Moving Forward? Some Conclusions

What this book has tried to show is that combining different approaches to the analysis of spoken classroom discourse is more fruitful than relying upon a single approach. As discussed earlier, current trends in the wider field of discourse analysis are moving towards using multiple analyses of the same data. No single approach can provide a comprehensive account of what is happening in a particular data-set. And each approach has its own set of limitations and critiques. Through a pragmatic combination, some of these limitations may be effectively addressed. It is hoped that this book-length application of different types of discourse analysis to the same data-set has helped to support, illustrate and contribute to these ongoing developments in both the fields of discourse analysis, and language and gender.

It is hoped that the research presented in this book will provide impetus for other researchers to continue this area of study. As stated in the introductory chapter, gender is still a key issue in all aspects of education, including the interactions that happen on a daily basis inside classrooms. Sexuality is also starting to receive more explicit attention in education, especially in relation to gender. Both are areas imbued with ideological struggle, therefore they are ripe for academic scholarship as well as activist intervention. It is clear that we need to continue to develop our knowledge and understanding of how gender and sexuality operate in education contexts, as understanding is a pre-cursor to change. I would encourage researchers to focus their attention on other aspects of education and schooling in relation to gender and sexuality, in addition to classroom interaction. I would also like to see a continued focus on spoken classroom discourse in relation to gender and sexuality. This book has shown how classroom interaction is a site where gender and sexuality identities are played out on a daily basis. It is a site of
ideological struggle for all those involved. Although I have used four approaches to analyse the interactional data, there are, of course, many more discourse-analytic approaches available for use. There is, therefore, much scope for incorporating further analyses in order to enhance our understandings, and also to continue the ongoing methodological debates in the field of discourse analysis.

The research presented in this book has paid particular attention to the ways in which gender intersects with sexuality, although other dimensions have not explicitly been considered. This is mainly because of the scope of the research – within a single project, it is impossible to consider all possible social dimensions in relation to gender, so the research is necessarily selective. It is obviously important to acknowledge other social dimensions which clearly intersect and overlap with gender and sexuality, such as age, ethnicity, social class and so on. And Lazar (2005) urges us to be careful of so-called ‘liberal’ ideologies which assume that the experiences of all women are similar. She argues that the adoption and prevalence of such ideologies in Western academia has allowed middle-class, white, Western, heterosexual women to represent their partial experiences as universally shared by all women. This is clearly not the case and is, in itself, an enactment and reification of certain kinds of social privilege. Lazar calls instead for a ‘serious re-visioning of gender’ (2005: 16) which incorporates a critical interrogation of such privileges and encourages a critique of popular post-feminist discourses.

Due to the focus of this research, I would not make any claims about generalising the findings or arguments presented beyond the demographic characteristics of the participants involved in the study. As outlined in Chapter 2, the student participants in the classroom study were predominantly white, aged 11–14, and lived in the same geographical region. The interviews conducted later with the young LGB-identified people involved a greater diversity in terms of ethnicity. And, obviously, all of these participants identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Other language-focused studies have examined the ways that gender interacts with other variables in the classroom. For example, Eckert (2000) and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) examine the ways in which gender intersects with age and class in US high school settings. Norton and Pavlenko (2004) have examined some aspects of the interrelationship between language, gender and ethnicity in second language classrooms. Goodwin (2003) has investigated language in relation to ethnicity, class and gender in children’s play talk. Some studies have focused upon gender in relation to other social variables without an explicit focus upon language (for example, Duncan’s 1999 study on