

Background to how readers are positioned

Boys and girls are positioned as, for example, 'good' or 'struggling' readers by teachers, themselves, and by peers, through their interactions with one another and by practices that form part of the teaching of reading, such as 'ability' grouping/streaming or reading benchmarking. Positioning is not only about the labels we might use but also the practical consequences which are visible in the classroom.

Boys' and girls' positioning as readers at school can have an impact on their orientations to reading and their engagement with reading for pleasure. A child who has negative interactions around reading with teachers and peers, or who knows they are positioned negatively, may be more likely to disengage with reading. Yet this is not necessarily the same for all boys (or girls) as positioning is not just related to their gender but also other aspects of their social identities such as ethnicity/'race' and social class. There are different sub-groups of boys who may have quite different experiences of learning to read at school, even within the same classroom.

The positioning of children as readers (and learners throughout the curriculum) is influenced by dominant perceptions of social identity categories such as gender, ethnicity and social class – these can take the form of stereotypes which people hold unintentionally. These ways of thinking can shape teachers' and children's perceptions of individuals (and groups) which in turn impact on teaching practices, interactions and talk between teachers and children and among children themselves.

Boys' and girls' positioning as readers can be based on teachers' and children's sub-conscious perceptions of boys' multiple social identities. The way in which boys and girls are positioned as readers can therefore vary between different sub-groups– e.g. White middle class boys may be positioned quite differently to White working class boys in the same classroom, depending on teachers' perceptions of these boys' social class identities and the implications for their orientations towards reading.

The way in which boys are positioned can vary between one classroom or school and another and can depend on the teacher's or adults' own life experiences and their ethnic, social class and gender identities and the demographic characteristics of the pupil in-take/children in their class. If you would like to read more about identity making in school we recommend this chapter by the researcher [Diane Reay](#). You can also read about positioning in the [project report](#)