourses of physical education which value the knowledge, attributes associated with the dominantly masculine practice of traditional team games in Australia, girls are positioned and position themselves as marginal, in need of constant encouragement, cajoling and detailed instruction.

One problem with such an interpretation is that it is thus possible to infer that girls and their teachers are the problem - that is, that the teachers should not talk so much, they should let the girls get on with their play, that they should change their talk to change the way in which the girls are positioned. I would argue that given the context in which they are teaching that at least in one respect to change the way in which the girls are positioned solely through changing the language is virtually impossible. While sports and games and the teaching approaches that characterise them dominate all aspects of physical education, including dance and gymnastics, girls positioning is unlikely to change. Further it may be that rather than changing the teachers' language to be more like that used with the boys, there are important messages here about pedagogical practices and social relations that are actually responsive to the needs, interests and pleasures of girls. It is difficult to either fully support or reject this interpretation from the data available from this study since it requires some comment from the recipients of such talk. Although students were interviewed, the questions did not directly relate to their preferences for different styles of teaching. This would be an important aspect of further work in the area.

However before abandoning the possibility that there is something to learn from these differences for future pedagogic practice Bernstein's notions of elaborated and restricted code can provide further interpretative insights into the differences in language use that have been identified.

Bernstein's (1971) distinction between elaborated and restricted code is helpful as one way of theorising the different orientations to social relations and social control that the male and female teachers had towards their students and the way this is realised in their choice of language. Although an association between the two linguistic codes and social class appears to be more common and also more controversial (Atkinson, 1985), of more interest here is the relationship between the nature of the codes and social orientations to others in an exchange. For instance, according to Bernstein (1971), the major function of the restricted code is to "define and reinforce the form of the social relationship by restricting the verbal signalling of individual experience" (p.150). In contrast, elaborated code facilitates the expression of individual dissimilarity and personalised meanings.

An analysis of individual lessons demonstrated that the female teachers not only talked more to their students but they also made different linguistic choices, in particular choices in relation to describing how or why a skill (or indeed any activity) should be performed. The verbal explicitness of their talk has striking similarities to that described by Bernstein for the elaborated code.

The preparation and delivery of relatively explicit meaning is the major function of this code....The code will facilitate the verbal transmission and elaboration of the individual's unique experience. The condition of the listener unlike that in the case of a restricted code, will not be taken for granted, as the speaker is likely to modify his (sic) speech in the light of the special conditions and attributes of the listener. (p:150, emphasis in the original)

On the other hand restricted code, is primarily characterised by predicability,

The intent of the person is likely to be taken for granted. The meanings are likely to be concrete, descriptive or narrative rather than analytical or abstract. In certain areas meanings will be highly condensed. The speech in these social relations is likely to be fast and fluent, articulator clues are reduced; some meanings are likely to be dislocated, condensed and local; there will be a low level of vocabulary and syntactic selection; the unique meaning of the individual is likely to be implicit. (p:150)

This description comes remarkably close to the style of the interactions between male teachers and their students. This is not at all surprising if, as Bernstein argues restricted code is predicated

on an assumption of solidarity in the form of shared knowledge, values and attitudes of the parties involved (Atkinson, 1985).

By drawing on the concepts of elaborated and restricted codes, and the social relations they anticipate and construct between participants in exchanges, it is possible to link the language of the teachers with differences in their relationships with their students and, in particular, the differences apparent between the female students and their teachers, both male and female. Taking a case of female students with their male teacher, as an example, it would seem that the male teacher's increased talk with the female students is not only concerned with cajoling and 'talking' them into the lesson, but is also an anticipation of a different point of view, a recognition that the girls do not share his knowledge and particularly, do not share his orientation to physical activity and sport. As such he needs to make his intentions more explicit, than he is required to do for the boys. He cannot assume their position in relation to the discourse, rather he can and does anticipate a range of positionings, some compliant and others contestive.

It would seem that the girls behaviour brings the interpersonal to the foreground of the lesson at the expense of the task-orientation purpose of the lesson. In the boys lessons, it seems to be less important as to whom the teacher is dealing with in comparison to what is being taught. The ritualised discourse/restricted code of skill instruction, coaching, refereeing and so on can then be more easily employed. With the female students with whom the teacher is dealing becomes far more important and far less predictable as twenty to thirty subjectivities with varying orientations to the discourses and practices of the lesson need to be taken into account.

Clearly no lesson texts are constituted entirely within an elaborated or restricted code. When whole lessons are taken into account certain segments of the lesson such as the warm-up, lend themselves to a more highly ritualised or predictable choice of language than others. In general however the female teachers in this study showed themselves to be more adept at switching codes than was the case for the male teachers. If as Bernstein suggests "the ability to switch codes controls the ability to switch roles" (Bernstein, 1971, 151), then it would seem that the female teachers are more flexible in their positioning of themselves and their students. Students are thus offered a multiplicity of positionings including those which allow them to be tentative and reluctant but also those which allow them to be skilled and knowledgeable performers.

## **Conclusion**

A detailed analysis of lessons reveals complexities and contradictions - on the one hand the female teachers provide more explicit instruction, more praise and encouragement and attempt to create more personalised relationships with their female students. On the other hand, their use of

language also attempts to more closely control students behaviour through regulatory statements about appropriate attitudes to physical education and the proper comportment of their bodies.

The boys appear to be allowed more freedom. On the other hand their compliance with the discourses and practices of physical education is assumed (except in dance where they are expected to be resistant). For a boy to be non-compliant is not so much to identify himself as a poor or problem student but to bring into question his masculinity, his very identity as male. For girls resistance to the discourses of physical education brings no similar risk, rather resistance can ironically confirm their positioning as feminine in a patriarchal gendered discourse.

The value of this analysis is not in the definite answers it does (or does not) provide rather its value lies in providing a way of recognising how language operates, usually unconsciously to position subjects in relation to specific discourses. Although the focus of this paper has been primarily on the construction of gender, similar methods of analysis could be employed in research which puts other social relations at the centre of concern. The methodology used in this study also provides a basis for reflexive practice whereby teachers may develop a better understanding of their own practices through an examination of the meanings constructed in and through their language choices.

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