PERFORMATIVITY: MAKING THE SUBJECTS OF EDUCATION

Deborah Youdell, Institute of Education, University of London, UK

d.youdell@ioe.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade or so the concepts of the *performative* and *performativity* have been taken-up increasingly in education studies. At its most straightforward, the field of linguistics understands the performative as something that is said that is the simultaneous 'doing' of that thing; an often-used example of this is the judge's pronouncement 'I sentence you….'. Yet the idea that what we say can, at least sometimes, *produce,* and not

just describe, the social world has been seen as having significant potential both for understanding the world and for thinking about and enacting social change. This is why the idea of the performative has become a key area of exploration in the field cultural politics in education.

In this chapter I explore the significance of the performative for politically engaged forms of education studies and practice. The chapter begins by setting out conceptual debates over the meanings, effects, and political potential of the performative and performativity. The chapter identifies two inter-related ways of working with the idea of the performative and performativity in education – one in relation to interrogating subjectivity that comes out of post-structural feminism in education and one in relation to interrogating policy that comes out of education policy sociology. The focus of the chapter is on the first of these two approaches; *the question of what the performative offers to our understandings of the people – the students, teachers, parents, policy makers – who populate the education domain*. The chapter goes on to explores examples of education studies that have used the idea of performativity to examine subjectivities in education settings and examines the take up of a *performative politics* inside education, considering the potential of performative politics to challenge 'who' 'makes sense' as what 'sort' of subject in education settings.

POST-STRUCTURAL THEORY

The uses of the performative that have been pursued in education studies are part of a wider engagement with post-structural theory. Before moving on to explore these uses of the performative in detail it is useful to locate it in this broader intellectual field.

Post-structural theory offers a range of inter-related conceptual tools for thinking about power, knowledge, the subject and agency. A key aspect of post-structural approaches, developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault (1991), is understanding **power** as *disciplinary* or *productive*, rather than seeing power as being held by those in positions of relative advantage over others. This leads to a focus on power as it *circulates* through the 'micro-circuits' of prevailing ideas and social practices, and not just on power as it is wielded or used to repress. Foucault (1991) argues that this disciplinary power works through institutionalised practices, or 'technologies', that make the person visible and knowable to others as well as to her/him self.

The post-structural theory of Foucault as well as other writers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, and Jean-Francois Lyotard refutes the idea of universal knowledge and understands **knowledge** as located and partial and so inseparable from the circulation of power (See Baudrillard 1994, Derrida 2001, Foucault 2002, Lyotard 1984). Foucault (1990, 1991) moves to the idea of **discourse,** which has become a central concept in post-structural theory. Discourses are multiple and shifting systems of knowledge with varied and potentially porous status' ranging from what is taken as self-evident– a 'regime of truth' – through to what is unspeakable or ridiculous – 'disavowed' or 'subjugated' knowledges. It is important to recognise that discourse, in this sense, refers to much more than talk alone: discourses are cited by and circulate in speech and writing as well as visual representations, bodily movements and gestures, and social and institutional practices.

All of this thinking brings with it an understands the person, or **subject**, created over and over again through ongoing relational processes that are made meaningful by enduring discourses, an understanding that rejects the idea of a person who is complete and (relatively) constant over time. This is often called **subjectivation** (Foucault 1982 & 1988); referring to the productive force of circulating discourses that creates people as social subjects *at the same time* as it subjects them to relations of power. This leads to an understanding of **agency** as simultaneously made possible and reigned in and obscured by prevailing discourse and meaning, rather than seeing agency as being intrinsic to the subject who knows her/himself and her/his motivation and can to act to achieve her/his desired ends.

These ideas of productive power, discourse and subjectivation all intersect with and underpin contemporary uses of the performative.

THE PERFORMATIVE AND PERFORMATIVITY

A useful starting point for understanding the performative is JL Austin's 1962 work *How to do things with words*. In this text Austin explores things that are said, often referred to as 'utterances' or 'speech acts', that *make something happen*. Austin makes a distinction between two forms of performative, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary. For Austin, an illocutionary performative always has the effect it names and has this effect in the moment of the speech act, for instances the sentence passed by the Judge that we saw above. In contrast, the perlocutionary performative may not have an immediate effect, may have no effect at all, or may have a different effect than the one expected, for instance, when a

mother calls her child to 'come here!' the child may do just that right away, may do nothing, or may turn and run in the other direction. Austin sees the slipperiness of perlocutionary performatives as failures that he calls 'infelicities'.

In a lecture given in 1971 Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1988) engages with Austin's assessment of performative infelicities and takes a different approach. Derrida argues that there is an inherent 'contextual break' between the intentions of a speaker and the meaning and effect of a performative. This means that it is the conventions and meanings of a situation, and not just the speaker, that influence what a performative will 'do'. With this in mind, instead of thinking about performative 'infelicities', Derrida argues that the break between intention and meaning opens up the space for a performative to 'misfire'. This is not a problem for Derrida, rather, the space for misfire is also a space in which the meaning and the effects of communication might change (see Derrida 1988). In this sense the 'performativity' of an utterance or text is also its potential to unsettle or resist dominant meanings and effects.

Jean-Francois Lyotard also engages with the idea of the performative in his 1984 work, *The Postmodern Condition* where he explores the performativity of knowledge itself. Lyotard argues that the grand narratives of the enlightenment, scientific revolution, and modernity have been replaced by petite or small narratives whose status and meaning are contingent on the normative meanings of the communities in which they circulate. In this sense knowledge itself is seen as performative: its status and legitimacy is secured through its performative effects or through its performativity, its effectiveness in creating itself as

knowledge. As it is applied in Lyotard's analysis of the university, this account of performativity suggests the restrictive and regulatory potential of the effective performative. For Lyotard these are the 'terrors of performativity' (Lyotard 1984 cited by Ball 2003 p220).

Derrida and Lyotard's engagements with the notion of the performative and its capacity to create the thing to which it refers are clearly related, but have been taken in different directions in the ways they have been used in different fields and by different authors. In sociological and philosophical work on education policy Lyotard's consideration of the performativity of knowledge has been pursued and developed in analysing contemporary *education policy tendencies* and their effects, including their effects on 'who' the teacher and student can be. Whereas feminist philosophy and literary studies, and later feminist education sociology and cultural studies, has engaged and developed Derrida's thinking about the performative for analysing *subjectivities* and thinking about *performative politics*.

Performative subjects

The idea of the performative has been central to recent post-structural thinking about the *subject* and the relationship between the subject, power and politics. This take up and development of the performative in relation to the subject has been led by Judith Butler, a contemporary US philosopher and political and literary theorist who has engaged and developed the ideas of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Much of Butler's exploration of the performative has taken sex, gender and sexuality as its central concerns (Butler 1990, 1993, 1997, 2004a) and she is often thought of as a post-structural feminist or queer

theorist. Sex, gender and sexuality are core issues for Butler, yet her interests are far-reaching, including concerns with race, ethnicity, nationhood, and nationality and even the question of *being human* (see Butler 1997, 2004b). Her work endeavours to make sense of these categories as 'cross-cutting modalities of life' (Butler 2007) and throughout her writing the capacity of the performative to make particular sorts of people – or subjects – is a key theoretical tool.

Butler defines the performative as being:

> '[T]hat discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names' (Butler 1993:13)

and suggests that:

> 'Discursive performativity appears to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make. ... [g]enerally speaking, a performative functions to produce that which it declares' (Butler 1993:107).

In thinking about how performatives make people, Butler turns to the classificatory systems, categories, and names that are used to designate, differentiate and sort people and suggests that these work *performatively* to create the people they name. Keeping the ideas of discourse and subjectivation that I described earlier in mind when thinking about these performative processes reminds us that performatives, and the subjects they constitute, are not neutral, but are situated in discourse and enduring relations of productive power.

Butler (1990, 1993, 1997, 2004a) argues that designations such as 'boy' and 'girl', 'man' and 'woman' are performative – they *create* the gendered subject that they name. Furthermore, these performatives do this while appearing to be just *descriptive*. By appearing to be descriptive they create the *illusion* of genders' *prior* existence. So while it appears that the subject *expresses* a gender that is true or 'proper' to it, this is actually a performative effect of gender categorisations and their use. This naming is not simply descriptive, it is 'inaugurative' – '[i]t seeks to introduce a reality rather than reporting an existing one' (Butler 1997:33).

Butler illustrates this with what she describes as 'an impossible scene': a 'body' that has not been named, is undefined, and so is not meaningful in discourse and cannot be made sense of by us. She suggests that it is only when this body is named in terms of the classificatory systems that are socially meaningful that we can make sense of and engage with 'it'. When the medic declares 'it's a girl!' or 'it's a boy!' the baby is performatively constituted as a gendered subject, as 'he' or 'she', as 'him' or 'her'. These are not performative constitutions that we can simply choose to opt-out of – Butler says they are 'compulsive' and 'compulsory' because they are the ground on which our subjecthood rests. She says that '[b]eing called a name is ... one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language' (Butler 1997:2) and is a prerequisite for being '*recognizable*' as a subject (Butler 1997:5, original emphasis) – we cannot simply reject the gendered pronoun 'he' or 'she', without one of these we simply do not make sense. For this reason these performatives also demand 'repetition' and 'citation' – we must be called 'she' and 'her',

or 'he' and 'him' consistently and each time we are addressed in order to continue to make sense:

> 'The rules that constrain the intelligibility of the subject continue to structure the subject throughout his or her life. And this structuring is never fully complete. Acting one's place in language continues the subject's viability' (Butler 1997:136).

And all of this demands a community of speakers and a set of discourses and conventional meanings in which naming and recognition takes place: the subject 'comes to "exist" by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other' (Butler 1997:5). While a lot of debate in the field takes the performative to be spoken, Butler points out that a performative need not be spoken – it might be textual, it might be representational, it might be bodily, it might even be a silence or an omission. Performatives are a part of discourse and are effected through a range of discursive practices.

Butler (1997) also engages with the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary performatives that I discussed earlier. Butler notes that some utterances do appear to effect the acts they speak about as they are said; the judge's pronouncement of sentencing ('I sentence you'), the cleric's declaration of marriage ('I now pronounce you man and wife'). But Butler's main focus is the less certain perlocutionary performatives that Austin calls 'infelicitous' and whose potential 'misfire' Derrida highlights. Drawing attention to Derrida's contextual breaks and Austin's suggestion the performative is 'ceremonial' she stresses the performative as 'an inherited set of voices, an echo of others who speak as the "I"' (Butler 1997:25). She writes:

'If a performative provisionally succeeds ... [it is because] that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*. It is not simply that the speech act takes place *within* a practice, but that the act itself is a ritualised practice. What this means, then, is that a performative "works" to the extent that it *draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force' (Butler 1997:51 original emphasis).

Performatives, then, are citational, contextual, part of a chain of signification, and replete with prior uses whose meanings sediment as well as future uses in which their conventional meanings might be opened up to change. As such, Butler suggests that 'speech is always in some ways out of control' (Butler 1997:15).

Performative politics

That performatives and the discourses they are part of might be 'out of control' opens up possibilities for engaging these in a *performative politics*. It does this by insisting that its meanings and effects are 'non-necessary'. (Butler 1997:39) and opening up the possibility of misfire. The performative might not 'do' what was expected, and this possibility of different meanings and effects offers the grounds for political practice concerned with changing meaning and changing how subjects are recognised and so 'who' they can be.

A key to this is a subject or a community of subjects who deploy the performative to political ends. Being performatively constituted as a subject makes a subject who joins the field of discourse whose discursive practices can constitute further subjects:

'the one who names, who works within language to find a name for another, is presumed to be already named, positioned within language as one who is already

subject to the founding or inaugurating address. This suggests that such a subject in language is positioned as both addressed and addressing, and that the very possibility of naming another requires that one first be named. The subject of speech who is named becomes, potentially, one who might well name another in time' (Butler 1997:29).

The subject, then, has 'discursive agency' (Butler 1997:127) s/he can speak and act with intent and make things happen. *This is not the agency of a sovereign subject who exerts its will. Rather, discursive agency is derivative, an effect of discursive power*:

'Because the agency of the subject is not a property of the subject, an inherent will or freedom, but an effect of power, it is *constrained but not determined* in advance. ... As the agency of a post-sovereign subject, its discursive operation is delimited in advance but also open to a further unexpected delimitation' (Butler 1997:139-140, my emphasis).

The discursive agency of this performatively constituted subject is *enabled and constrained* through discourse at the same time. The subject cannot control discourse and its effects, what a performative can and will do is informed by meanings sedimented in context and past uses and is never guaranteed. Nevertheless, the performatively constituted subject can and does deploy discursive performatives that have the potential to be constitutive – the subject does this incessantly, without self-conscious intentions. But s/he might also do tactically, with particular effects in mind.

Understanding subjects as being subjectivated through ongoing performative constitutions suggests that a key political challenge might be to intercept these performatives in order to re-constitute discourses, and so subjects, differently. Judith Butler insists that the sedimented meanings of enduring and prevailing discourses might be unsettled and

reinscribed. And that subordinate, disavowed, or silenced discourses might be deployed in, and made meaningful in, contexts from which they have been barred. What these approaches suggest is that a post-structural political practice might invite the subjectivated subject to take up a position of 'strategic provisionality' (Butler 2001), and attempt, albeit without a promise of finality or closure, to use her/his discursive agency to unsettle normative meanings and avoid being made a subject who stands in and acts her/his 'place' in discourse. The performative, then, is an opening for resisting normative meanings and making currently subjugated subjects intelligible in new ways. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender politics' reinscription of 'queer'; disability studies' reinscription of 'crip'; and hip hop's reinscription of 'nigga' might all be understood as examples of such performative politics in action.

These ideas have massive implications for thinking critically about the subjects of education and the processes through which enduring inequalities are produced in the performative practices of institutions, teachers and, indeed, students. Using the idea of the performative insists that while 'who' we are is *constrained* it is not *determined* – either socially or biologically – and so what it means to be a teacher, a student, White, or of color, a boy or a girl, might be opened up to radical rethinking and remaking. And if 'who' these subjects might be unsettled and re-inscribed, then there may also be the possibility of interrupting the enduring inequalities that are produced in part through the association in educational and popular discourse of particular abilities and talents, educational orientations and aspirations, and disabilities and deficits with particular social groups (Youdell 2006a). Later in this chapter I offer examples from empirical education research

that has sought to explore these performative practices as well as the possibilities of their meanings and effects being shifted. First, however, I turn to another use to which performativity has been put in education research.

Performative policy

Stephen Ball, a UK education policy sociologist, has been central to developing Lyotard's performativity – the production of knowledge as knowledge – in the field. Ball (2000 and 2003) identifies performativity as a policy technology which, alongside the creation of markets and the insertion of managerialism into education, is a core part of the global policy tendency towards privatisation in education (Ball and Youdell 2008). Moving from Foucault's understanding of disciplinary technologies, Ball writes: '[p]erformativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions' (Ball 2003:216). Reflecting Foucault's identification of the technologies of disciplinary power, Ball maps a series of practices that are the technologies of performativity in education: 'it is the data-base, the appraisal meeting, the annual review, report writing, the regular publication of results and promotion applications, inspections and peer reviews that are mechanics of performativity' (Ball 2003:220). Ball is not alone in working with Lyotard's account of performativity to interrogate contemporary education policy; James Avis (2002), Jill Blackmore and Pat Thompson (2004), Michael Peters (2004a, 2004b), and Robin Usher (2006) are among a growing number of education scholars who are working with this idea.

Importantly, Ball's policy sociology emphasizes that *people* as well as *institutions* are impacted by performativity:

> 'the policy technologies of education reform are not simply vehicles for the technical and structural change of organizations but are also mechanisms for reforming teachers (scholars and researchers) and for changing what it means to be a teacher, the technologies of reform produce new kinds of teacher subjects.' (Ball 22003:217).

For Ball, then, these education policy technologies are performative in that they create education as a particular sort of activity, education institutions as particular sorts of places, *and educators and students as particular sorts of persons*. In these latter effects performative policy technologies can also be seen as subjectivating, a point at which Ball's take-up of performativity in policy sociology connects strongly with Judith Butler's use of the performative that I have already detailed.

It is noteworthy, however, that in policy sociology performativity is regularly interrogated for the ways that it remakes education by *reducing* both education and those who populate it to what is measurable, manageable, knowable. It is an account of the performative production of *constraint*. Whereas, while Butler details the way that the performative makes the particular subject intelligible in particular ways (others not), her articulation of a performative politics underpinned by Derrida's performative misfire keeps open the potential for the performative to exceed these constraining meanings and effects and instead mean and make something different.

READING THE PERFORMATIVE SUBJECTS OF EDUCATION

The work of Judith Butler has had a significant impact in education studies where it has been used to understand and analyse a range of usually qualitative empirical data pertaining to everyday life in educational and related settings. The influence of Michel Foucault is evident in the work of these education scholars, but this is a Foucault transformed and sometimes even supplanted by Judith Butler's development of his ideas, her simultaneous engagement with other theoretical tools, and her application of these to feminist/queer concerns. Use of the performative to think about categorisations of identity has extended beyond gender and sexuality to a range of classificatory systems, for instance scholars concerned with the constraints of race, disability and class locations have thought about these as performative constitutions. By the beginning of this decade a significant body of education scholarship was emerging in publication that covered concerns with the performative constitution of educational subjects made meaningful through gender, sexuality, social class, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, ability, disability and special educational needs.

This work has tended to be located at the intersection of sociology of education and cultural studies in education and has drawn on a range of forms of data, from artefact and representations of popular culture and the media to detailed qualitative interviews, narratives and autobiographical accounts, ethnographic observations and everyday and institutional documents and representations. What is common across these forms of data is their qualitative richness, a richness and level of detail that allows an interrogation of the

discourses circulating within it and the unpicking of the performative effects that these might have. In what follows I give a flavour of some of various these engagements.

In my paper *Identity Traps* I offer the following data episode generated from observation as part of a school ethnography:

Black and Other names

DY (*the researcher, mid/late twenties, woman, White*)
MARCELLA (*student, aged 15/16 girl, Black*)
MOLLY (*student aged 15/16, girl, White*)
JULIET (*student, aged 15/16, girl, Mixed-race*)
JASMINE (*student, aged 15/16 girl, Mixed-race*)

Sitting in a group around a table in the Year Base (Home Room). The discussion takes place while the rest of the tutor group is in a lesson. The group is in the process of recounting a conflict with RACHEL*, another girl in year 11, that resulted in* MARCELLA *being excluded from school for a fixed term (suspended).*

MARCELLA: I went to maths and I confronted her and I got excluded for it. She's just something!
MOLLY: You called her 'Popadom'.
ALL: (*laugh*)
[…]
MARCELLA: I hit her a bit, buffed her out a bit, so she learned sense!
          (*simultaneously*) JULIET: Duffed her up a bit.
          (*simultaneously*) MOLLY: Called her a few names.
MARCELLA: And when I used to see her I pushed her a bit and called her abusive
      names ... I know the reasons sound silly but I have my reasons, (*trailing off*) she's
      just, one, a... (*agitated, with heightened 'Black' accent*) She thinks she's Black!
      Come on! She thinks she's Black! She thinks she's Black! She thinks she's Black!
          (*simultaneously*) ALL: Yeah.
MARCELLA: (*parody of 'Black' accent*) She talks to me, she talks to me like that, what a
      damn talk?
[…]
DY: What do you mean 'she thinks she's Black'?
JULIET: The way she acts.
MOLLY: The way she talks.
JULIET: Everyone knows, every one knows here that she's ... (*interrupted*)
          (*simultaneously*) MOLLY: (*to* DY) Even you know.

MARCELLA: (*interrupting* JULIET) I know there's not a certain way for a Black person to present, but there *is.*

JULIET: No, but there is.

MARCELLA: Yeah, that's the thing, there *is*, that's what... I know... I have to say this, there *is*, that's what, I have to say, but there *is.*

JULIET: The hairstyles and stuff.

MARCELLA: Yeah, but there *is*, there *is*, I know there's not a Bla... (*laughs*) know what I mean!

ALL: (*laugh, someone claps*)

        (*simultaneously*) MOLLY: (*quoting*) 'There is'!

MOLLY: (*imitating mature, rational tone*) That's the way it is in this kind of society.

MARCELLA: And you know Coolie right, she's *Indian*, a proper Indian right, I have Indian next door neighbours so I know what they look like, right.

        (*simultaneously*) GROUP MEMBER: (*laughs*)

        (*simultaneously*) GROUP MEMBER: (*a sharp intake of breath*)

MARCELLA: She, right, you know when a Black person and an Indian person makes a baby they call the baby *Coolie* because its got half Black and half Indian, she goes round saying that that's what she is because she's ashamed of what, where she comes from.

DY: So where is she from?

JULIET: She's Indian, yeah.

MARCELLA: Indian.

[…]

DY: So what are you saying? That she *acts* like she thinks she's Black?

MARCELLA: Blacker than me, I know this sounds funny but she does, she uses words that I'm not even ready for yet!

DY: What sort of words?

MARCELLA: I forgot what.

MOLLY: like 'gwarnin' or something like that, in'it?

ALL: (*laugh*)

        (*simultaneously*) JASMINE: Not ready!

MARCELLA: She just, I don't know, she's just something else she is. And also cos she goes out with Black boys it gets to my head you see, so she gets a bit...

MOLLY: Do they actually *know* she's Indian?

JASMINE: No probably not.

        (*simultaneously*) MARCELLA: No.

        (*simultaneously*) JULIET: I don't think so you know.

MARCELLA: Cos [boy] thought that she was Coolie.

JASMINE: When she rings up [girl], she said he asked her 'What are you?' and she goes 'Coolie'.

ALL: Yeah.

DY: So she tells people that she's got a Black parent and an Indian parent?

MARCELLA: Yeah, Coolie.

<div align="right">(Youdell, 2003:7-8)</div>

The analysis that I offer in the paper argues that a 'hierarchy within the Other' is created and policed through intersecting discourses of race, sex, gender, and sexuality which cite the natural-ness of race and sex-gender and the normal-ness of heterosexuality. Focussing on race, I suggest that the data offered above shows how raced subjects are performatively constituted and contested through their naming and designation. I also argue that it shows the discursive practices through which races are constituted as discrete, authentic and hierarchical. The group draws on a number of names that might be understood as race identities. Some of these are familiar – Black, Indian, White. Others are perhaps more recognisable as terms of abuse – 'Coolie', 'Popadom'. Drawing on Butler's notion of the performative I argue that in naming and asserting these race identities the group is not simply reporting fact or offering a description, they are citing an enduring discourse of race that performatively constitutes race identities. These names are not descriptive – this is a moment in the constitution of race identities and of these subjects in terms of these race identities.

I also argue in the paper that all of these names are permeated by an understanding of race as a discrete and authentic marker of identity and that a key feature of the students' discursive practices is a citation of an enduring discourse of race phenotypes or physiognomies. While there seems to be some oscillation between a discourse of essential races and a discourse of culturally constructed races, race remains self-evident and unproblematised (if problematic). I go on to suggest that at the core of the group's understanding there appears to be an implicit assertion of racial authenticity; individuals are *a* race – whether Black, Coolie, Indian or White – which is determined by the race of

parents, is enduring, and can be identified. This recourse to authenticity carries with it at least a residual acceptance of race as natural and based in essences – race identity remains a biological fact (Youdell, 2003). What the analysis aims to show, then, is how the everyday practices of young people in schools are thick with performatives that are made meaningful and whose effects rest on their embeddedness in and citation of enduring discourses.

This reflects readings of the performativity of race offered by other scholars. Miron and Inda (2000) argue that, across race politics, race should be understood as a performative and Warren (2002) and Ringrose (2007) explore the performative constitution of Whiteness in the classroom. In Youdell (2006b) I show how institutional and everyday teacher practices deploy Orientalist discourses that act performatively to constitute Islamic students as a threat and so as impossible learners.

I have also offered analyses of this sort in relation to gender and sexuality. In Youdell (2004a and 2004b) I examine the minutiae of practice inside the classroom to show how performative constitutions of the homosexual subject have the potential injure these students *and* the potential to be reinscribed in new ways that allow these students to constitute themselves as legitimate and even desirable 'gay' subjects inside school. Other education scholars do similar sorts of work with these conceptual tools. Mary Lou Rasmussen's book *Becoming Subjects* draws on Butler's notion of the performative alongside other aspects of post-structural theory to analyse empirical accounts and cultural artefacts and offer an extensive analysis of the constitution of sexualities in secondary schools (Rasmussen 2006). Emma Renold's book *Junior Sexualities* draws on ethnographic

data generated in primary school to offer an analysis of the performative constitution of younger children's subjectivities, arguing that gender constitutions are simultaneously constitutions of young sexualities (Renold 2005). Vicars (2006) demonstates the injurious effects of the performative 'queer' in school settings. Ringrose and Renold (forthcoming 2009) use the performative to interrogate the gendered constitution of violence in schools. And in Youdell (2005) I use ethnographic observation to demonstrate how performative constitutions of sex, gender and sexuality are inseparable in the discursive practices of young women inside school, so much so that a conceptualisation of 'sex-gender-sexuality' is suggested.

Special educational needs, disability and 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' have all been explored in terms of their performativity. Building of Roger Slee's (1996) Foucauldian analysis of the productive force of these discourses, Sue Saltmarsh and myself (Saltmarsh and Youdell 2004) and Linda Graham (2007) have developed analyses of the performative constitution of 'special' and 'problematic' in education policy and institutional and teacher practices. And Cath Laws and Bronwyn Davies (2000) have analysed participant observation data to show how teachers can practice differently with students diagnosed in these ways in order to interrupt the performativity of normal (and abnormal) and remake this as a 'doing' rather than a 'being'.

An important development in the field has been in work that endeavours to unravel the performative constitution not of single classificatory systems eg gender, or single

categorisations, eg girl, or obviously entangled subjectivities, such as sex-gender, but of *multiple and intersecting performatives* that make multi-faceted subjects and subjectivities.

For instance, Rasmussen and Harwood (2003) explore a range inter-connecting performatives, including race, gender, sexuality, size and ability, whose injurious effects work together to make schooling almost untenable for one girl, Jemma. Drawing on data generated through a series of interviews with Jemma, Rasmussen and Harwood unravel the performative force of the discourses that have, over time, come to push Jemma out of education. Here, extracts of Jemma's accounts are woven together with Rasmussen and Hardwood's analysis to create a detailed demonstration of how performatives have acted to shape both Jemma's school experience and her sense of self:

> 'In our reading of Jemma's story, her process of coming to understand her self as "slow" was the result of performative acts supported by "elaborate institutional structures" that are bigger than any one individual or group situated in the narrative above. Jemma's construction as "slow" was supported by an educational bureaucracy that produced schools that "streamed" students, creating educational spaces for people defined as "slow". Adults supported her construction as "slow", particularly when she was told that she belonged in the "slowest class" and she was put in the English as a second language class; Jemma never understood why this occurred as, although she spoke both French and English, she considered English her first language. Jemma was told by some adults that she was dumb and stupid, her friend's mum said she had dyslexia, her doctor told her she had "depression", and her parents called her a "slut", "no good at anything and useless". Jemma's peers told her truths including that she was "dumb", "stupid", a "fat heifer", a "black mamma", a "slut", and teased her because she was "no good at school". The name "black mamma" was just one of the ways that Jemma said her peers included references to "the colour of my skin" (Jemma, Transcripts). Being told she was "stupid" led Jemma to form the belief that *she was stupid*, a truth that has "… just stuck with me ever since" (Jemma, Transcripts). Added to these experiences, Jemma stated, "When I was a kid I used to always get told that I was no good at anything, that I was useless" (Jemma, Transcripts). Jemma was told many truths about herself by both adults and by her peers, truths that "… made me believe that I was a good for nothing and useless child" (Jemma, Transcripts).
> […]
> For Jemma there is no questioning that the many labels she was given, including

"slow", "fat heifer", "black mamma" were onerous, influencing her disengagement from the process of schooling and positing her as "other". These injurious discourses intertwined and sustained one another, and through processes of repetition they produced harmful effects. One such effect of these performatives that sought to produce Jemma as "slow" was that they lead her to experience this as an ongoing subjectivity. The truth of being told she *was* stupid became the subjectivity of *being* stupid.' (Rasmussen and Harwood 2003: 29 and 32)

This reading of the intersections of a number of performatives demonstrates both the complexity of these processes and how these intersections contribute to the sedimentation of performative effects. Indeed, in the case of Jemma, Rasmussen and Harwood demonstrate powerfully how these performatives come to *be* 'who' Jemma is educationally, socially, and psychically.

Pursuing similar lines of analysis Lewis and Fabos (2005) examine multiple performatives as they work in instant messaging to constitute multivocal subjects. And Robinson and Dias' (2005) analysis of practice within early childhood interrogates constitutions across race, class, gender, and sexuality. In *Impossible Bodies, Impossible Selves* I use the concept of the performative to work across multiple classificatory systems and analyse how the subjects of schooling are constituted through constellations of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and disability and to examine the implications of these constellations for differently made subjects' for recognition (or impossibility) as students and learners (Youdell 2006a).

The growing influence in education of Judith Butler's work on performativity, as well as her wider thinking, is reflected in the 2006 publication of a Special Edition of the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* dedicated to her work. Emma Renold (2006) interrogates

the performative constitution of normative heterosexuality in the everyday practices of primary school children and offers empirical examples of moments of its interruption. Anoop Nayak & Mary Jane Kehily (2006) engaged the corporeality of the subject, exploring the gender performativity of embodiment in the practices of young people. Valerie Hey (2006) explored the usefulness of making the concept of performativity work in thinking about the lived lives of embodied subjects and considered the possibility of the performative to resignify subjugated subjectivities. In a similar vein my own contribution to the volume considered the performative politics of the practices of subjects constituted through orientalist, (anti-)Islamist, and nationalist performatives post-9/11 (Youdell 2006b).

A PERFORMATIVE EDUCATION POLITICS?

These sorts of engagements with the politics of the performative – that is the potential to use the performative to resist constraining, normative subjectivities and, potentially, make alternative subject positions possible – is an increasingly consistent theme in education scholarship informed by these ideas. This should not be surprising given the consistent commitment to social justice in much work in education studies, and the prior commitments to critical theory held by many of the education scholars who have engaged with post-structural thinking in an attempt to find ways to better understand the limits of critical theory and politics and find additional political strategies.

Beavis and Charles' (2000) paper uses the performative to explore the potential for non-normative gender constitutions at the interface of real/cyber space. Kopelson (2002) explores the possibility for a queer performative pedagogy. Davies (2006) had drawn on the performative in developing her thinking about the politics of teachers' pedagogic and reflexive practices. LeCourt (2006) takes up the performative to demonstrate the spaces for working class to be constituted differently, that is, in way that do not simultaneously exclude, in higher education settings. In Youdell (2006c) I explore the potential for a performative politics to be taken up in education in relation to policy, curriculum, pedagogy and everyday practice. And North (2007) seeks to test what performative politics can offer in anti-oppressive education.

These ideas were pursued through an action research project that I was involved with between 2006 and 2008 which worked with primary (elementary) school teachers to find ways to unsettle the heteronormative through curriculum, pedagogic and everyday interventions in primary education settings. Two of the education scholars leading the project, Elizabeth Atkinson and Renée DePalma, draw on a performative politics when they argue 'that in order to break old chains, new chains of invocation must be forged. In order to deconstruct 'gay' as an insult, it must be allowed to acquire new, positive and intelligible meanings and associations' (Atkinson and DePalma in press:20). They demonstrate this in practice by offering a reading of fieldnotes and reflections from one of the teacher-researchers in the project:

> Teacher: Year 5 teacher in Andy's school
> Sam: Year 5 pupil; also part of Andy's 'lunch time group' in the Nurture Room.

Tony: Year 5 pupil
Alan: Year 5 pupil

> In class, about ten minutes into the lesson, with no warning Sam stands up and
> shouts out:
> *Andy is gay and he's going out with a man!*
> The interruption is met with raised eyes from the class but no further reaction.
> Teacher: *Sam, everyone knows that*.
> Tony: *Old news, Sam*.
> Sam attempts to shift the failed insult to two of his classmates): *Alan is gay and
> is going out with Tony*.
> No response from either named child, both of whom continue with work.
> Teacher (to Sam) *Sam, sit down, and get on*.
> Sam does so. No further interruptions
> (Andy reflects) This is what we're looking for. Not losing gayness, but losing its
> potential as an insult.
>> (Atkinson & DePalma in press:20-21).

Atkinson and DePalma suggests that this scene reflects at least the partial success of this teacher-researcher's pedagogy that seeks to embed within it a performative politics and the subsequent, again partial, resignification of the performative 'gay' inside his classroom. They write:

> 'Andy's ongoing attempts to forge a new chain, to create a new commensurability between teacher and gay may not have been taken up at this point by Sam, but it seems to have provided a new possibility for Tony and Alan: they do not recognise Sam's invocation of 'gay' as an insult even when it is directed at one of them. They find old discourses now unintelligible (gay-insult) in the light of new intelligibilities (gay-Andy).' (Atkinson & DePalma 2008:21)

Atkinson and DePalma's analysis highlights how the force of a performative – whether inscribing normative meanings or signifying something new or previously disallowed – rests on the intelligibility or unintelligibility of these meanings within the specific context and moment. The resignification of 'gay' as an intelligible and acceptable teacher subjectivity that Andy has pursued does appear to have has some purchase in his classroom

– this subject position is 'old news' to at least some of the students in his class. Tony and Alan's citation of the intelligible and acceptable gay teacher could be read as demonstrating that the resignification of 'gay' may have begun to sediment in this context. At the same time, however, Sam's citation of 'gay' as an injurious name whose performative force rests on its abiding meaning and constitution of the vilified homosexual subject continues to be intelligible in this classroom. The acceptable gay teacher subject who was previously unintelligible in this context may have been rendered intelligible, but the unacceptable, vilified homosexual subject remains intelligible in this setting and, in Sam's practice, might be seen to continue to assert it's sedimented meaning and threaten to undercut and recuperate the resignification that Andy's practices have sought.

Of course, Andy's resignification of 'gay' is effective at least in part because it cites prior resignifications that have already been pursued and are already intelligible elsewhere – through the Gay Rights movement and now in the liberal mainstream, for instance. Furthermore, the co-existence of incommensurable meanings in this classroom and the uncertainty over their performative effects – we cannot know for sure 'who' was constituted through which practices and whether those constitutions will endure – reflects the wider interplay and collision of discourses and performatives and the promise and risk of their misfire. Is Jean Paul Gaultier a fashion super-hero whose popularity evidences that 'gay' as been reinscribed already or is he yet another pansy who acts his place in normative discourse and makes dresses ? It seems reasonable to argue that in Atkinson and DePalma's example we find a performative moment where the injury is overridden, where the teacher takes up an acceptable gay identification, and where this is recognisable to some of the

students. Yet what remains open to question, perhaps permanently, is how far and how enduring the reach of these new discursive possibilities for identification will be?

The idea of the performative, and the performative politics that are developed from this, are being applied to education research and curricula, pedagogies, and everyday practices inside educational settings. This is not a revolutionary politics that promises a monumental upheaval and reordering of social (and political and economic) life. Nor is it a politics of liberal reform that looks to the legislature to enshrine particular rights, responsibilities and protections but leaves the textures and meanings of daily life unquestioned. It is a politics that places meaning, and its capacity to create and constrain as well as transform social life and social subjects, at the centre of an ongoing politics that takes seriously the constitutive force of the everyday practices of institutions, educators and students.

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