CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AND LITERACY PRACTICES IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

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> *"The peace that you are looking for*
> *is within you, and I can show you*
> *how to get in touch with it".*
> **(Prem Rawat)**

DECLARATION

I, **Janitha Singh**, declare that this study is my own work. This study has not been submitted before any degree or examination at any other university.

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ABSTRACT

This study sets out to examine the process through which gender is constituted in the English classroom in relation to the teaching of one comprehension lesson at Springfield Model Primary School in KwaZulu-Natal. The study looks at one lesson in-depth and delves into the representations of gender in the lesson. Using qualitative methods and drawing from a comprehension passage entitled, "Shining moon and his Toy Canoe" (Appendix 1) the study examines the ways in which boys and girls in a grade 7 classroom made sense of the comprehension passage and how that sense-making relates to their understanding of what it means to be male and female. The study shows how resource materials (like the prescribed comprehension, for instance) used in the English classroom articulate young children's knowledge about gender and how they position themselves in the discourses of gender. An analysis and examination of how the learners understood the passage is undertaken, to see how gendered messages were generated within the English lesson. An interview with the teacher was conducted to examine how gender is constructed in the teaching of the comprehensions lesson.

Two important findings are highlighted in this study. The text is an important tool through which gender is elaborated. The boys and girls in this study positioned themselves in contradictory ways to dominant perceptions about gender. However, largely they draw on dominant ideas about gender and maintain the status quo. The research also demonstrates further the ways in which the teacher reinforces notions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', despite her best intentions.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study sets out to examine the process through which gender is constituted in the English classroom in relation to the teaching of one comprehension lesson at Springfield Model Primary School in KwaZulu-Natal. The study looks at one lesson in-depth and delves into the representations that children make of gender in/through the comprehension lesson. Using qualitative methods and drawing from a comprehension passage entitled, "Shining Moon and his Toy Canoe" (Appendix 1) the study examines the ways in which boys and girls in a grade 7 classroom made sense of the comprehension passage and how that sense making relates to their understanding of what it means to be male and female. The teacher's role in the construction of this understanding was significant and therefore an interview was conducted with the teacher. The study shows how resource materials (like the prescribed comprehension, for instance) used in the English classroom articulate young learners' knowledge about gender and how they position themselves in the discourses of gender.

The GETT report draws attention to the lack of substantive qualitative research in the area of gender issues in South African education. The report further posits that in South African schools there is very little gender work that examines what goes on in schools. Recently, however there has been heightened interest in gender and schooling. In 1997, the Department of Education established a Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) that produced a report pertaining to the status of gender in education. This report of the Task Team exposes a multitude of areas of concern with regard to gendered practices in schools and postulates measures to make schools critical and active sites for the fostering of "all forms of human rights, including rights based on sex, gender and sexual orientation" (GETT, 1997: 104).

The GETT recognized that it was working in unknown territory because there was minimal research and tangible data relating to all aspects of gender and education. In this vein, the report stated that future research in South African

education be undertaken by focusing on "qualitative differences in the experiences of boys and girls of different cultural backgrounds and different locations and school types" (ibid, 115).

It was with the above in mind, that I chose to focus on a topic pertaining to the area of gender in South African education. I have taught English at Springfield Model Primary School for 10 ten years. I have acquired an immense interest in the field of gender and education. My readings on gender, education and the teaching of English have suggested that there is a shortage of existing work on issues of how texts are used and understood by learners inside classrooms. Very little is known about classroom dynamics in gender terms in South Africa with regard to HOW interaction among learners and texts within classrooms reinforce and contest dominant gender meanings. I am concerned with the political implications of the ways in which learners are constrained by dominant discourses on gender which perpetuate inequalities.

Gender equality is enshrined in our constitution. The Constitution of South Africa (1996) makes the following founding provision:

> "1.   The Republic of South Africa is one, sovereign, democratic state
>   founded on the following values:

(a)   Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of
        human rights and freedoms;

(b)   Non-racialism and non-sexism" (1997: 3)

However, just as much as gender equality is enshrined in our Constitution, it would indeed, be very naïve to believe that gender equality is really being practiced in all spheres of schooling. Hence, this small study hopes to shed some light on how gender is constructed in the teaching of a comprehension lesson and how young learners' emerging gender identity is situated within this. Given the lack of research and analysis of gender in the classroom, this

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study will provide some perspectives on this area and help to provide teachers with details about what may be happening in their classrooms.

Coupled with the above, is my concern about the emergence of Curriculum 2005 that is founded on the principles of Outcome Based Education (OBE). The introduction to Curriculum 2005 (1997, 1) clearly states that it is vital that the curriculum is restructured to reflect the values and principles of our new democratic society because:

> "In the past the curriculum has perpetuated race, class, gender, and ethnic divisions and has emphasised separateness, rather than common citizenship and nationhood".

The curriculum in South African education is progressively being restructured. In December 2001, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) for Grades R-9 was released. The Revised National Curriculum Statement is "aimed at promoting commitment as well as competence among teachers who will be responsible for the development of their own learning programmes" (2002:2). However, my concern with this pedagogical freedom is that despite such curriculum 'transformation', it is my contention that replacing one curriculum with another, or replacing one text (source material) with other 'seemingly' more progressive material does not necessarily guarantee a delivery of gender sensitive education. Changing curriculum practices must be complemented by proactive pedagogical practices by teachers themselves. Thus, this study will be useful in sharing some insight on how the contents of a text together with the way in which a teacher teaches, may contribute to either a perpetuation or contestation of dominant hegemonic practices.

The role of the individual teacher also has to be explored. In this quest, this study explores a primary school classroom (grade 7) where the teacher taught what she considered to be an innocent, gender-neutral comprehension lesson. It is important to note that the comprehension passage entitled, "Shining Moon and his Toy Canoe" (Appendix 1), is contained in a textbook called "Wide Range Reader – Green Book 2" which is a prescribed text at school. An analysis and examination of how the learners perceived the passage as well

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as how the teacher understood her role is undertaken, to see how gendered messages were generated within the English lesson. Furthermore, insight will be given into the degree to which the text (passage); the teacher's understanding and the learners' existing knowledge were involved in articulating and constructing gender. I strongly subscribe to the belief that unless we discover what happens within classrooms in relation to gender discourses, it would be difficult to suggest or recommend teaching strategies to teachers to foster progressive teaching. In this way, it is envisaged that this study will, in some way, assist in illuminating the aforementioned area in South African education about how texts used in the classroom can articulate and construct gendered identities.

The study makes use of feminist poststructural theories to understand how gender identity and texts are interwoven. Poststructuralist theory sees identity as a process being constituted and reconstituted in everyday practices (Weedon, 1997). A poststructural analysis is useful because it recognizes the contradictory nature of all discourses and suggests that social structures are part of discourse. While discourses are powerful in shaping how people think about gender, for example, at the same time the subject is given agency (Davies, 1989). This way of thinking is useful because gendered meanings that children make of the comprehension lesson are not necessarily stereotyped but open to different possibilities. There are layers of meanings, contradictions and differences which are inscribed in all classroom materials (Giroux, 1986). In this study I seek these meanings by using qualitative methods to show how gendered meanings are constructed in the teaching of a comprehension lesson.

Chapter Two focuses on a literature review outlining the theoretical considerations that form the foundation of the study. Chapter Three elucidates the research methodology used. In Chapter Four an analysis and research findings are presented, and in Chapter Five the conclusions derived from the preceding research will be synthesized, general implications of the study expounded and finally recommendations suggested.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on the theoretical considerations underpinning this study. It is profeminist in orientation. There are a variety of feminist approaches which look at gender, language and schooling. The liberal feminist approach aims to expose the sexual bias in curricular material. The structuralist feminist perspective looks at the reproduction of structural inequalities of gender in the classroom. The poststructural feminist perspective decentres the notion of a rational fixed self. Identity is constructed as being constituted through particular social practices that people have in their daily lives. The ideas of poststructural accounts of identity are useful in this study of language, texts and gender (Weedon, 1997, Apple, 1991, Rath, 1991, Patterson, 1990).

Poststructural Theories

In this section I provide a brief description of how some of the elements of poststructural theories may be useful in this study. There are many different ways of understanding postructuralism and the literature around it is vast. In this section, I explore briefly what is relevant to this study. In particular, my interest is its relevance for gender and language studies.

This study explores how gender is constructed in/through an English comprehension lesson. Poststructuralist theories suggest that there are a range of subject positions that may be occupied in contradictory discourses (Davies, 1997). Poststructural theories have emphasised that power is dynamic. This means that people are not passive recipients of socialization. People actively construct and impact upon the world shaping their lives and others. Foucault (1977) has argued that there is nothing fixed about the subject. People are positioned and position others in discourse. Discourses enable particular groups of people to exercise power in ways that benefit them (Weedon, 1997). Power is not localized but power can be productive. Everyone is ensnared by power but we can modify its grip in specific conditions and as a strategy.

Gender and Language

Poststructuralist theories argue that meaning is the product of a system of differences into which a text is articulated. Meanings are multiple and contradictory. Individuals as subjects are agents (Davies, 1997). They are able to resist and make meaning of their social position. According to Davies, a person is not simply socialized into the social world but makes meaning in active ways. Learners are thus not passive objects, rather they actively take up as their own, discourses through which they are shaped and through which their emergent gender identities are situated.

In this study I am not looking for the stereotypic depiction of sexist images in the passage but I consider the processes by which gender identity is constituted. I am concerned with classroom mediation and how boys and girls are positioned and position themselves in relation to the comprehension lesson. Postructuralism is helpful in understanding how gender and language operate. Reading and making meaning is neither natural nor single and there are many possible modes of reading. Reading and making meaning is socially produced. In speaking and acting from a certain position people bring to a particular situation their history as social beings. We take on particular story lines as if they were our own experiences. In the classroom certain images, metaphors or structures can function to position girls as marginal. For this reason it is important to focus on language. If we can see how we are being positioned and position ourselves as gendered people then we can also refuse such positions. Patterson (1990), for example, looks at how meanings are constructed in the English classroom. She claims that one has access to the way in which one's identity is constructed. This is achieved by showing how the text is produced and dominant meaning is foregrounded. Reading can appear so neutral and normal but dominant readings are produced and asserted by the powerful group. Individual responses are shattered by the powerfulness of dominant readings. This is not to say that individuals do not challenge. They do but dominant readings make it difficult to sustain the challenge. For example, in a comprehension lesson the meanings that are ascribed to gender is based on dominant readings, but teachers are powerful

and they can allow challenge to occur or foreground dominant gender stereotypes. Learners are agents and they too can offer resistance or appropriate dominant messages. It is for this reason that poststructural feminism offers a way for understanding the subjects in this study.

Gender, curriculum and language

Connell (1987: 99) points out that institutional settings such as schools are places "where social practices are gender structured". In practice, schools provide two types of curriculum: firstly, the 'official' curriculum and, secondly, the 'hidden' curriculum. In the case of the former, schools very often display gendered practices openly. For instance, boys are expected to carry or move furniture around while girls are not expected to do so. In the case of girls, it is expected of them to clean or neaten up the class. In other words, the expectations of learners at school are based on their gender.

With regard to the 'hidden' curriculum, schools transmit, very unconsciously, messages about notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. Acker (1994: 93) aptly sums up this contention when she points out that in schools "gender is a major organising principle, applied to uniforms, curricular subjects, administrative practices, classroom activities and even the use of space within and around the school". The school is a site of multiple power relations. These are not simply negative. At this point, it must be borne in mind that although schools may be sites for the reinforcement of gender inequality, they may also be sites for "intervention and change" (Gilbert and Taylor, 1991: 5). Put simply, it must not be assumed that learners are passive recipients of knowledge. Irrespective of the information that learners are exposed to, there always exists the possibility that there will be individuals who will resist or contest it. It must never be assumed that what a teacher teaches and hopes to achieve in a lesson is necessarily materialised in the manner that the teacher anticipates. Futterman (2000) shares the view that schools can provide an ideal arena in which to engage learners to rethink gender roles. So, just as much as they may be responsible for perpetuating gendered identities, schools can also provide avenues for resistance.

In light of the fact that a passage from a text (which is being taught) is central to the study, it becomes necessary to look at the influence that school texts play in the construction of gender identities. Gilbert and Taylor (1991: 1) argue quite forcefully that irrespective of whatever texts are used in class, it must be remembered that these "texts construct and legitimate particular images of femininity and masculinity".

Bearing the above in mind, this study will concentrate on four ways in which texts can play a role in the articulation of gendered identities. These areas of focus will be 'representations'; 'narrative structure'; 'stereotyping'; and 'language'.

Representations
'Representations' convey the idea that school texts (like other forms of media) are part and parcel of transmitting knowledge about particular attitudes and understandings. In other words, they invariably form an integral part about how the reader will come to understand his or her surrounding or the world in general. They lure the reader to interpret or understand information in a particular way. To advance this idea further, the issue of 'gender' can be seen as a category of 'representation'. Davies (1997) argues that gender is a linguistic category of representations that tends to compartmentalise people into different characteristics associated with that particular category. For instance, certain expectations of being 'male' or 'female' are inscribed in society and, consequently, the way one behaves or acts is in accordance with gender expectations. It follows then that through representations in texts, we start to identify with characters in the story and start developing a sense of 'self'.

Baker and Freebody (1989) concur with the idea that the way characters are 'represented' in a story can develop a pupil's sense of identity. Therefore, the way in which gender is portrayed will be likely to influence a pupil's identity formation. They add that when characters are allocated stereotypical sex roles, it has the effect of reinforcing the expected behaviour to the readers.

Stereotyping

Closely aligned with the above is the issue of 'stereotyping' in texts. The concept of 'stereotyping' simply takes for granted that ALL members of a particular group share the same characteristics. Perkins (1979: 30) defines a 'stereotype' as "a group concept (it is held by a social group, about a social group) which gives rise to a simple structure that often hides complexity based on an 'inferior judgmental process' ". In this way stereotyping, by repetition, plays an integral role in naturalising dominant ideologies in society. Thus,for example, constant gender stereotyping in texts reinforces the status quo and perpetuates the fallacious idea of male domination in society.

'Stereotypes' may be viewed as a 'simplified generalisation'. It is a kind of shorthand for understanding the world. However, as it is a way of generalising about the world, it is an over-simplification that allows for little or no change and can have harmful effects. They are quickly recognisable and are used frequently as messages that may be quickly conveyed and understood by the reader or audience. Stereotypes are often considered to be unfair and unjust, as they tend to focus on negative aspects of a particular social group that may disadvantage them in real life, as some people tend to judge people by the stereotypes that they see in the media or even a story, but they may also be used to convey positive representations.

Narratives

Another important aspect of texts (like the comprehension passage) is that they are human-made, that is, they are not natural products they are 'constructions'. The cornerstone of the construction is laid by the writer. The starting point is the idea : what is the story about?. This can be a major theme, a character or a storyline. The three basic aspects of a text/story or even media construction are:

1. What happens? - storyline
2. Who does it happen to? - characters
3. What is it about ? - themes

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Each of these can be part of the original big idea that began the creation of the text. Probably the most important aspect of the initial structure of a text is the way the story is told. The word that is used to cover all aspects of storytelling is 'narrative'.

The 'narrative' of a text is, in simple terms, the story. The story is constructed by the person/s who wrote the text. When we read the text we try to make sense of it so we can be said to be mentally active. We bring to the reading all the aspects of our lives that make us what we are: our upbringing, backgrounds, our education, our life experiences, and so forth.

Thus, 'narratives' may be considered as a way of structuring meaning. An important aspect to bear in mind is that the way in which narratives are created may even code and represent gendered behaviour. Simply stated, the structure of the 'narrative' either openly or subtly articulates gender patterns and behaviour. A number of writers, including feminist theorists (Gilbert and Taylor, 1991; Acker, 1994; Davies, 1997) in their analysis of texts have come to the conclusion that narrative structures are vital when analysing how men and women are positioned as subjects by certain texts.

Language

'Language' and the way it is used in a text is another important aspect to look at. The world is signified by 'language' that can be regarded as elaborate codes and symbols. In this way then, 'language' is regarded as a place where our sense of self, that is, our subjectivity is created. Hence, when examining the story under research, the use of language will be looked at critically in order to gauge the extent to which it articulates gender subjectivities.

In a nutshell, the theoretical perspectives outlined above collectively provides the basis for the research at hand. The next chapter will focus on the methodology employed in this project.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. 1 The Research Site

The school under study is Springfield Model Primary School. It is a predominantly Indian school established in 1955 in Asherville, a residential suburb about 10 kilometres away from Durban's Central Business District. The school caters for about 760 learners from the ages of approximately 5 to 14 years (that is, grade 0 to grade 7).

Asherville is a working - to middle-class residential suburb that was designated an Indian area. However, since the late eighties and nineties, there has been some desegregation. More recently, a fair number of working class and middle class professional and entrepreneurial African families have taken up residence in the suburb.

Initially, the school was reserved exclusively for Indian learners but in the late nineties, in keeping with local and national developments, African learners were admitted. There are also a small number of coloured learners who have not averaged more than 2 % of the learner population over the years. The present school population is around 760, being made up of approximately 80% Indian, 19 % African and 1 % Coloured learners. The gender composition of learners is 45 % females and 55 % males. Apart from racial diversity, the school population is also diverse along ethnic, class and religious lines with the vast majority of Indian learners being first language English speakers while the African learners are mostly second language English speakers (their home language being predominantly isiZulu and some speak isiXhosa). The home language of the Coloured learners is English.

3. 1. 1   The School Itself

The school itself (the physical plant) is situated deeply within the suburb some distance from businesses. It is situated below road level and not easily visible from the main road. The majority of learners walk to school, while some get

there by private transport, taxis or buses. The school has hardly received much of an overhaul for a considerable time and is in a condition of disrepair. It is also overtaxed in terms of resources because of the increase in learner numbers over the past few years.

3. 1. 2   Teaching Staff

The teaching staff of the school is totally Indian and comprises 16 level one teachers (classroom-based teachers who are not part of management and have not been promoted). All 16 teachers are female. The management consists of 3 males. The former includes the Principal (male), 1 Deputy Principal (male) and 1 Head Of Department (male). There is also 1 Indian secretary who is female.

A representation from different religious and language ethnic groups are spread more or less evenly through the staff. While the majority of teachers are members of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), they do not necessarily share similar political affiliation and opinions. Views towards gender relations may differ quite markedly even though this may not be outwardly apparent. Most reject any suggestion that they may in any way be sexist over total support for current political and social changes.

3. 1. 3   The Subjects Under Study

Of the 40 learners that made up the grade 7, there were 16 girls and 24 boys. Using their parent's professional occupation as a basis, it could be seen that the learners varied from working to middle class families. Their ages varied from 12 to 14 years. Religious representation included Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. With regard to racial composition, the class composed 35 % African (14 pupils), 0,05 % Coloured (2 pupils) and 65 % Indian (24 pupils).

3. 1. 4   The Teacher Under Study

The female teacher who taught the particular lesson under study qualified at a teacher training college. She specialises in senior primary school education and has been in the profession for 24 years. During the interview, she stated explicitly that she believed in gender equality.

3. 2 Qualitative Research

In light of the fact that this study aims to glean an in-depth understanding of a comprehension lesson in a classroom, a qualitative research approach was adopted as it is generally intended to determine: "What things exist" rather than to determine how many such "things there are". As Brock – Utne (1996:605) states that qualitative research is "holistic, in the sense that it attempts to provide a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationships of causes and consequences that affect human behaviour".

The qualitative research approach was also chosen as it allows for the use of multiple research strategies to focus on micro-issues within an everyday social situation, such as a school. Judith Bell (1987:6) argues that qualitative methodology will suit such purposes when she described it as:

> "An umbrella term for a family of research methods having in common the decision to focus on inquiry around an instance. It is much more than a story about our description of an event or state".

Consequently, the qualitative research approach proved appropriate to my study as it incorporated the methods of observation as well as interviews to glean data. Furthermore, given the reality that schools are in a constant dynamic of change, qualitative research enables one to achieve a greater understanding of the interaction of factors and events involved in such a process. It is particularly suitable since it is process orientated, flexible and adaptable to changes in circumstances and contexts.

Closely linked with the above, the advantage that qualitative methodology allows for is learning more about the complex ways in which inter-group relations occur and are affected by the school situation, the school's policies and practice which influence the relations between learners of different genders. Thus, it allows for a focus on both intended and unintended attitudes and practices of both teachers and learners. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000: 305) motivate for qualitative research as it "affords the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations".

Stenhouse (1988:49) offers the following view of qualitative research methods that it is: " the collection and recording of data about a case or cases, and the preparation of a report or a presentation of the case. It involves, generally, participant or non-participant observation and interviewing".

The above definition aptly sums up the methodology of this particular study and the following sub-sections of this chapter will provide more information on participant observation and interviewing.

3. 3   Observation

As a teacher in the school, and especially in the context of the study where the focus was the context of teaching and learning in an English classroom, and the ways in which perceptions of the learners and the teacher towards the text shaped the learning environment, the value of using participant observation was realized.

My observation of the class took the form of non-participant observer. This was largely due to the fact that I merely observed the lesson and did not take part in it. I watched what happened to the members of the group and how they behaved. Hence, it was possible to carefully concentrate on the interactional processes of the class as well as the relationship between members. Accordingly, I attempted to understand the context's culture.

The fact that I was a teacher at the school was an advantage not only in getting the teacher to permit me into her classroom, but it also afforded me the opportunity to attain the trust of the learners as I was familiar to them.

3. 4 Interviews

My interviews began with the learners first. The administering of interviews was kept as informal as possible. I opted for this method to solicit attitudes and understandings about issues that were experienced by learners and the teacher during the lesson. Hence, the flexibility of the unstructured interview allowed for opportunities to explore their knowledge about gender. The conversations helped to understand the learners' and teacher's reactions to, and interpretations of, the events that had occurred. At this time, it must be pointed out that the anonymity and integrity of respondents were respected and protected. Quotes of the learners and the teacher are not directly acknowledged to preserve anonymity. The names of the respondents have been changed for the same reason.

The entire class of 40 learners were interviewed in a series of interviews over two days. I found the use of a tape recorder during the interview sessions to be distracting and disturbing to the learners. Hence, I discontinued the use thereof and took notes as the interviews progressed.

3. 5 Analysis Of Data

This is basically a descriptive and qualitative study. One of the primary means of analysis was through content analysis of the data gleaned from the observation and interviews. Although at a very basic level, the inputs attained from the aforementioned techniques (i.e. observation and interviews) were cross-referenced to establish common (and divergent) perceptions and understandings among the learners and the teacher.

The analysis of the data gathered is presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings of Data

4.1 <u>Introduction</u>

In this chapter I present the analyses and findings of the study. The ideas of gender representations, stereotyping and narratives discussed in Chapter Two guide the analysis. In this chapter I show how learners make meaning of their gender by positioning themselves within dominant stereotypical ideas about gender but at the same time alternative meanings exist which challenge the dominant position. The interview with the teacher shows that she does not provide for the space to challenge the stereotypical position and therefore the dominant message is maintained.

4.2 <u>Description of the lesson Progression</u>

The learners were given the story the day before to read as homework. The teacher initiated the lesson by asking pupils their understandings of the story. Different views were elicited to create a more or less coherent understanding/interpretation of the story.

Individual pupils were asked to read out the story aloud and then the teacher asked them to stop at intervals. Pupils were asked questions with regard to meanings of words, understanding of plot, description of the setting and the roles of the father and mother. These were close-ended questions, which allowed pupils minimal opportunity to delve into any other concerns, or issues they may have wanted to raise. Considerable focus was given to the character of 'Shining Moon' and the teacher consistently described him as 'intelligent' 'brave' and 'adventurous'.

The lesson concluded with the teacher presenting the class with a series of questions on the chalkboard. These questions were primarily descriptive and content-based in nature.

4.3. Findings and analysis of data

4.3.1. Boys are brave, heroes and adventurous

In the series of interviews conducted, the pupils were asked if they liked the story. All the respondents both boys and girls concurred that the story was 'enjoyable' and reasons forwarded included:

> Boy: It was exciting because boys are sharp.
>
> Girl: It was adventurous
>
> Boy: It was nice that the boy (like me) was a hero!
>
> Boy: It showed how good boys are and capable of doing a lot like in real life
>
> Girl: I liked it because that's what I expect from boys...to be brave and heroes.

The data gleaned revealed that both boys and girls found the story enjoyable because the boy was a 'hero' or 'brave' as they would expect him to be. However, what could not be overlooked from the pupils' responses was that their constructions of gender involved the girls and boys drawing upon characteristics, which they perceived to be appropriate to their gender group.

It must be borne in mind that the above comments included opinions of girls as well. Therefore, what became noticeable was that the story seemed to offer the pupils images (representations) which they considered either similar or different from themselves. Both the girls and boys based their opinion of the story on their own stereotypical assumptions about sex role divisions in society. In other words, it was apparent that the way in which these pupils came to understand themselves and define their identity was very much dependant on how they saw themselves in others (like the characters in the story). Therefore, characters within a story are likely to construct a child's sense of identity and if the characters offer gendered subject positions, then it

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is likely that this will play a significant role in the child's identity formation, Thus, by adopting or identifying with these roles of the characters in a text which are considered appropriate to their gender, texts perpetuate the social order which reinforces gender distinctions.

4.3.2. Family: Father is a breadwinner and mother cares

Closely linked with the preceding observation were the responses to the concept of 'family'. The majority found the 'family' as depicted in the story (father, mother and children) as the 'way families should be'. The respondents echoed the view that a family 'must have a father that works, a mother who does housework and cares for the learners". From the general view expressed, it became apparent that there was not much questioning about the idea of a 'family'. This may have arisen because such representations of family life resonate with the dominant and acceptable way of living and the learners accepted it as a 'natural' occurrence in life. However, they do resist:

Boy: The family is not natural because my father figure is my granddad.

Girl: My mother and I make up my family.
No. Not all families have a mother, father and children. Some parents have no children and are hoping they have children. Some parents are divorced. Some parents are dead.

Girl: Yes. His mum seems to be caring and will worry about Shining Moon and his dad like all dads will expect Shining Moon to take care of himself. All fathers take care of their families. Shining Moon will have to grow up like his dad.

Girl: Yes. Because a family must have a father that works, a mother who takes care of the house and the children and has the food cooked for them.

Boy: Yes the father looked after the family and the mum looked after the children. Someone has to be the provider or there will be no food on the table.

The above assertions lend to the idea that these pupils did not subscribe to the 'taken-for granted' view of a 'family'. In reality there are different family set-ups. An important implication of these reactions is that the manner in which pupils react to a text is wide and varied. In other words, it will be too simplistic to argue that all pupils will react the same way to a text or passage. It must be borne in mind that contradictory discourses do exist within society with regard to gender and the idea of resistance to dominant hegemonic ideologies must be taken into account. The lived experiences of children point to the multiple ways in which the role of the mother and father is experienced. It is significant to note that there always exists contradictory ways in which gender ideologies are experienced which, in turn, may explain why some pupils either accept or reject dominant discourses. Naidoo (1994:64) supports this idea that readers are not necessarily passive, that is, ideologies (whether gendered or not) are not something that is simply transferred from text to reader. The pupil (reader) comes to the classroom with a myriad of lived experiences and thus will not 'automatically' absorb the content of the text. External influences of upbringing (background), past experiences and so forth will influence the way a pupil reads a text and make sense of it. Yet the dominant way of understanding gender is very powerful. I asked the learners the following question:

If you had to imagine how father, mother and Shining Moon looked in real life, how would you describe them?

Boy	Father, tall, independent and assertive and mother, slim and pretty. Shining Moon, cute and cuddly.
Girl	Father, big, strong, muscled man. Mother must be thin, kind, caring person. Shining Moon must be brave, strong like his father.
Boy	Father must be strong, tall, mother; short, pretty. Shining Moon must be brave and tough.

Girl	Father: big and strong; mother, pretty and loving,

From the 40 pupils interviewed individually, 36 convincingly described the father (whose description is not actually given in the story) as "strong", "burly" and 'big-built". The rationale given was that "fathers are always the bigger and stronger ones". The remaining 4 respondents admitted that they did not give much thought to the way the members looked and retorted that "they didn't know how they could have looked. "

With regard to the mother, she was typified as being 'caring', 'loving', 'petite' and 'gentle'. However, 2 pupils described her as being 'big size', and 'burly'. Their contention was based on their idea that they 'lived on a kind of farm' and therefore she had to be like that because of the hard work she had to do.

When pupils were asked about who they considered to be the most important person in the family, 39 of them contended that the 'father' was the most important simply because 'fathers earn the money to support the family'.

Do you think the descriptions you gave are generally how these people are seen in everyday life? Why?

Boy	Yes. People look at families that are ideal and perfect even on TV it is like that. There are so many sitcoms that have perfect families.
Girl	Men are bigger than girls. Boys grow taller and stronger. Ladies like to be thinner so they can dress well.
Boy	Yes. Fathers are strong, mothers are pretty and little boys are cute and adorable.
Boy	Yes. Kids are cute. Shining Moon was a strong little boy. Fathers are generally overpowering characters. Mothers are caring, kind and always worrying about every little thing.

Only one girl regarded the mother as the most important because she felt that her task of cooking, caring for the learners and home were more important then the father 'who simply went out hunting everyday". She added that 'he had an easy job" in comparison with the amount of work the mother had to do. She related this to her home situation as she felt that her mother was the most important as she was the one 'who held the family together." At this point, it is important to note that although there may be shared recognition of the world as represented through familiar images and ideas, there always exits the possibility of alternative representations and meanings. Hence, the girl's response typifies such counter-hegemonic beliefs since meanings are not found in texts but they are produced in the act of 'reading'. The act of 'reading' is a social process and although texts may convey sexist ideologies, they can at the same time offer sites for resistance to that dominant ideology.

Generally, the comments demonstrated that the pupils saw the power relationships in the family as 'real' because they based it on their own experiences.

Who would you regard as the most important person in Shining Moon's family and why?

Boy	His mother. She is strong and holds the family together. She has a much more demanding task of cooking, cleaning and caring for the kids. Father goes out to work it seems far more easier.
Girl	Father. He leaves early to hunt. He looks after them and protects his family.
Boy	Father. He can protect all of them. He is a hunter. He is brave. He also brings home the meat to eat.
Girl	Father. His dad hunted for food and he would be able to protect them if any animal attacked them.

Once again, it could be noted that the depiction of Shining Moon's family in the passage subtly articulated particular notions of 'masculinities' and 'femininities' for pupils by creating positions for the ways in which females and males are

expected to be. However, at the same time there also exists the possibility of alternative interpretations to the understanding of the sexual division of labour within the family and such understandings run contrary to those held by dominant patriarchal ideologies.

4.3.3. Boys don't cry.

Shining Moon did not cry because 'he was a boy'. Do you think he did the right thing and why?

Boy   No. He should have cried out his fears and whatever he was feeling. He would have felt much better. Being lost is scary and there is nothing wrong in crying.

Girl   Yes. Boys don't cry. They are not sissies. Girls can really cry. Shining Moon was brave to find his way home.

Boy   Yes. He would have shamed himself and his father.

Boy   No. I feel it was okay for him to cry. Nobody would have seen him or heard him. He was alone in the forest. He would have felt better.

What would you have done?

Boy   I would have sat down and thought very hard about what I was going to do and I would have worked out a way to get home.

Girl   I would have done what Shining Moon did and been brave.

Boy   I would have tried to remember landmarks to guide me back home.

Girl   I would have cried and been very scared.

Would you have cried?

Boy   No. I don't get scared so easily.

Girl   No.

Girl   No.

Boy   Yes.

With the exception of two boys and 2 girls the rest of the respondents felt that Shining Moon would have been a 'sissy' if he cried. They adamantly believed that 'boys are <u>not</u> expected to cry' and the 'crying was for girls'. The two boys who did not find anything wrong' with Shining Moon crying argued that it was part of 'human nature' and that 'everyone cries'. The 2 girls shared almost the same opinion, in that, they asserted that crying was a sign of 'sensitivity' and 'whether you are a boy or a girl, we all had emotions and feelings. Therefore, crying is normal for everyone'.

An interesting observation was that several pupils highlighted the emotion disposition of the teacher towards Shining Moon because he did not cry. According to the pupils, she displayed 'pride' and 'admiration' at the fact that he did not cry. They noticed the excitement in her voice and the use of words like "mature", "man", "brave" and "tough". Some of the boys admitted that they felt "nice and proud" when the teacher used such words. One boy retorted "it made me feel better and stronger than the girls". They added that the teacher made it seem 'natural' that boys are like that. In opposition, some of the girls stated that they felt 'useless' and 'unimportant' by the teacher 'harping' on the qualities of Shining Moon. They strongly felt that the teacher was trying to convince them that 'only girls cry' and that 'it is wrong'. One girl was quite vociferous and stated:

> Boys do cry as well! The mam must realize that. Not all boys are brave!

The discourse within which pupils are located will shape them into gendered beings as their thinking, speaking and even behavior will be shaped according to the multiple ways which they can recognize sex/gender as 'appropriate' behaviour. When the interviewees were asked if they would have cried if they had been in Shining Moon's position, only 3 of the boys stated they would because:

> I would be frightened
> I'll cry although I'm a boy
> Being lost is scary and there is nothing wrong in crying.

The boys' who said that they won't cry, generally asserted that:

Men are men and don't cry

Men and boys are not sissies and shouldn't cry.

With the exception of 3 girls, the others contended that they would cry because:

Girls scare easier than boys

Girls generally cry

Girls are weaker than boys.

The girls who said they wouldn't have cried stated:

I don't get scared easily

It does not mean that the girls must cry

Girls can be as brave as boys.

Millard (1998) supports the idea that reading plays a vital role in marking gender difference. She suggests that boys and girls assume a variety of roles that are presented by characters in a text. The characters which pupils come across in texts reinforce the 'positive' aspects of femininity and masculinity and boys and girls are highly resistant to transgress these gender identities represented in texts. Sometimes pupils tend to 'share' identities with characteristics from texts and constructed their attitudes from personal 'identification' with these characters. Therefore, by assuming these roles, which are considered apt to their gender, they perpetuate the social order, which reinforces gender distinctions.

Despite the fact that the majority of responses revealed that the story did contribute to the construction of gendered identities among pupils, it also revealed that at the same time girls and boys in the same class did not necessarily share the same attitudes towards issues of gender, it follows then that understandings of gendered subjectivities are not always fixed but are susceptible to contestation and resistance.

4.3.4. Girls are Weaker than boys

When attempting to gauge the pupils' assumptions about males and females, the following question was posed to them:

> **Father is unconcerned when he returns home but mother is very concerned. Do you think that this is common behaviour of mothers and fathers? Why?**

Boy   Yes. Mothers worry more than fathers do.

Girl   Yes. Mothers show their feelings more. Fathers are strict.

Boy   Yes. Fathers want their sons to grow up to be men. Mothers are usually worrying and excitable.

Girl   Yes. Parents react differently. It also depends on their moods. Mothers love more. Fathers are stern.

The comprehension passage offers learners a means through which gender identity is constructed, and position themselves in the dominant logic where mothers are considered to be nurturers and fathers are strong.

Responses to another question illustrated similar results:

> **Shining Moon's father made him a bow and arrow. If Shining Moon was a girl do you think he would have made that for her? Why?**

Boy   No. He would have made her a rattle or a set of drums.

Boy   No. Bows and arrows are dangerous for girls to play with. He would have made her a doll.

Girl   No. He would have made her a pretty toy.

Boy   No. He would have made her a red Indian doll with black plaits.

If the 'hero' (Shining Moon) happened to be a girl. Do you think the story would have been different? Why?

Boy   Yes. Parents usually don't allow girls to wander off alone anywhere.

Girl   Yes. The girl would have been watched all the time. She would have not got lost. Shining Moon was a boy it was okay.

Boy   Yes. The girl would have been scared and she would have not found her way home.

Girl   Yes. A girl would not wonder off into the forest. She would know it would be dangerous. Besides she would not be playing with a canoe which would have made her lose her way in the first place.

The male respondents who felt that the story would be different, forwarded the following reasons:

Girls are not brave and intelligent!

No way! A girl could never do that!

If Shining Moon was a girl, she would have never found her way back.

The above assumptions were supported by a few girls who contended:

Girls are weaker than boys

A girl would have get scared and just cried

A girl would have not have been adventurous

During the interview, even the teacher maintained the view that 'although girls and boys should be treated as equals, it must be realized that physically they can never be the same. Girls are built differently from boys. Her reaction clearly indicated that the teacher not only chose a text that is more suitable for boys, but also seemed to have greater expectations for the boys' abilities. Therefore, it was not surprising that during the observation in the classroom, the teacher tended to interact more with the boys and greater preference seemed to be given to boys' answers and responses.

What went unnoticed by the teacher was her failure to acknowledge positively the responses of the girls. This, according to some female pupils, made them feel 'powerless'. Consequently, the teacher unknowingly (via her actions and behavior) covertly signaled to the pupils that the girls were being sidelined and reinforced the gendered conception among them that girls were marginal while boys were more dominant. It must be noted that pupils are constantly involved in the construction of gender identities and usually base these identities on external models of masculinity and femininity.

The teacher was constructing different subject positions for the girls and boys. As previously mentioned, these positions are not necessarily 'passively' accepted by pupils and some pupils resisted it sometimes by becoming quieter. Two of the girls admitted in the interview that:

> I became quieter because I found no use in trying to answer.
> Mam was being unfair so I decided not to bother anymore.

Following from above, it must be borne in mind that in speaking and acting from a certain position, pupils bring to a particular situation their history as social being. Pupils tend to take on particular story lines as if they were their own experiences. In the classroom under study, it became evident how certain images and representations functioned to position girls as marginal.

4.4. Teacher's Construction of Gender

In this section I draw from the interview with the teacher to demonstrate her understandings of gender and how it positioned the boys and girls in her classroom:

> **What was your objective for this lesson?**
> To get learners to understand the plot; meanings of the words; description of setting and the role of parents. The character (main) of Shining Moon was also to be brought out.

What are your views on the family unit?

I honestly do not subscribe to the view that a family has to necessarily comprise parents, that is father and mother. Reality is such that many pupils come from broken families, therefore the idea of a typical family has to be looked at again.

So why did you not discuss this idea with the learners during the lesson?

I did not find that necessary as I believe it is a given reality to pupils because they come from such understandings. Therefore I did not want to question this issue as I did not want to upset the apple cart as such. It is left to the pupils to decide for themselves what to believe or not.

What is your understanding of 'gender' ?

It refers to the differentiation between the two sexes. Each sex is attributed certain characteristics or ways.

Taking your opinion into consideration, how would you describe the characters of mother and dad in the story?

The mother would be lady-like, gentle, pious, nurturing and the father appears strong and largely built.

Would you assume them to look any different from what you have described?

Yes it is possible. I did not consider that during the lesson and while reading the story but I did not deem it wise to share that with the pupils because if I described the characters in any other way, they would not have been so called 'real' to the pupils. Remember, the children come to the class with certain ideas about how men and women look, therefore I did not want to interfere with it.

When you read the text/passage, did you notice any gender bias in it?

Yes, I did notice instances of it.

If you did then why did you not bring it to light during the lesson?

I felt that it was not needed because I believe that it was an advantage that the characters were presented the way they were because it represented and depicted real life to the pupils so that the story will be

more realistic and believable to them. I felt that they would feel more at home with the story. I did not want to upset the apple cart as such. I did not want to create a situation in the class where I open a can of worms about gender inequality. If I did, I believe it would have really affected my lesson objectives and outcomes and cause a distraction. The children are at liberty to decide what they want to believe about gender.

So what essentially is your view about gender equality?

I strongly believe that girls and boys should be treated as equals. But physically they can never be the same. Girls are built differently from boys. Boys are more physically stronger than girls. This is a reality that we must face.

What motivated you to choose this particular story?

I felt that it would be exciting to the pupils especially the boys because they would find the character of Shining Moon admirable. I was certain they would enjoy the story because of its adventure.

What about the girls?

I felt that they would fall in line with the story because let's face facts-most of the stories we do in schools have males as heroes. Therefore, I felt that this story will not pose a problem to the girls because they are used to it. I also took into account the fact the there are more boys in the class, I assumed that they would appreciate it more. I also expected them to be more active and responsive. The girls I expected would follow the lesson and appreciate the story.

I noticed that you tend to be very passionate and expressive when you teach?

Yes I am, especially when I feel strongly about something. This I feel makes the lesson more exciting by using expressions and gestures. In my experience I notice that the pupils tend to be more attentive when I am more dramatic. I choose words that will help express my point of view. Choice of vocabulary is also important to convey messages.

Would you say that your personal beliefs influence your teaching?

I guess it does, like any other educator's would. I do not intentionally influence pupils along my thinking about things. I am proud to say that I

am a very neutral person and teach in a neutral way. I am also very fair
with both boys and girls in the class. I am also a female and I know
what it feels like to be dominated.

Do you believe that your lesson was successful?

Yes I believe it was successful. The boys really enjoyed the story. They
were responsive and eager. I think my objectives were met. I also feel
that the pupils understood the story and appreciated it.

A central aspect that comes to light is the significance of the teacher's
pedagogical practices. The way in which teachers decide to approach the
content of a text is largely dependent on their own ideological assumptions
about the subject. In this instance, despite the teacher vehemently asserting
that she was committed to gender sensitivity her actions belied her words.
Taylor (1991: 31)) concurs with the idea that "teacher's expectations about
different interests, abilities and likely futures of girls and boys are subtly
conveyed through classroom practice".

Inextricably linked to such pedagogical practices is the 'language' that a
teacher uses. For the feminist post-structuralist critic, 'language' is socially,
naturally and historically constructed. In other words, the world is
'represented' through language and meaning is created within their relation to
a shared context. Hence, our 'subjectivity' (that is, our sense of 'self') is
continuously mediated and amended by ideological and unconscious
processes. According to Fiske (1987: 49) our 'subjectivity' is "the product of
the various social agencies to which we are subject, and thus is what we share
with others".

Subsequently, as language is acquired, we give meaning to experience and
we understand it according to particular ways of thinking. Therefore, it is not
surprising that the teacher's use of words (language) like: 'strong', 'brave' and
so forth when describing Shining Moon had the effect of constructing and
reinforcing a conventional gendered sense of identity within the classroom.
It must be borne in mind that the words people learn, use, and to which
meanings are attached, are not necessarily from dictionaries but from other

people's usage. Therefore, the use of other people's words play a role in our own ideological development and our making of meaning.

Interestingly, the teacher did not share the same 'collective' view of a 'family' in the interview session. But she chose not to highlight this issue or bring it into question during the lesson. Her contention was that she did not find it necessary to question it as it was a 'given reality' to the pupils. Therefore, she stated:

"I did not want to upset the apple-cart, as such".

Research, like those of Pratt (1985) and Riddell (1992), demonstrate that despite some teachers holding a particular view of gender relations, they may adopt an ideology of 'neutrality'. In other words, they considered it wrong to interfere with differential gender practices at school because they believed that a school must exhibit a 'democratic' ethos in which pupils and teachers are given the opportunity to exercise their freedom of choice.

Strongly intertwined with the notions of the concept of the 'family' were the pupils' expectations of how the characters (members of the family) physically appeared and the characteristics aligned with them.

The teacher stated that 'if she described these characters in any other way they would not be realistic to the pupils'. Hence, although she professed to believe in gender equality, her actions in the classroom contradicted her personal ideology.

Therefore, the teacher taught in a way that contributed to the pupils believing that the gendered messages in the text were 'real' and 'natural'.
The views expressed by the teacher evidenced how the text played a contributory role in circulating ways of thinking about what it means to be 'male' or 'female'. These responses reflected the way in which the text (together with the teacher's pedagogical practices) interacted with the pupils' 'common sense' beliefs about men and women.

Once again, it can be seen that a teacher's personal belief impacts on the classroom discourse and consequently, pupils are actively involved in inferring the underlying ideologies and making sense of a variety of understandings of gender relations.

Teachers can play a vital role in modifying attitudes and behavior about gender relations among pupils. Thus, a teacher's attitude and belief are important in establishing a conducive classroom context for raising issues of inequality. But the onus is on the teacher to challenge such issues or create an atmosphere within the classroom to sensitize pupils.

Post structuralist theories argue that meaning is the product of a system of differences into which a text is articulated. The teacher believes in gender equality but provides contradictory messages about it. Her neutral stance adds to the marginalisation of girls and does nothing to challenge the representations of gender.

Conclusion

This study helped highlight how gender identity was constituted in the English classroom in relation to the teaching of the one comprehension passage. What the data in this project illuminated vividly is that in this comprehension lesson, the meanings that were ascribed to gender were based on dominant understanding of gender. The teacher offered no opportunities for challenge to occur and merely foregrounded dominant gender stereotypes. Both boys and girls are active agents. Contradictory meanings do emerge although the power of dominant and stereotypical representation of gender proliferates. The challenge against dominant versions of gender exist but the power of dominant discourses arrest the possibilities of thinking about gender in different ways. The teacher's inability to challenge conventional meanings about gender is also made clear.

The following chapter attempts to make suggestions and recommendations in the above regard.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

5. 1 Overview of the Study

This study set out to examine the process through which gender relations were constituted in the English classroom in relation to the teaching of one comprehension lesson at Springfield Model Primary School in KwaZulu-Natal. The research focused on how learners made meanings of gender in relation to the teaching of a comprehension lesson. The study looked at one lesson in-depth and delved into the representations of gender in the lesson.

The study showed how resource materials (like the prescribed comprehension, for instance) used in the English classroom articulated attitudes and knowledge about gender. The analysis and examination of gender showed how a seemingly innocuous text 'naturalized' gender appropriate behavior. In the final analysis, the research highlighted that the gendered meanings, which were generated during the lesson, were contested and appropriated and learners drew upon dominant ideas of gender to make sense of their lives. In other words, it demonstrated how the passage and the learners interacted in shaping their gendered identities. What was also revealed through the research was that although the teacher and text played an integral role in influencing the learners, they were not just passive recipients of stereotypical ideologies or the teacher's influence. Some excercised agency, that is, some were capable of resistance and rejection. This became evident when some learners offered counter–responses during the lesson.

5. 2. Implications of the study and some suggestions for future interventions

The study highlighted the factor that resource material (like the story, which was under investigation) played a significant role in constructing and legitimating particular images of femininity and masculinity. As Kamler and Comber (1996:1) postulate: "The meanings constructed in texts are ideological and involved in producing, reproducing and maintaining

arrangements of power which are unequal". Given the above reality, teachers need to urgently sensitize themselves (through workshops, further research or even on their own accord) about issues surrounding gender with regard to textbooks. Even basic knowledge about 'representations', 'stereotyping', 'language' as revealed in this study will make teachers aware of sexist images that may be contained in textbooks or resource material. This will prompt them to select material more discerningly, which will be a good starting point.

Textbooks and/or resource material that contain stereotypical images and messages of men and women can be used to foster gender sensitive education. It must be remembered that gender sensitive education does not rest primarily on the text (content) that is used-but it also depends on HOW or WHAT is done with it.

Following from above, sexist texts can prove 'useful' in that they can be used as 'springboards' to initiate in-depth analysis of sexist images contained in them. Such texts can be utilized to encourage learners to question their own perceptions and feelings about their gender. Tasks and activities could be set, where boys and girls begin to critically examine the gender identities being represented in resource materials. They can be encouraged to offer alternative subject positions or readings of the sexist texts they are exposed to.

The abovementioned aim cannot be attained without the role of the teacher. It follows then that teachers become change-agents and the most valuable agent of transformation in the drive towards gender-sensitive education.

However, the study revealed that the teacher's purported neutrality impacted on her teaching. Therefore, one of the greatest challenges facing the gender-sensitive teacher is to assist boys and girls to reflect critically on their own lives and understandings of gendered experiences. In order to achieve this, teachers must first begin to question their own ideological assumptions and beliefs about the subject. Only when they are able to do the former, can they

decide on their belief about what reform is possible or desirable in class when teaching about gender.

Consequently, a good starting point for teachers is for them to first reappraise their own attitudes; their own stereotypes they may unconsciously hold; their perceptions and expectations about gender issues. It is only through the former actions can they realize their own standpoint with regard to teaching gender and, in so doing, their action as teachers within a classroom will be progressively transformed.

Possibilities to promote such perception change among prospective teachers, as well teachers within the system will be education programmes during training years and in-service programmes for those who have already entered into the profession.

If a classroom climate is pervaded by an ethos to challenge and 're-read' dominant ideologies, there will exist more opportunities among learners to offer opposition or contestation of stereotypical notions about gendered roles and positions. In this way, although texts dohave political, social, economic and particularly ideological underpinnings, learners are trained and prepared to challenge ideological values that promote gender inequality. Therefore, classrooms not only become sites for the reproduction of discrimination gender relations but also offer arenas for intervention and resistance to them.

5. 3 Conclusion

Despite being a small-scale study, it does demonstrate two important issues. First, learners actively construct their gender in relation to the text. Some make meaning of gender in ways that are contradictory. Both boys and girls contest and challenge dominant definitions of gender but the dominant logic of gender is prevalent which perpetuates the marginalistion of girls in the English lesson. Second, teachers are powerful agents in shaping gender equality but

they need to be alert to these issues in all their practices if they are to become effective agents of gender equality.

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APPENDIX 1

Shining Moon and his Toy Canoe

Once upon a time in North America there was a little Indian boy whose name was Shining Moon. His wigwam stood in the forest where the Splashing River flowed. He lived in the wigwam with his mother and father and baby sister.

His father went out hunting. His mother stayed at home and cooked and sewed. His baby sister swung in her cradle from the branch of a tree. But Shining Moon played outside the wigwam, or down on the banks of the Splashing River. He was as happy as the squirrels climbing in the trees. He was as happy as the fish swimming in the deep, grey water. He was as happy as the birds flying in the wide, blue sky.

Shining Moon had many toys which his father had made for him. He had a ball made of fur and little animals made out of wood. But better than these he liked his toy canoe and his little bow and arrow. The canoe was made of tree bark, with a long string tied to one end.

Shining Moon always held tightly to the string when he floated the canoe. He didn't want the Splashing River to carry it away.

His bow and arrows were made of birch twigs, and he liked to try shooting at trees with them. When he grew older, he would be able to go hunting with his father.

One day Shining Moon went to the edge of the Splashing River to play with his canoe. Gently he set it down on the water, and ran along the

bank beside it, holding the string. The river was calm near the edge. There were many tree roots reaching out and catching the weeds that came by.

"I think," said Shining Moon to himself, "that I'll let my canoe sail down alone, just once. The tree roots will stop it from going too far."

So he untied the string and let the little boat sail all alone. Down along the edge of the river it went—bobbing up and down. Shining Moon ran along beside it until a tree root stopped it. Then Shining Moon took the boat out of the water and walked back to where he had started.

"It goes much better by itself" he thought. "I'll let it go once more." So he went on playing with his toy canoe, letting it sail by itself again and again.

But soon a little wave caught it and carried it away from the edge. Before Shining Moon could get it, it was out of reach. It floated swiftly away down the middle of the Splashing River.

"Oh!" cried Shining Moon. There was nothing he could do to save it, for the river was deep, and he couldn't swim. He just watched the little canoe floating bravely down the river, away and away and out of sight!
He ran beside the river for a few minutes, but he knew it was no use, and he turned slowly back again.

He had lost his little canoe made of tree bark. He would never, never see it again!
He was very sad.
He was as sad as the wind that cried round the wigwam in the cold winter. He was as sad as the birds when they could find nothing to eat in the snow. His little canoe had gone.

For a long time he stared at the Splashing River. Then he said, "I still have my bow and arrows. I'll play with those."

First he tried shooting at the trunk of a tree. Then he thought of a new game. "I'll shoot one arrow" he said. "Then I'll run to it, and shoot again from the place where it lands. I'll follow the arrow and see where it takes me."

So he turned his back to the river, and stood with his feet apart. He fitted an arrow to the bow, and let it fly. Whizz! It shot through the air, and landed a good way ahead among the trees. Shining Moon ran to pick it up. Then he stood facing the way the arrow pointed, and he let it fly again. "This is a good game " he said, "I'll call it the Arrow Hunt."

So he played in the morning sunshine. He shot an arrow and ran to pick it up. Then he shot it again and ran after it. He was so pleased with the new game that he didn't see that he was going further and further away from his wigwam and the Splashing River. He didn't see that he was going deeper and deeper into the forest.

Sunbeams and shadows danced among the trees. Again and again flew the arrow, silver in the sunlight.

On and on ran Shining Moon, further and further away from the wigwam and the Splashing River—deeper and deeper into the forest. Suddenly Shining Moon felt hungry.
He picked up the arrow and turned to go home. But the forest trees were not the forest trees he knew. He didn't know which way to go.

He was lost. He stood still and stared at a squirrel that moved the leaves

above his head.

Shining Moon was sad.

He was as sad as the wind that cried round the wigwam in the cold winter. He was as sad as the birds when they could find nothing to eat in the snow. Shining Moon was lost.

"This is an unlucky day," he thought. "I've lost my little canoe in the Splashing River, and I've lost myself in the deep green forest."

He wanted to cry, but he knew that Indian boys should never cry, so he thought hard instead. "I don't know which way to go," he said, "so I'll look for the sun." Shining Moon looked through the trees.

"Ah, there it is," said Shining Moon. "In the morning I see the sun over there from my wigwam. I'll walk back this way."

He walked in and out between the trees. He walked through the sunbeams and the shadows.

He walked and walked and walked. The sun rose high in the sky, till it was right overhead.

"It's midday," said Shining Moon. The sun went down a little towards the West. "It's afternoon," said Shining Moon. The sun went down a little more and the shadows of the trees grew long and thin. "It's evening," said Shining Moon. He wondered if he would ever find his way home. Then he heard a noise. He stood still and listened.

It was a splashing, splashing sound. It must be the Splashing River.

"Oh!" cried Shining Moon. "If I can get to the river, then I'll know my way home." He ran through the forest, in and out among the trees, on and on over the long shadows and the last sunbeams. He came out beside the Splashing River.

"Oh!" cried Shining Moon with joy. "Now I'll be all right. Our wigwam is beside the Splashing River. If I follow the Splashing River, then I'll find my way home."

But then he thought of something else, something that made him sad again. Here was the Splashing River with tree roots reaching out to catch the weeds that came by.

But this wasn't the part of the Splashing River that he knew. Which way was his wigwam? Should he go to the right, or should he go to the left? He didn't know. He was still lost after all. He stood on the bank and stared at the Splashing River.

He was very sad.

He was as sad as the wind that cried round the wigwam in the cold winter. He was as sad as the birds when they could find nothing to eat in the snow. He was still lost!

Then he saw something. The root of a tree was sticking out in the water, with a patch of green weed floating beside it. There in the weeds, against the tree root—just within reach— was a toy canoe!

It was a little one, made of birch bark. It was his own— Shining Moon's own little toy canoe!

"Oh!" cried Shining Moon in joy. He bent down and took the canoe out of the river.

He shook off the drops of water and a piece of green weed. He wiped the little boat dry. His own little canoe! He had found it! Now he knew which way to go home, for the little canoe had stopped above the tree root. So it must have sailed down the river from that side. So the wigwam must be somewhere on that side, too.

Gladly Shining Moon turned to the left and ran along beside the Splashing River. He ran and ran and ran, until at last he came to the part that he knew. "I'll soon be home now," he thought. It's quite a lucky day after all. I've found my little canoe and I've found my way home.""
Darkness was creeping over the forest now, but there, just ahead, Shining Moon could see his wigwam.

Father was just home from hunting. Mother was just saying, "Have you seen Shining Moon?" Baby sister was just tucked up in bed for the night.
Out from the trees beside the Splashing River ran Shining Moon.
His bow was slung over his shoulder. His arrows were tucked in his belt.
His little toy canoe of tree bark was under his arm. He was happy again.

He was as happy as the squirrels climbing in the trees.
He was as happy as the fish swimming in the deep, grey water.
He was as happy as the birds flying in the wide, blue sky.

Then, as Shining Moon ran in through the wigwam door, the shining moon, after which he was named, shone down over the forest, to say goodnight to him.