

9 Performing discipline in UK primary school classrooms. Challenging essentialist beliefs about teacher gender

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1. Introduction

Gender essentialism is the idea that men and women are essentially different because of the disparities between the two sexes (Humbert, van den Brink, and Kelan 2018); that biological sex naturally determines the intrinsic and unchangeable traits possessed by women and men (Rippon 2019). This principle is inaccurate and outdated and has led to discriminatory attitudes, which is when essentialism becomes potentially damaging. The view that women and men behave ‘differently’ – due to their biology – reflects a naturalist view, and a dangerous one. This is a salient, political issue with global applicability across different geopolitical landscapes. The perception of ‘suitable’ behaviours for both sexes is often subject to socio-cultural variation; this is dependent on geographical location (Humbert, van den Brink, and Kelan 2018). What is globally consistent is that gender politics is closely linked to cultural ideologies (Moosa and Bhana 2017a). The different skills and characteristics attributed to men and women sustain the patriarchal status quo: that gender inequality is ‘natural’, that men are natural leaders, and that women are born followers (Rippon 2019). Such worldwide beliefs perpetuate occupational segregation by sex, and gender inequalities within the workplace. Because of gender stereotyping, men often report feeling deterred from entering what society deems as ‘women’s work’ (discussed in Section 2). This trend is evident worldwide (McDowell, Lazzaro-Salazar, and Marra 2020; McDowell 2018; Haines, Deaux, and Lofaro 2016; Moosa and Bhana 2017b; Buschor et al. 2014; Cruickshank et al. 2018). Too few men enter non-traditional areas of work due to essentialist gendered beliefs, having internalised that such work is only suitable for those with female characteristics. Attempts to address this reinforce stereotypes; a gendered response to a shortage of men that seeks to carve a masculine niche into such roles to make them more suitable. By promoting ‘masculine’ characteristics, damaging stereotypes are advocated, and perpetuated (see sections 2.1 and 2.2).

Such beliefs instead must be challenged if men and women are to be successfully recruited into non-traditional work roles in greater numbers. This chapter aims to tackle stereotypes of essential gendered behaviour that have led to certain discriminatory beliefs about one gendered occupation in particular: primary school teaching. It will outline key, empirical findings from applied, discursive analysis of male teachers' classroom discourse. This will shift how we think about the performance of this profession as gendered; instead, to as it should be seen, as gender neutral. Such research can help challenge persistent, gender essentialist beliefs that lead to bias about certain jobs, and the type of people we believe suitable to perform them (Cruikshank et al. 2018; Carli et al. 2016; Diddham 2015). We must address the damaging role that gender beliefs can have in preventing equal representation for men in what is understood to be 'women's' work (Williams 1995), to tackle the gender imbalance in primary schools that exists not only in the UK (outlined in Section 2), but elsewhere (e.g. in Australia, see McGrath and Van Bergen 2017; in South Africa, see Bhana and Moosa 2016, Moosa and Bhana 2017a; in Germany, see McDowell, Klattenberg, and Lenz 2020; and in Vietnam see Nguyen 2020).

2. Essentialist perceptions about 'gender-suitable' occupations

The belief that gender derives from one's biological sex, shaping a fixed and inherent identity that controls how we speak and act, has led to occupational segregation (amongst many other issues). In this, women and men are deemed to be suitable for different types of work, based inherently on their gender. Such assumptions – that men and women have different skills, abilities, and preferences for work – exist on a global scale (Humbert, van den Brink, and Kelan 2018; Huppertz and Goodwin 2013). These views are centred on cultural beliefs that women are carers, and therefore put family life over work, or want to work within a role that requires such traits. Men, in line with hegemonic masculine ideals, are 'breadwinners', with a need to gain status and financial security. The concept of gendered occupations emerges from what are deemed as 'feminine' or 'masculine' traits. So-called feminine workplaces are characterised by stereotypical features of femininity (being caring, facilitative, supportive). Supposed masculine workplaces are characterised by hegemonic masculinity (aggressiveness, competitiveness, power, leadership (Burke and Collins 2001; Litosseliti and Leadbeater 2020; Mistry and Sood 2016).

Stereotypical ideals about who can perform certain work roles endure because such views are so deeply entrenched around the world (Haines, Deaux, and Lofaro 2016). Attempts have been made to increase the representation of women in leadership roles by introducing targets and

quotas. These repeatedly fail, however, as the traits ascribed to women are not seen to be in line with what is considered to be a ‘leadership’ standard (see Humbert, van den Brink, and Kelan 2018). Similar issues are evident regarding men’s entry into occupations traditionally associated with women; quotas are not being met. The interpretation of a ‘global’ workplace in this current chapter is one that is found across the world: the primary school classroom is such a place. There exists an issue, here, that has global applicability: the shortage of men in this teaching role. This is an issue made even more prominent by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerical variation exists across geographical location, certainly, but most countries share the commonality of a lack of male primary school teachers (Nguyen 2020; McDowell, Klattemberg, and Lenz 2020; McGrath and van Bergen 2017). Primary school teaching is strongly associated with a nurturing role, and with providing pastoral and physical care to young children (Bullough 2015). Rarely are these seen as masculine traits. Such generalised assumptions, based on cultural constructions of gender, have damaging, global consequences of gender bias (Basow and Rubenfeld 2003; Mistry and Sood 2016). Even with frequent government initiatives to recruit men, their numbers in primary schools are not increasing. Male teachers are still viewed as ‘freaks’ (Warwick, Warwick, and Hopper 2012). In certain countries, such as Australia and South Africa, the number of men taking up teaching roles is declining (see McGrath and Van Bergen 2017).

One potential reason for (and problem with) this current situation is that people bond with those that are most like them: we are naturally drawn to those who are the same (Rippon 2019). Therefore, men in powerful roles often recruit other men, as they are seen to share the same traits, and so be seen as more suitable for the role (this occurs at the expense of women, who are viewed as different to men, and more family-orientated [Humbert, van den Brink, and Kelan 2018]). Something similar happens when young boys see only women in teaching roles. Boys learn through this experience that teaching is a role that is not suitable for men. Conversely, young girls learn it is a job type most appropriate for them (one revolving around caring and communication). It is, therefore, imperative that the gender balance of teachers reflect society to teach young children that men have the traits to perform these roles (see Moosa and Bhana 2017b for a discussion of reducing gender-based violence against women in South Africa).

2.1 Teacher gender in the UK primary school: why so few men?

In the UK, 85 percent of registered primary school teachers are women (Department of Education 2020). This makes the very small proportion of primary schools in which male teachers are present important foci

for study. The UK government, primary schools, and Initial Teacher Education hubs have attempted to recruit more men into the occupation through various initiatives (Cruickshank et al. 2018). However, men are still not entering these professions in sufficient numbers since these initiatives began (Thornton and Bricheno 2006). This, coupled with a high male teacher-trainee attrition rate, means that there remains a 'huge gender imbalance' across teaching staff (Mistry and Sood 2016, 283). One possible barrier is that such initiatives are attempting to attract men by promoting apparently 'hegemonic masculine' aspects of the role. For example, they refer to the commonly held beliefs that men are needed to prescribe 'hard' discipline (e.g. giving direct and aggressive orders, [see Read 2008]); to be an authoritative male role model; and to forge positive relationships with boys to get them better engaged in their schooling (Spilt, Koomen, and Jak 2012).

Amongst teachers, classroom management issues are generally regarded as problematic since pupils who are disruptive in class can damage the learning environment for their peers. This has led to classroom management being perceived as one of the greatest challenges for teachers from many countries; said challenges presenting some of the main causes of job dissatisfaction (Klattenberg 2020). How teachers are thought to react to, and discipline violations of permitted classroom behaviour (e.g. a student calling out without raising their hand) has often been incorrectly indexed by teacher gender due to the essentialist beliefs previously discussed. Higher numbers of female teachers are said to have led to a softer, 'liberal' style of classroom discipline (e.g. the use of mitigated directives and criticism, [see Read 2008]). This has, apparently, led to the underachievement of boys in the classroom. As a result, more men are thought to be needed to provide 'hard' discipline to perform classroom management, to improve boys' academic engagement (see McDowell, Klattenberg, and Lenz 2020). In carving out a masculine niche for men in this field in an attempt to make the job 'more suitable', schools, initiatives and policy makers have increasingly pushed the discourse that men are needed because boys need a 'male' role model (Skelton 2003). This follows the (arguably) global rhetoric of 'think manager, think male' (Schein et al. 1996, 33). This is based on dangerous, gendered beliefs, and not fact (see Ankers de Salis et al.'s 2019 discussion on whether men make better teachers of boys than women).

This persistent idea that women are not capable of 'hard' classroom management only perpetuates harmful, gendered stereotypes, that women do not possess the speaking rights and control needed to hold power in their classroom, and that they cannot adequately control male pupils (Read 2008). It also perpetuates stereotypical ways of thinking about classroom management and discipline; that it must be direct and aggressive (i.e., indexed as masculine), to be successful. In fact, such discipline strategies have been shown to damage positive

teacher–learner relationships (see Carrington, Tymms, and Merrell 2008 for an example).

As Humbert, Van Brink, and Kelan (2018) argue, it is when essentialist gender beliefs lead to discriminatory attitudes that they become a problem. Male teachers often self-report that their school's expectations of them to fulfil hegemonic, masculine roles made them extremely unhappy and uncomfortable (see Sargent 2000; Skelton 2003). In various geopolitical contexts, this accounts for the high attrition rate of male teacher trainees and teachers. For example, Jones' (2004) research reports on male teachers who are not allowed to hug their pupils, and Cushman (2010) that male teachers are required to fulfil stereotypical, male roles to the extent that in primary schools this is detrimental to teaching pupils about gender equality. Instead, Cushman (2010) argues this behaviour reinforces gendered beliefs of role performance in young people. The implication sustains that men bring something to the profession that women simply cannot offer (supporting essentialist gendered beliefs that men and women will bring different skills to the job); but also, that they are not capable of giving care, and nurture, as these are not hegemonic, masculine characteristics (MacDougall 1997). Such assumptions reinforce damaging stereotypes.

2.2 What is 'being a teacher' in the classroom?

To perform a teaching role, teachers must combine transactional goals (e.g. teaching instruction and classroom management) and relational goals (e.g. creating a harmonious, friendly, and supportive class environment; fostering good teacher–pupil relations). Teachers must make decisions and perform classroom management, managing conflict and bad behaviour. They must often react to bad behaviour by disciplining students (Klattenberg 2020). In this current chapter, discipline is defined following Margutti and Piirainen-Marsh (2011, 305), as 'activities through which teachers and students address some forms of conduct as unacceptable, criticisable or reproachable'.

The interrelationship between sex and gender means that men are often thought to speak in masculine ways and women feminine (Basow and Rubinfeld 2003). Indeed, men are expected to use language to exert their social dominance in interaction. Yet to what extent can classroom management through discipline strategies really be classed as feminine or masculine? Generalising about all men and women has reinforced gender dichotomies and strengthened sex-role stereotypes. This has allowed for the simplification and reduction of a group of people's behaviours and created an 'imagined community' (Talbot 2003, 70). This is where essentialist gender stereotypes are prevalent; the belief that men are needed to perform 'hard' discipline and women can only display 'soft' discipline (see Read 2008 for an in-depth discussion of discipline). One way to

change societies' perceptions of primary teaching is through an exploration of how the job is discursively performed rather than simply assuming that teachers will perform it differently because of their gender.

3. Methods

Applying a qualitative, discourse-analytical approach to examine real-life classroom discourse, this chapter examines how male primary school teachers respond to important issues of discipline, decision-making and leadership. This research adopts Interactional Sociolinguistic theory (IS), which entails a detailed analysis of the language strategies employed in the context and situation in which they take place. It is important to study the practices used in the classroom to reposition generalisations regarding language and gender 'away from properties that women and men might have, toward their social practices and social relations' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999, 198). Freed (2003) stressed the need to examine how people communicate using the linguistic resources available to them in each specific context. This is because language is embedded in social practice, which affects the choices we make (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). Numerous studies have disagreed on the extent to which an examination of linguistic features and language styles should be gender-based and separate from 'their full conversational and communicative contexts' (Freed and Greenwood 1996, 2). Where the essentialist approach has categorised speakers according to biological sex and assigned certain discourse markers accordingly, social constructionists acknowledge the effect of the specific contexts, and the various factors that may contribute to the performance of one's identity (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999, 2003; West and Fenstermaker 1995).

3.1 *Data*

Fieldwork was conducted in 3 co-educational primary schools in Hertfordshire, UK, which were primarily selected because they had male teachers, resulting in a case study of 12 teacher participants, 6 men and 6 women. All teachers were white, and British. This is not a representative sample of gender, social class or race, and cannot provide insights into intersectionality, but is sufficient for a qualitative, exploratory case study, and provides a substantial database of classroom interaction. Data was collected by the author and consists of two, full schooldays of both video and audio recordings per teacher, resulting in approximately 120 hours of classroom discourse which was then transcribed and coded using NVivo as a data management tool. Video recordings were employed to aid the transcription as these allowed the identification of the pupils when they interacted with the teacher. These also provided evidence of important, non-linguistic behaviour such as body language, aiding data analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher to gather background knowledge.

There are a small number of studies that have demonstrated that female teachers do in fact employ a ‘hard’ discipline style in their classroom (see McDowell and Klattenberg 2018; Read 2008 for examples) there has been far less exploration of male teachers’ linguistic behaviour. While data from female teachers was also collected, this chapter only focuses on that gathered from male teachers.

3.2 *Data analysis*

For an initial identification of instances of classroom discipline, Lewis’ disciplining taxonomy was deployed.

Table 9.1 Types of Primary School Discipline Strategies (adapted from Lewis 2001; Lewis et al. 2005)

| <i>Discipline Strategy</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|---|--|
| Student Involvement in discipline decisions | Encourage the class determine what is good behaviour and involve them in creating and determining the discipline process, so the students understand that their behaviour is not what the other students expect. |
| Talking with students | Discuss and explain the students’ bad behaviour and the impact that it has on others, so they are encouraged to change. |
| Recognition and Rewards | Recognise and reward the students who behave appropriately. Praise students. Reward class when everyone is behaving. |
| Hinting | Non-directional description of bad behaviour so that students self-regulate (ask questions, describe bad behaviour, remind students about classroom rules). |
| Punishment | Applying consequences to misbehaving students and increasing the level of punishment if students continue to misbehave (move seats, give detention). |
| Aggression | Legal aggressive techniques including shouting or yelling angrily, keeping the entire class in over break/lunch time because of disruptive students, using sarcasm, deliberate embarrassment of pupil in front of the class. |

The data was initially analysed and coded into the various discipline strategies noted in Table 9.1. Then, classification from Read’s (2008) discussion of ‘disciplinarian’ (hard) discipline (which is unmitigated orders and criticism) and ‘liberal’ (soft) discipline (which is mitigated, softened commands and criticisms) was adopted to further classify discipline

types. To do this, the linguistic strategies used to carry out the type of discipline were examined in more detail by using frameworks frequently adopted within Interactional Sociolinguistics. These were Coates' (1996) taxonomy on collaboration and mitigation, Holmes' (1982, 1990, 1995) frameworks on tag questions, hedging and politeness, and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model. These frameworks were chosen as they are well established and frequently used to categorise linguistic features and their functions including unmitigated declaratives, orders, and criticism, which are frequently culturally associated with masculinity (Mills and Mullany 2011). Whereas mitigation through hedging, minimisers, use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' to include oneself in the instruction or order, speaker collaboration, minimal responses, inclusive address terms, and the use of facilitating tag questions tend to be associated with femininity (Cameron 2007). As recommended by Holmes (Holmes 2014, 182) to check the data analysis and interpretation, data was presented at both linguistic and education conferences and discussed with other prominent researchers. Moreover, four workshops were held with education practitioners, and over 50 data extracts were discussed to check interpretation, the analysis of which was very well-received and agreed upon.

Sociolinguists have progressed from the examination and explanation of so-called gender differences to take account of the context when examining men and women's speech in scholarly discourse. However, terms such as 'feminine' or 'masculine' speech are still used, despite acceptance that gender can be placed on a spectrum. This is problematic, as there remains an ideology of split-discourse styles explicitly seen through the terminology of discussing such language. As no other terminology yet exists, however, the author has to this point used the terms 'masculine' or 'feminine' in this chapter. In the remainder of this chapter, however, more descriptive labels for teachers' style and strategies, which do not draw on limiting gender norms and stereotypes, will be used. Finally, to re-frame gender norms, an alternative form of expression is offered in this chapter's conclusion: the suggestion that we remove such terminology altogether and instead discuss the language used as indexical of the profession. This chapter adheres to the premise that teachers will use all types of linguistic strategies regardless of their gender and provides further support for this.

4. Analysis and discussion

The extracts in this section present insights from the data to demonstrate how men perform classroom management.

4.1 Male teachers utilising 'soft' discipline styles

This section presents evidence of male teachers using what has been termed 'soft' (liberal, mitigated) discipline (Read 2008). They made use of positive sanctions to motivate and encourage students to work when

they were misbehaving, such as giving out rewards and giving positive encouragement and praise (Lewis 2001; Lewis et al. 2005). Linguistic strategies employed to mitigate this type of discipline included hedging, minimisers, the inclusive pronoun 'we' to include oneself in the instruction or order, collaboration, minimal responses, inclusive address terms and facilitating tag questions (Holmes 2006).

Extract 1 demonstrates a teacher (who works with the youngest group of pupils) encouraging a male pupil to engage in his work:

Extract 1 (Children are in Year 1)

1. {Adam is lying flat on the floor}
2. Stephen: Adam (.) Adam can you come over here please/
3. Stephen: Adam (.) Adam I think I'm not going to be asking anymore
4. because we've got work to do alright/
5. Stephen: okay you can join in with this work or you can sit there and
6. lose your reward

Here, Stephen begins by directly calling the student by name to get his attention and then mitigates his instruction with the modal verb 'can' in line 2. So rather than directly order Adam over, he phrases this as an interrogative. When Adam ignores him, Stephen attempts again with a more direct statement, but we still see mitigation with the hedge 'I think': 'I think I'm not going to be asking anymore', which he then immediately softens with a reason for his request 'because we've got work to do 'alright' in lines 3–4. Giving a reason for his request is an attempt at hinting (Lewis 2001), reminding Adam of the classroom rules and expected behaviour. He uses the inclusive pronoun 'we' to include himself in his instruction to minimise its threat, 'we've got work to do', showing downward mitigation (Holmes 2006). In fact, whilst teaching, Stephen often used 'we' to refer to himself as part of the pupil group, especially when pupils approached him when he was working with others (i.e., 'we are busy working'). He ends his request with the tag question 'alright' which acts as a preventative measure by making it clear what he expects from Adam and checking his understanding. In line 5, Stephen begins with the frame 'okay' to reinstate the rule, before giving a caution followed by the threat of privilege removal. This may seem tough, but the entire threat is mitigated to allow the student to choose the positive option (joining the teacher) seen through the verb phrase 'you can'. Such skills allow the teacher to motivate and encourage the pupils. Throughout this extract we see the teacher employ several strategies using a mix of reorientation and reactive discipline alongside hinting and minor threat of punishment (lines 5–6).

Along with mitigation, teachers made use of positive reinforcement during periods of discipline (e.g. gaining reward points; getting rewards). Extract 2 demonstrates the teacher, Stephen, using such strategies to perform both transactional and relational work with his pupils.

Extract 2 (Children are in Year 1)

1. Stephen: You've lost your sticker and in fact you can earn that sticker
2. back if you do good work (.) look at how many words Michael has
3. written already AND Adam (.) in fact all of purple group well done
4. Jack: <?>
5. Stephen: no don't take a board use a piece of paper everybody else is
6. doing their work that's brilliant keep going okay/ I'm going to get
7. you all money in the reward bank if you keep going

Stephen utilises the rewards and recognition strategy several times here (Lewis 2001). He begins by reminding Jack that he can 'earn' his sticker back (which was lost early in the day due to bad behaviour) if he performs well. This mitigates the earlier punishment as well as providing an incentive for Jack to work harder (Lewis et al. 2005). Stephen praises the other pupils who are performing well (lines 2–3) to encourage Jack to stop misbehaving and carry on with his writing. We see further evidence of this in lines 6–7, where he praises Jack for starting his work, which is then mitigated with the invariant tag question 'okay' to attenuate the force of the order (Holmes 1982). He then offers the positive sanction of 'all the money in the reward bank' in lines 6–7 if Jack keeps going with his work (the 'reward bank' is a jar of sweets). His praise in line 3 also acts to provide motivation and encouragement to the other pupils who are doing their work. In doing so, he creates a friendly and supportive classroom to improve motivation and learning, commitment, and participation when the children are performing transactional tasks.

Teachers often used linguistic strategies to attenuate the force of their utterance to show concern for their pupils' faces when performing discipline. In extract 3, the teacher Keith makes a joke, which itself is a positive politeness strategy as using humour is an effective bonding tool (Brown and Levinson 1987) often used to perform relational practice (Fletcher 2018). However, this then causes the other pupils to get over-excited and despite trying to carry on with his transactional instructions, Keith must stop teaching to gain back control of his class:

Extract 3 (Children are in Year 6)

1. Keith: tis the lesson to be happy
2. {Children laugh persistently}
3. Keith: no you've got to say what you've learned ERR wow hang on
4. hang on I'm losing your attention and that's not the point of this (1.)
5. the point is (1.) the vehicle is a text message and that's meant to make it fun but
6. you still need to share your learning alright/
7. Mohammed: oh
8. Keith: okay/ {child nods yes} Good, super stuff.

Keith reminds his pupils about the point of the lesson, that yes learning should be fun (line 5), but they still must be engaging in the work, learning and sharing their learning with their peers. He uses slang to reduce the force of his utterance in lines 3–4 ‘hang on hang on’ rather than directly ordering them to be quiet or to stop what they are doing. He then explains why he has stopped them in line 4, before re-explaining the transactional work they need to do in lines 5–6. The invariant tag ‘alright’ at the end of line 6 (Holmes 1982) turns his statement into a request by asking the students if they understand his instructions and acknowledge what they must do besides have fun with the task. This is further reinforced in line 8 with the question ‘okay’. On getting agreement from one pupil that was extremely over-excited, Keith delivers praise in line 8 to give positive reinforcement and encouragement (Lewis 2001).

Ben, in extracts 4 and 5, consistently uses strategies to perform ‘soft’ discipline work. In extract 4, Ben is teaching French, but cannot get one pupil to engage. He stops teaching the class and directly addresses the student by name (line 1), but he does not do this in a threatening manner. Nor is this an attempt to deliberately embarrass the student evident by the mitigation employed:

Extract 4 (Children are in Year 6)

1. Ben: /j'ai dix ans/ Christopher I need you to do the actions as well stop
2. fiddling with your shoes just poppet there we go
3. Ben: quel âge as-tu/
4. Boy and Girl in unison: j'ai onze ans
5. Ben: I know people find this hard but you know there's no slumping
6. on the desk picking chatting and being silly is sort of no excuse
7. really is it/

Ben explains his expectations to the student to get them to perform the task and directs him to ‘stop fiddling with his shoes’. He attenuates this directive with the minimiser ‘just’ before referring to the pupil fondly as ‘poppet’ (line 2). This is a term of endearment in the UK and an inclusive address term that softens the force of the directive (Brown and Levinson 1987) that, in this case, is used to show politeness to the pupil. Using such inclusive address terms allows Ben to keep a cohesive link with his pupils, reducing the teacher–pupil hierarchy by demonstrating solidarity. He attempts to carry on teaching, but some children are being disruptive, so once more he stops his transactional talk teaching French. So, again, Ben must ask the children to be quiet and to pay attention. However, he does not do this directly, nor aggressively. Ben mitigates his hinting strategy in lines 5 and 6. This hinting aims to remind students of the classroom rules; sit up straight and pay attention. He also provides a

reasoning of sorts for their misbehaviour here: ‘I know people find this hard’. Once again, he gently reminds his pupils that this conduct is not acceptable (Lewis 2001) and hints to them the classroom rules in lines 5–6 hedging using discourse markers ‘sort of’ and ‘you know’ to minimise the force of his utterance (Holmes 1990).

We see Ben using inclusive address terms (Brown and Levinson 1987) in lines 1 and 3 of extract 5, referring to his students as ‘guys’. He softens with the modal verb ‘can’ which means he uses an interrogative rather than an imperative and repeats ‘please’ twice in this instruction:

Extract 5 (Children are in Year 6)

1. Ben: okay guys can I ask you to please go to your erm literacy places
2. please {children move noisily}
3. Ben: shh shh shh (.) guys (.) we are going to have to be really quiet
4. today because we we’ve got erm (1.) we’ve got SAT’s happening
5. throughout the school {children quiet down a little but are still a bit noisy}
6. Ben: so we are going to do so what we are going to first of all
7. what we are going to have a look at today is shh shh we’ve got to
8. be really quiet today because we don’t want to get in trouble for
9. making noise now over the course of the next two weeks sure
10. we don’t\

A strategy frequently deployed throughout this sequence is the use of the inclusive pronoun ‘we’ (Holmes 2006), where Ben is including himself in every instruction that he gives to his pupils from lines 3–9, a total of 10 times. He explains to the pupils why they must be quiet to provide a justification for his request (Holmes and Stubbe 2015). Instead of directly telling the pupils to stop talking, he uses the more informal and friendly ‘shh shh’ in lines 3 and 7. Ben’s filled pauses ‘erm’ (lines 1 and 4), restarts and repetition (lines 6–7) and recycled turn ‘sure we don’t’ are all strategies that act to attenuate the force of requests to create a feeling of group cohesion and collaboration (Schnurr 2013).

Extract 6 demonstrates the teacher Matt using positive reinforcement for students who had written their homework well, and mitigated criticism for those who had not:

Extract 6 (Children are in Year 7)

1. Matt: you haven’t got a partner that doesn’t matter you just need to
2. sit on the floor on your bottom please (1.) that is all I ask of you
 {pupils settle}

3. Matt: alright I have got a few people that I need to see later about
4. their stories I am not massively impressed by some people (.) some
5. people already know who they are okay (.) but there's some really
6. REALLY scruffy work (.) some people have taken a great amount
7. of pride in their work (1.) and those people know who they are (.)
8. whereas OTHER people are do you know what some of it there
9. was almost GRAFFITI in some of the books (.) and that's really
10. upsetting and we are going to have words about that because I'm
11. a little bit annoyed (3.) these books are a record of all the fantastic
12. work you have done and then to RUIN it really let's be honest with
13. graffiti (.) I'm NOT massively impressed (.) AT ALL (1.) so some
14. there are house points(.) in fact house points galore and for others
15. (1.) it's going to be a bit of a telling off (2.) alright/ {Pupils nod}
16. Matt: cool (.) right let's get that sorted (5.)
17. Matt: alright okay guys erm (1.) alright what we are going to do in
18. a bit is we are going to get into our places and we are going to go
19. back through our stories (1.) some of us are going to spend a bit
20. of time writing them yeah/ SOME OF US are going to improve our
21. handwriting (.) because it's a bit scruffy hmm yeah/

In this extract, Matt is explaining to the pupils that their stories were written in poor handwriting. Before expressing his disappointment in more detail, Matt positively acknowledges those students who had done well giving them praise and recognition in lines 6–7 (Lewis 2001). When expressing his emotion, he minimises his criticism and threat of the forthcoming sanctions with hedges in line 11 'a little bit'; and line 15 'a bit of a' (Holmes 1995; Coates 1996). He then goes back to rewarding and recognising the students who had done well with the promise of 'house points galore' as a means of encouragement and motivation, but also as a recognition of academic achievement. He completes this element of discipline with the invariant tag 'alright' which acts as a check that the students understand what he has just outlined. But it also acts as a means of hedging the force of his previous utterance (Holmes 1982). This deployment of mitigation is a face-saving strategy (Brown and Levinson 1987) that allows the teacher to reduce the level of criticism and therefore the embarrassment of having done poor work which is important for student motivation and participation (Cullen 2002). Being critiqued openly in class may be extremely damaging to a student's motivation and engagement. So, Matt critiques the group rather than single out individuals. This discipline style carries on into his next initiation sequence. His use of the slang term 'cool' and collaborative 'let's' in line 16, followed by his use of inclusive address markers 'guys' in line 17 and repeated use of the 'we', 'us' and 'our' to include himself in his own transactional instructions (lines 17–20) all function to downplay his status and power (Holmes and Stubbe 2015) to maintain a sense of group cohesion and solidarity between himself and his pupils.

5. Conclusion

Essentialist gendered viewpoints often lead to discriminatory gender politics and this occurs across different geopolitical landscapes (Humbert, van den Brink, and Kelan 2018). Gender is therefore a major cause of segregation, excluding the ‘other’ from work roles seen not to be suitable. Damaging beliefs that men cannot deliver pastoral care to their pupils or demonstrate any caring traits at all (MacDougall 1997) means they are often in demand to become teachers only due to the ‘masculine’ traits they can supposedly bring to the job (which also perpetuates that women do not possess such traits), as evident in the worldwide initiatives that attempt to attract men to the role (Buschor et al. 2014; Cruickshank et al. 2018; Skelton 2009).

To tackle this, we therefore must make visible these gendered beliefs and how they manifest themselves in social practices around the world. The notion that women and men are simply ‘naturally’ different, is key to men’s lack of visibility in this occupation. Changing this mindset within societies is crucial; and providing evidence as to how the job is actually performed, rather than focusing on essentialist gender beliefs of what is thought about teacher performance, is paramount. This chapter questioned whether gendered stereotypes are truly applicable to how classroom management/discipline is linguistically performed in the primary school classroom. The focus here was on participants as teachers and their use of styles and strategies that are appropriate for their context and for their pupils as individual learners. Women and men have a wide range of communicative skills in their linguistic arsenal. So, as competent teachers, they need to use whichever style is required to perform the role (for similar research see Nguyen 2020; McDowell, Klattenberg, and Lenz 2020; McDowell 2019). Numerous factors can influence a teacher’s style including the age of the pupil, the training the teacher has had, and the relationship they have with each pupil. Therefore, each teacher’s linguistic performance is determined by their workplace culture, with the linguistic repertoire of their setting having influence on their linguistic choices.

We must increase public awareness that the speech style of performing this role is not linked to gender, but to the environment (Marra, Schnurr, and Holmes 2006; Powell, Bagilhole, and Dainty 2009). Teachers orient the community in which they belong (Wenger 1998); that of being a primary school teacher. The discursive behaviour of these teachers should therefore be thought of in the general public as the discourse of ‘doing “being” a teacher’ to move away from persistent gender norms to de-gender this job to recruit more men. Re-interpreting language use as reflecting professional identity has important implications for other geopolitical contexts, too. For example, Bhana and Moosa’s (2016) work in South Africa discusses that, in their culture, women often face

gender-based violence, so showing young boys that men too can make caring and compassionate teachers, would be an invaluable aid to changing the cultural mindset of how men can behave. To explore this and other political issues across the globe, further research in this area would involve additional data collection from a wider range of geopolitical contexts to investigate if these current findings are replicated and to allow for the consideration of intersectionality.

Transcription conventions

| | |
|------|--|
| \ | Falling intonation |
| / | Rising intonation |
| <?> | Indecipherable speech |
| WORD | Loud/raised voice/Stressed word |
| (.) | Very brief pause |
| (1.) | Longer pause with length in seconds |
| {} | Paralanguage or transcriptionist comment |

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