GENDER AND GEOGRAPHY:
LITERACY PEDAGOGY AND CURRICULUM POLITICS

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University 1992.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

Alison Lee
Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into processes of gendered subject production in literate practices in school settings. Focusing on student writing in geography, the study explores gender differences in written texts with a view to asking what is differently at stake for girls and for boys in 'becoming literate' in school geography.

The study is an ethnographic case study of a geography classroom, focusing in particular on contexts for the production of two texts which are subject to close textual analysis. Drawing on a range of theoretical and methodological perspectives: curriculum studies, linguistics and feminist theory, the thesis argues that classrooms are sites of multiple and competing discourses. Student texts are oriented discursively and generically in different ways. These orientations both reflect and produce wider discursive alignments within the discipline of geography and elsewhere. The thesis investigates the politics of these differences.

Part I builds a detailed account of the Year 11 geography classroom as a set of curriculum contexts within which students’ literate practices are located. Readings are produced of the official curriculum resources, focusing in particular on the syllabus and the classroom textbook material. The spoken language dynamics of the classroom are investigated in terms of the materiality of processes of speaker positioning along gender lines in the production and negotiation of geographical meanings.

Part II produces detailed readings of two student essays: one by a girl, one by a boy. Differences between the two are investigated, drawing links between the texts and the discursive contexts of their production and reception. The argument is made that the two texts enact a significant gender difference in and through different geographies.

Part III discusses the consequences of the thesis findings for contemporary debates about literacy pedagogy. This includes a critique of one dominant framework within which the notion of ‘critical literacy’ is being engaged: that of educational linguistics. Finally, the argument is made that existing accounts of ‘subject-specific literacy’ need to be expanded to engage two senses of the word ‘subject’: both the specificity and multiplicity of the discourses of subject-disciplines and the concomitant production of different human subject positions through textual practice. To investigate the implications of this, theories of literacy pedagogy, it is argued, need to engage more substantially with available theories of the subject, such as feminist theories, while at the same time engaging sophisticated analytics for the exposure of the material workings of discursive practices in school-literate productions.
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For constant loyalty and support in writing this thesis, I thank Poly – Maria Angel and Marion Benjamin. In this and in our collective writing projects, I have benefited immeasurably from the theoretical sophistication of their work and their commitment to scholarship.

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I would like to thank the teacher of my study, Alan A, who generously made his classroom and his time available for me. Alan was always prepared to consider and confront the gender politics of the study. He was a skilled practitioner and I learned a great deal of geography. I would like to thank Karen and Rowan, who tolerated my curiosity, though I am not sure they understood it. I would also like to acknowledge the students of the Year 11 class, who accommodated my presence with equanimity.

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Notes on notation

1. References in the text will consist of surnames only, except where two writers carry the same name. In this case, they will be differentiated by the inclusion of an initial with a full stop, for example, C. Luke.

2. References in the Bibliography will include full names where known, except where it is clear that the writer uses and prefers initials. This is done for political reasons, to foreground gender – that is, to prevent a default attribution of masculine gender to women writers.

3. A glossary of technical linguistic terms used in the text is included on pages viii-xi following this note. These will not include terms considered to be in common usage, but rather terms specific to systemic functional linguistics. Linguistic terminology will be used for the most part without definition in the text. The notational convention within systemic functional linguistics of using capital letters to distinguish categories of different orders has not been adopted, since the analyses are not highly technical and there is little danger of confusion of categories.
Glossary of Linguistic Terms

The terms listed here are substantially as they have been formulated by Halliday in *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985a), unless referenced otherwise. The list consists only of terms used in the thesis, so significant grammatical categories are absent. The order is alphabetical for ease of initial reference, but items are further grouped into super-ordinate categories for explanatory efficiency.

**actors, goals:** see transitivity structure: participants

**amplification:** a mode of realisation of the ‘affect’ dimension of tenor (see register); the process of ‘saying it louder’, either literally or metaphorically, i.e. by repetition (Poynton 1990a)

**attributive relational process:** see transitivity structure: process

**carrier, attribute:** see transitivity structure: attributive relational process

**circumstantial element:** see transitivity structure: participant

**classifier:** see nominal group

**congruent:** the most transparent or ‘natural’ coding of elements of an event with respect to either or both transitivity or mood (see grammatical metaphor).

**epithet:** see nominal group

**field, tenor, mode:** see register

**grammatical metaphor (incongruent):** a coding within one linguistic function which would more ‘naturally’ appear in another (see nominalisation).

**hyperthème:** organisation of sections of text with respect to the textual metafunction (see metafunctions and theme/rheme); a clause or clause complex announcing the departure point of a paragraph-level message (Martin/in press).

**hypotactic, paratactic:** Hypotaxis is the relationship between clauses of unequal structure; parataxis is the relationship between clauses of equal structure.

**identifying relational clause:** see transitivity structure: process

**lexis:** ‘content’ vocabulary as distinct from grammatical vocabulary
macrotheme, macronew: organisation of whole text with respect to the textual metafunction (see metafunctions and theme/theme). A macrotheme is a clause or clause complex announcing departure point of the whole text; macronew is the arrival point at the end of the whole text (Martin/in press).

material process: see transitivity structure: process

metafunctions: language functions in the most general sense related to or deriving from an understanding of distinct strands of linguistic structure. There are three metafunctions: the ideational (experiential and logical) realised at clause level in transitivity structures; the interpersonal, realised at clause level in mood structures, and the textual, realised at clause level in thematic structure.

minor clauses: commonly consisting simply of nominal groups; minor clauses do not participate in either the transitivity structures or the mood structures of major clauses.

modality: one of the linguistic technologies associated with the register variable, tenor, which realises interpersonal meaning. The term can be used in a general and a specific way. Generally, modality refers to the linguistic resources that negotiate the terrain between positive and negative polarity. More specifically, modality, as distinct from modulation (see below) is concerned with negotiating propositions in terms of possibility, probability and usuality.

modulation (see modality): the linguistic resources negotiating the terrain between positive and negative polarity in terms of proposals, speech acts concerned with negotiating action or potential action. Modulation codes degrees of inclination, obligation and necessity with respect to commands and offers.

mood structure: that aspect of linguistic structure which constitutes the major clause-level realisation of the interpersonal metafunction and which constitutes the clause as a social as distinct from a propositional act.

nominal group: a structure primarily organised around a headword, commonly a noun. It may consist of a noun alone or include one or more modifying elements. Modifiers are distinguished functionally as follows:

epithet: a defining or describing element capable of intensification;

classifier: a defining or describing element that subcategorises;

qualifier: performing similar functions but following the headword and usually consisting of a prepositional phrase or a clause.
nominalisation: (see grammatical metaphor): an item that functions as a noun, both structurally and functionally, but which derives from a process congruently realised as a verb.

participant: see transitivity structure

process: see transitivity structure

register: the conjunction of a particular set of semantico-grammatical options associated with a particular social context or situation type. The three contextual variables, field, tenor and mode, are realised through probabilistic rather than categorical selections from the three metafunctions of the language system:

   field (what is 'going on') is realised in terms of the ideational metafunction, particularly, lexis and transitivity;

   tenor (relations among interactants) is realised in terms of the interpersonal metafunction, including particularly choices of mood, modality/modulation, invocation;

   mode (the role of language in the situation) is realised in terms of the textual metafunction, particularly theme/rheme and information structure (Halliday and Hasan 1985).

relational process: see transitivity structure: process

theme/rheme: organisation of the clause with respect to the textual metafunction. Theme announces the departure point of the message (realised in English by initial position); the rest of the clause constitutes rheme.

token, value: see transitivity structure: participant

transitivity structure: a basic grammatical technology for constructing representations at clause level. ie, realising the experiential metafunction, and related to the register variable, field. Transitivity structures consist of three potential functional elements: process: the 'core' of the structure, usually realised in verbal groups; participant: the entities associated with particular roles within a particular process, and circumstance (an optional element).

Process: Process types include material (or 'doing') processes, verbal (or 'saying' processes, and relational (or 'being') processes. Relational processes are distinguished between attributive, involving attribution of some quality to an entity, and identifying, which specify an entity in relation to some role or 'identity'.

Participant: an entity associated with a specific process type; for example, actor and goal ('doer' and 'done to') with respect to a material process, carrier and attribute (entity and quality) with respect to an attributive relational process, and token and value ('identified' and 'identifier') with respect to an identifying relational process.
Preface

Any beginning is determined by the exclusions it operates and the conclusions it repeats. A beginning is not an origin; there can be no founding or finding of first principles which would be prior to the working out of those principles in the course of an argument.

(Frow 1986:1)

This thesis is about writing; it is also an exercise in writing. Its field of concern is the politics of school literacy theories and pedagogic practices; its form conforms to the specifications and constraints of a specific written genre: the thesis. It is impossible to separate these two dimensions of the enterprise which meet at the site of this text; indeed, it is extremely productive to consider the relation of one with the other. Another way of saying this is to note that the thesis is a particular kind of “student text” (P. Gilbert 1989).1 At the same time, within this text, other student texts are made the object of investigation. It is in this sense, for instance, that this Preface stands as much for being a ‘Preface’ of a specific genre, a textual exercise governed by specific institutional rules, as it attempts to stand as an account of a field: a secondary school geography classroom and its literate practices.

This primary move of intrication is a deliberate and necessary production and pronouncement of a complexity. That is, rather than clouding the issue, it brings a necessary complexity to light—a complexity concerning the production, performance and status of knowledge in specific institutional locations. Questions of literacy and schooling are what this thesis is about, in both of the ways indicated in the opening sentence. Here the term ‘literacy’ is understood as both access to particular discourses and subjection to the rules of those discourses. First, the title, *Gender and Geography: literacy pedagogy and curriculum politics*, indicates, among other things, that the thesis is concerned with questions of school literacy, the specific reading and writing practices of the subject-disciplines of compulsory schooling. Literate practices in the school context concern the (re)production of legitimate knowledges in appropriate textual forms. To be deemed school-literate is to have participated, more or less non-coercively, in what Lather terms “the textual staging of [school] knowledge” (Lather 1988).

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1 This is not to deny or gloss over important distinctions between doctoral- and school-level writing, not the least of which is that the thesis is also in important ways a 'public' text, as I consider in more detail below.
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1 This is not to deny or gloss over important distinctions between doctoral- and school-level writing, not the least of which is that the thesis is also in important ways a ‘public’ text, as I consider in more detail below.
Second, the thesis, as genre and as text, also functions as a particular, disciplined performance of knowledge. As a product of research (understood as a production of new knowledge) it nevertheless functions also as initiation into a disciplinary or professional community, with its particular regimes of truth. To be authorised as a proper text, then – indeed, to be intelligible at all – a thesis must reiterate those meanings and forms which are available to, and have currency among, the scholars who will receive it. The production of a thesis, then, is itself also a matter of access and subjection. It is a matter of performance, of writing. That is, it is a specialised form of literate practice.

Literacy is understood here as textual practice and textual practice is a form of social practice. All texts are produced within particular relations to particular and multiple contexts. The production of this text, for instance, is readily and complexly contextualised in relation to a particular school classroom, a particular geography curriculum, a particular university with its particular politics of knowledge production, a particular feminist writing group, a contemporary international debate over literacy pedagogy, a thesis examination process. At issue for all instances of textual production and reception, then, are some complex relationships: between text and context; between literacy and learning; between the performance of knowledge and self-formation; between social and cultural reproduction and the making of the new.

What is important to point out, therefore, is that a text has no necessary or transcendent identity. Rather, the attribution of meaning to a text will only ever be the assignation of a provisional identity, within the specific institutional context of its production and reception. In the case of the thesis, this state of affairs is powerfully illustrated in terms of the strategic selection of examiners. Who will read me? Who is reading me now? In the case of school texts, as will be mapped in some detail in the following chapters, there are multiple and complex determinants brought to bear on what ultimately any single piece of student writing is deemed to be. Of course, to argue for the necessary provisionality of textual identity is not to deny the power-full implications of particular ascriptions of identity, the particular consequences for writers situated in subordinate positions within institutional regimes.

This thesis is informed by particular kinds of critical theory: theory which demands that both complexity and provisionality of knowledge claims define the arena within which the text is produced and received. To refuse this complexity – to claim transparency and autonomy for the thesis (defining it classically in terms of the constitution of particular, unproblematised relations of subject and object; knower and known) – would be to efface it as writing. ‘Writing’ here is provisionally understood as the production of particular kinds of subject positions. Without preempting methodological considerations taken up in Chapter 1, it is important to signal here that the refusal of the productivity of
writing would necessarily also delimit what can count as writing in the case of the body of school texts which, through the production of this thesis, I have constituted as the research domain. If these school texts are to be available for certain kinds of readings and re-writings, in accordance with the research agenda, then this thesis, understood as writing, must itself also become part of the data. This means that this text asks to be read in some of the same ways as the school texts are read throughout the thesis – that is, in terms of the production of subjectivities, and of the politics of such production. This is in part, then, a ‘student text’ about ‘student texts’. What follows is an elaboration of this point.

As an exercise in writing and about writing, this Preface functions, and and also seeks to function, as a statement of its intertextual location. As Frow (1986:1) puts it, “a beginning is the more or less differential repetition of a series of other texts”. “However”, he goes on, “it is also, in Edward Said’s sense, a point of departure, a determinate production of difference.” The act of constituting a research domain – which makes possible the production of a thesis – is in the last analysis a political act. While no resulting analysis can escape the metaphysics of presence, a certain essentialism becomes the necessary condition for the point of departure which is motivated by a politics – a desire to produce a difference.

This Preface is a first attempt, then, to be explicit about the exclusions the thesis operates and the conclusions it repeats in the process of setting up the conditions of possibility for that particular form of conceptual and political exchange on the topic of gender and school writing which constitutes the thesis text. At the same time, it represents an attempt to explicate the function of the Beginning in the whole text as the signal of a “coming between – an intervention, or a mediation” (Frow, 1986:1). For instance, by beginning with Frow’s words on beginnings, I signal to a reader familiar with his work a concern with what contemporary literary theory might bring to current debates about literacy and schooling. In the present climate of debate on writing pedagogy in Australia, this in its turn signifies some important inclusions, exclusions and conclusions, and a clearly interventionist agenda.

As a beginning, then, it is necessary to locate a point of intersection of a particular “series of other texts”; to invoke a set of intertextual relations brought to bear on the constitution of the research field: gender, writing and schooling. It should be pointed out here, briefly (and expanded in a discussion of methodologies in Chapter 1) that the notion of ‘text’ is not limited to literary or academic published ‘written’ texts, but rather one which includes any form of semiotic production. Texts exist in complex relations with other texts. Hence, notions of context and intertextuality require (and will in the thesis receive) careful formulation. The purpose here is to begin to construct and position a textual ‘self’, a
writing subject in this text situated explicitly and in particular ways within an educational project. Writing, understood simultaneously as knowledge production and subject formation, is construed first and foremost as a form of positioned practice. Again, there are two significant dimensions to this exercise: that of the thesis as ‘student text’ within the institutional contexts of its production and reception; and that of the very specific and powerful regimes of schools and their attendant practices and pedagogies of literacy.

In relation to the first dimension, the concept-metaphor of positioning is useful to explicate the politics of text production. The post-graduate writer-subject is positioned in particular ways within that specific process of institutional training, the PhD. What the student-writer is required to do is to take up an appropriate position — that is, one of an appropriate kind and degree of authority — within a text which is to stand as evidence of the success of that training. Hence, the production of an account of intertextual location functions in part as a rite of passage: the establishment of the right to speak. In such instances, what is traditionally performed is the reiteration of sets of statements derived from the texts of knowledge – those privileged texts which have, in Barthes’s (1977) sense, become “works”. This is not to suggest that intertextuality as history can be so neatly identified and marked off from the production of the new. On the contrary, following Derrida, all the linguistic choices which have been made in the building of this text to this point bear the trace of other texts, and hence this text is only ever readable in terms of those traces. The thesis text itself can only function as a particular re-writing of a history and a passage towards a point of beginning.

In relation to the second dimension, the task, within the text of the thesis, is to construct a writer-‘self’ explicitly positioned within current debates about literacy and schooling. Here, I stress the function of the beginning, in Frow’s terms, as a strategic “production of difference”. To this end, I am at pains to articulate an investment in this project, and an intellectual commitment to intervention in current and currently-prescribed literacy-pedagogic practices. The writing position, then, is one of a particular relation to pedagogic practice. It is marked off, on the one hand, from a critical position ‘outside’ which might constitute ‘the school’ as an object of scrutiny informed by particular (other) disciplinary concerns. It is a position marked, on the other hand, by its difference from currently-dominant representations of, and interventions into, that practice. From this beginning, the task of the thesis can be understood as an elaboration and defence of that latter difference.

To do this, I draw also on a series of other “other texts” (to reiterate Frow’s words): texts which do not enjoy the status of “works”. These other texts are action texts, life texts, texts of histories, of anecdotes and of experiences. Among others, these are the texts of a certain ‘insider knowledge’; a set of experiences and concerns produced from ten years of
labour as a teacher in a secondary school English classroom. These are only apparently of a different order of knowledge from those knowledge traditions chronicled above. Here, they are not proposed so as to be either valorised or subordinated, or even essentially distinguished, with respect to these other intertexts. Rather, what is signalled here, by way of introducing a methodology for this thesis, is a re-valuing of the piecemeal and the local nature of curriculum action: the anecdotal, the experiential and the biographical, together with other marginalised texts in the field of literacy research and pedagogy. These are articulated here as one important “reading formation” (Bennett 1984) among others at hand. This is an assertion of the validity and importance of revisiting what is most materially ‘at hand’, that which is marginalised and suppressed in the terms of more orthodox forms of inquiry. This is an essential process if social regimes which produce these knowledges are to be interrogated and if new kinds of knowledge are to be made.

I have briefly sketched a writing ‘self’ within this text, located within a multiplicity of intertexts. This is, then, a multiple ‘self’. The ‘I’ in this text is simultaneously a writer, a student (writer), an ‘apprentice’ academician, a substantive academic, a teacher, and a woman. To ‘be’ one thing is not to ‘not-be’ another. In particular, this formulation raises the question of gender, and with the introduction of gender comes issues of power and of a particular form of politics. The nineteen nineties are being hailed in some quarters as the era of ‘post feminism’. It almost seems inevitable in a ‘post-’ era, a time of general demise of grand narratives and oppositional discourses, that feminism, too, is deemed to have ‘passed on’. In such a climate, intellectual work carried out in the name of feminism appears to be less than engaging. Indeed, a common cry amongst the ‘smartest’ academic circles in recent times has been that they’ve “heard it all before”. It might be fair to conclude that this is the decade which will mark the resolution of the gender/power struggle, and that all there is to be known and done in the redressing of masculine hegemony is about to materialise.

That this position is articulated from a position of privilege should surprise no one. That it is (young, thin, heterosexual) white male cultural theorists who want to refuse the

2 I take from Patterson (1989) the use of a lower case ‘e’ to mark English as a school subject-discipline and to distinguish it from English as a language.

3 The category of ‘experience’ becomes central to the development of an argument about the politics of subject production through textual practice in an educational context. What is important to point out here, however, is that it is not proffered at this stage in an unproblematised privileging of the personal and the individual which characterises liberal-humanist discourses in education and elsewhere. Nor is it a paradoxical return to empiricism. Rather, feminism and postmodernism both produce important ways of both valorising and politicising the particular, which disrupt the authority of orthodox disciplinary work.

4 I owe this list to Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989), who has developed the richest description of positionings of social dominance that I have encountered.
legitimacy of feminists’ struggles to name their subordination and marginalisation within the academy and elsewhere should indicate that ‘post feminism’ is in fact nothing more than the latest mutation in a long genealogy of strategies to silence women. It is in this climate, and with the intention of placing issues of pedagogy and schooling firmly in the ‘mainstream’ arena of the concerns of the human sciences, that this thesis situates itself as feminist work. Its brief is to demonstrate that ‘gendering’ is a central and crucial function of schooling; that currently available ways of engaging the issue have not succeeded in changing the distribution of power along gender lines, and that what is needed for there to be any possibility of effective challenges to masculine power is more and better ways of investigating and representing the processes and effects of gendering practices in schools.

Within the state institutions of the university and the school, as well as more generally within what might be termed the ‘universe of discourse’, all characterised in feminist critiques as patriarchal, an explicit self-positioning in gendered terms is powerfully productive of difference. That is, to write as a woman within these contexts – or at least, to signal the construction of an explicitly ‘feminised’ writer-subject – is for my purposes an important political project. This means, on the one hand, the textual production of a critical commentary with respect to the institutional regimes in question. On the other hand, it means that certain reading positions become available, differentiated along the lines of gender-belonging and gender conscientisation. To engender the writer is always to engender the reader. Again to be noted here is an important coming-together of what in more orthodox forms of educational research would be considered as two distinct dimensions of the project – those of writer-subject and research-object – in a newly intricated relation, one with the other. I simultaneously write as a woman within one educational-institutional context, and write about writing-as-a-young-woman (and indeed also about writing-as-a-young-man) within another. There are complex relations of power and of identification among the various realisations of these relations to be investigated, in the course of constructing an account of literate practices in a specific curricular location.

There is at this intersection an opening of a field, a framing of an agenda. A beginning in many respects marks an end, or at least, as Brooks (1984:94) notes, it must, in some way “be determined by the sense of an ending”. There is a politics at stake here; an explicit positioning of the researcher/writer within the field of literacy and schooling, marked indeed at the outset, in the title of the thesis, by the priority assigned the category ‘gender’. Gender politics above all, then, motivate this research project. The “ending” might even at this stage be “sensed”, albeit dimly, in terms of a genre of ‘gender and education’ research. At issue, generally, will be questions of representation, of participation and of power. This will be a project of critique but also one for the imagining of other possibilities.
More precisely, however, there is the question of the relationship of the work performed in this thesis to other work in the field of literacy studies. In particular, in a field dominated by considerations of competences and outcomes, what is the function and significance of working within critical cultural- and social-theoretical perspectives and traditions? What for instance will be at issue in dialogue with other, currently prevailing, representations of literacy pedagogy? How can pedagogy be otherwise conceived? Again, the prioritising of gender in an investigation of school writing informed by feminist and poststructuralist theorising puts a particular set of problems on the agenda: the relationships between gender and power, between power and knowledge, between textual practice and (gendered) subject production.

More precisely still, there is the question of the specific site for this investigation of issues of gender, writing and schooling: a senior secondary school geography classroom. For many reasons, problems of school literacy, of writing and indeed of gender have traditionally (though of course not exclusively) been raised in the domain of the school subject-discipline of English. While important, this has been both limited and limiting, as the following brief sketch will show. First, early literacy instruction has focused in large measure on reading and the writing of fictional narratives, such that literacy has, even in the primary school, often come to count primarily as literary literacy (Dixon [1975], Martin and Rothery [1980,1981], B. Green [1986]). Second, it is English teachers who have, on the whole, taken responsibility for post-primary literacy education, within a general (largely unexamined) curricular separation of ‘content’ and ‘language’, and with an accompanying continued privileging of the literary. Third, influential debates about what counts as appropriate language education and hence literacy education have centred until recently within the English teaching lobby, at least in England and Australia. Proponents of ‘basic skills’ have vied with ‘whole language’ advocates, and with custodians of the ‘Great Tradition’ (Dixon 1975), for what counts as an appropriate initiation for the young into a literate culture. Outside the field of English teaching, school literacy education has all-too-often remained an issue of ‘functional’ levels of competence, within a conceptualisation of literacy as a generalised and generalisable body of autonomous ‘skills’ (Grant 1986, Levine 1986).

Finally, much of the work on the gendering of language has been done in the field of literary texts, and there is no comparable body of analysis of other discursive domains. Within the mainstream literary tradition, a whole post-nineteen-sixties generation of Anglo-American and French feminist literary critics have written, and have themselves been intensively written about (Moi 1985). This collection of work, together with other work in disciplines such as psychology and linguistics, has made possible a substantial project of gender research in the field of literacy education, and specifically, on the
gendering of children's reading and writing in English (for example, P. Gilbert [1987], P. Gilbert and Rowe [1989], Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson [1989], Patterson [1990]). Indeed, recent syllabus developments in English and literature (in Western Australia and elsewhere) are informed in part by this work, and it is now possible to argue that English teaching's female majority, together with some male colleagues, have some sense of the significance of gender in the literary fictions which are read and written in their classrooms. (See, for example, English in Australia 95 (1991), special edition titled *Reading Differently*).

While English is understood to be about 'language', in one sense or other of that word, the other 'academic' school subject-disciplines, the sciences and social sciences, are presented principally in terms of their 'content'. This content is in turn typically represented in terms of its objectivity, neutrality and rationality. This is particularly so in the secondary school, as these subjects increasingly take on the identity of the disciplines from which they derive. Here, a powerful set of cultural binaries is aligned in perhaps their most effective and enduring form, within the school curriculum:

- content/language
- content/process
- objectivity/subjectivity
- rationality/irrationality
- man/woman

While English, language, and 'subjectivity'⁵ are in this sense feminised, the sciences are understood in terms of universal truths. Geography, which will be described in Chapter 1 as an 'emergent science', is no exception to this. Geographical representations of the spatial world come to stand for the world itself, a world which can be thoroughly mapped and gridded by means of the descriptive and explanatory discursive tools of the discipline. While the subject-discipline of English has been openly fraught with conflict and contestation over its principles and its practices, content-area knowledge is typically regarded as 'simply there', self-evident and independent of the social context in which it was produced, and the conditions of its incorporation into the curriculum. Similarly, it is seen as independent of the language in which it is 'transmitted'.

⁵ The term as used here is fundamentally different from the way in which it is used in the thesis generally, as outlined in Chapter 1, subsection 1.1.3; here, there is a 'commonsense' opposition with 'objectivity' invoked. I return to this point in Chapter 8.
There are two important consequences for educational theory and practice in such a ‘commonsense’ account. First, the myth of the neutrality and objectivity of scientific knowledge means that it is assumed to be free of issues of gender. Second, the transparency of this knowledge means that it is somehow separable from the language in which it is encoded. In the case of the former assumption, even the growing body of work in gender and science education has not adequately addressed the serious critiques mounted within poststructuralist and feminist critical theories of such issues as the masculinism of dominant versions of scientific rationality and their realisation in discourse, curriculum and pedagogy. Rather, it has confined itself largely to issues of participation and equity (Kenway and Modra 1989).

In the latter case, it has not been until very recently indeed that rigorous analytic work has been done on what participating in scientific-literate practices might involve (for example, work in the systemic-functional linguistic tradition to be reviewed in Chapter 7). However, even this work has on the whole confined itself to description and analysis for the purpose of more effective reproduction. The point to be made briefly here is that poststructuralist and other recent work on discourse has effectively problematised realist conceptions of the world which see language as a “conduit” (Reddy 1979) for knowledge concepts which exist in an unmediated relationship with ‘reality’. This critical work stresses the productivity of language, together with the historical and social specificity of the knowledge which is produced by means of language. The vast bulk of what goes by the name of ‘knowledge’ is discursive and there is no absolute or necessary distinction between the production of knowledge and its exposition or presentation. This point opens the way for a project of investigation of the social relations of production of knowledge, and the realisation of these relations in knowledge discourses. The argument here will be that gender, as one powerful social dynamic, is inscribed in discourse in the sense that subject positions are set up and taken up differently by males and females in and through participation in discursive practices in specific institutional sites. Rather than claim this as a universal truth, however, the thesis investigates processes by which this happens in a specific location.

During the history to date of this PhD research project – in the process of reaching a point which could be characterised as what Frow calls the “sense of an ending” which marks the possibility of arriving at a beginning – many exclusions have been operated. This beginning has been set up by a series of closures. Chief among these, perhaps, is the editing-out of a rich body of data produced within a secondary school English classroom. Of course, this work leaves its trace, continuing, even though in a muted way, as a point of dialogue and comparison/contrast with the material which remains. There are many reasons that could be given for this particular exclusion, but the one that I will assign
primary status can serve to make an important theoretical and methodological point. English is too obviously gendered, too obviously writing-based (Doyle 1989). English is too central and obvious a site for tracing the effects of gendered subject production in textual practice. English takes textuality as its subject-matter, and it sets up the problematic text as its object of analysis. This is so at all levels of education and inquiry, to collapse what are otherwise important distinctions between the domains of English literature as a discipline in universities and the subjects, English and literature, in the school curriculum.

The important move, then, has been to take the notion of the problematic text from its territory within English and apply it to another site: to read geography from an unexpected direction. This move has allowed an important glimpse at the productivity of discourses—the power of disciplinary formations to circumscribe what is to count as intelligible and proper within their boundaries. To locate the discussion within geography is to confront discursive productivity where it is least expected. In geography, as in all modernist sciences, the myth of the transparency of scientific discourses functions to efface its discursivity and its partiality and interestedness. At the beginning of the research project which informs this thesis, there was, on the part of both the collaborating geography teacher, Alan A and myself a considerable uncertainty as to what significance gender would have in the classroom. Geography purports to be an objective, rational discipline, concerned to order, classify and explain spatial phenomena. However, what became clear to both of us through our observation and analysis over time was that what had counted so readily as ‘gender-neutral’ across a whole range of classroom events had to be reconstrued as the ascription of universality and neutrality to a hegemonic masculinism. Through the study, this became visible as a contradictory but necessary condition for the production of the authorised version of geography within the curriculum enterprise. To demonstrate or perform this reconstruction, and to consider its consequences for literacy (and) pedagogy became the task of the thesis.

An ending for this project might now be envisaged in terms of the substantiation of a claim for the ubiquity of gender as a determining factor in the production of differentially intelligible and powerful positions and identities within a literate and schooled culture. There remains now the task of producing a reader. Indeed, to produce an argument is, among other things, to produce a reader. This is in many ways an arbitrary exercise, but one of a complexity to match that chronicled above in the task of constructing the writer. The reader is similarly positioned in particular ways within the (con)text. They must consent to a certain, duplicitous performance, both knowing and not knowing what the writer is going to say. On the one hand, the reader-examiner is presumably one who can judge the worth of the performance, and hence in important ways may already ‘know’ the
arguments. On the other hand, the arguments must be constructed as though that were not at all the case, and so there is an other reader, or other readers, projected, who must be convinced, or overcome, in order that the thesis’s project of ‘making a difference’ in the field can be fulfilled. In particular, these readers would best be constructed as those who read from a range of different positions which the thesis engages, contests or distinguishes itself from. These positions include instrumental realist/technicist, functionalist, marxist, liberal and humanist reading positions, the major positions underpinning the discourses of key other players in current literacy debates. The actual readers must perform their examiner function and keep the gates of the academy, while at the same time allowing for the possibility of subverting their gatekeeping duties. This is because of the inherently contradictory nature of the process being undertaken here by all participants.

Having provisionally sketched in a writer and a reader in the text, then, there remains only to stage a performance.