'Special Sport' for misfits and losers: educational triage and the constitution of schooled subjectivities

Sue Saltmarsh & Deborah Youdell, Macquarie University, Australia

Sue Saltmarsh
School of Education
Macquarie University
Sydney 2109
Australia

Phone: 02 9850 7717
Fax: 02 9850 8674
Email: snorth@aces1.aces.mq.edu.au

Deborah Youdell
School of Education
Macquarie University
Sydney 2109
Australia

Phone: 02 9850 8798
Fax: 02 9850 8674
Email: Deborah.Youdell@mq.edu.au

Biographical notes

Sue North is a researcher, tutor and occasional lecturer in the School of Education at Macquarie University. Her research interests include the construction of institutional identities in education markets. Her paper 'Negotiating the 'slippery slope' of Michel Foucault: considering Foucault in educational discourse' is forthcoming in the *Australian Journal of Education*. She is currently completing her doctoral research in the Division of Critical and Cultural Studies at Macquarie University, exploring the role of representational practices in the production of school violence.

Deborah Youdell is a Lecturer in Education in the School of Education at Macquarie University. Her current research is concerned with the intersections of students' social and learner identities and the insights these offers for understanding educational inequalities. Her publications include the book *Rationing Education: policy, practise, reform and equity* (co-authored with David Gillborn).

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Introduction

This paper is concerned with the relationships between students' social identities, their experiences of schooling, and educational exclusion. Drawing on data generated through an ethnographic study in a comprehensive public high school in outer-Western Sydney, the paper demonstrates the nuanced institutional and interpersonal processes through which particular young people come to be constituted as impossible students. In doing this, the paper focuses on a mixed-age boys' 'Special Sport' class. Drawing on Gillborn and Youdell's (2000) notion of 'educational triage', the analysis offered identifies and interrogates those practises that limit the educational resources to which this group of students has access and, in so doing, function in the production and maintenance of marginalised identities. Furthermore, the analysis suggests that the group's perceived inability to successfully negotiate the prevailing masculinist assumptions and practises that pervade the school is crucial to these discursive locations. Consequently, at every level of institutional discursive practise, both the students and teacher of the class are constituted as substandard members of the school community.

Background

The last 15 years of neo-liberal policy reform have seen the application of competitive principles drawn from the private sector to public services, including state education. The extent and character of this marketisation of education differs considerably from context to context, nevertheless, across English-speaking nations the entrenchment of neo-liberal forms of government has underpinned broad moves to established quasi-

markets (Whitty *et al,* 1998) of schools. In such quasi-markets schools compete for students, and parents, newly located as consumers, choose between schools. According to the neo-liberal doctrine of supply and demand, this competitive context enhances quality, promotes efficiency, ensures accountability, and is, therefore, in the best interest of all students.

Education scholars coming out of a critical tradition and working with developing post-structural ideas have called into question these claimed benefits of marketisation (see Apple, 2001). A number of studies have been undertaken that reveal the problematic impacts of these quasi-school markets. For instance, studies by Gewirtz *et al* (1995) and Reay (2001) show that the choosing practises of middle class parents and their capacity to influence, either directly or indirectly, the organisational practises of schools mean that children from these class backgrounds benefit from the education market place in ways that working class students do not. Similar educational inequalities are evident in relation to race and ethnic background, with UK studies demonstrating the educational privileges enjoyed by students from White and Indian backgrounds in comparison with Bangladeshi, Black and Pakistani students (see Gillborn & Gipps, 1996 and Gillborn & Mirza, 2000). These benefits, and inequalities, are not spread evenly across schools. The competition created by choice policies, and the tying of educational resources to a school's capacity to attract students, has seen popular schools become oversubscribed while schools judged to be less successful (by market-savvy, middle class choosers) struggle to attract students and, concomitantly, lose resources (see Marginson, 1996).

Alongside these problematic impacts of marketisation is a more recent debate concerning an apparent shift in educational outcomes by gender, in particular, a new concern that boys are performing less well in schools than girls. While some of this debate has taken the form of backlash against feminist pedagogies and curricula, a sophisticated literature exploring these apparent trends has developed (see for example Epstein *et al*, 1998) and more nuanced analyses have identified the complex intersections between gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and geographical location (Collins *et al*, 2000). This has led to an increasing engagement by education scholars with deconstructionist and post-structural work concerned with subjectivities and, in particular, masculinities (Connell, 1995; Martino, 1999; and Nayek & Kehily, 1996). Nevertheless, the relationship between the contemporary market context and the production of masculinities, and subjectivities more broadly, in schools has not been fully explored.

Gillborn and Youdell (2000) have sought to understand how, in the market context, school practises might be implicated, albeit unintentionally, in the remaking of educational inequalities marked by particular social identities. They suggest that schools are responding to the context of competition and limited resources by 'rationing education' through processes of 'educational triage' (p. 133). The notion of educational triage draws on a medical model of emergency care procedures, in which those patients deemed most likely to benefit from treatment are prioritised over those for whom treatment is considered least likely to be effective. In educational terms, triage refers to a systematic neglect of those students deemed to be 'hopeless cases' (p. 134), in preference for the allocation of resources to those students for whom 'treatment' is considered worthwhile. Ultimately, these strategies, Gillborn and

Youdell argue, 'seek to maximize the effectiveness of scarce resources but their effect, in practise, is to privilege particular groups of pupils marked especially by social class and 'race'' (2000, p. 134). Irrespective of the market positioning of the school, the privileging of some students at the expense of others materially advantages those whose access to facilities, opportunities, and teacher time and support are prioritised, while those whose access to material and symbolic resources is restricted by these processes are marginalised. Consequently, the effect of rationing educational resources in this way serves to reproduce hierarchical divisions within the social framework of the school. An analysis of practises of educational triage, then, promises to identify connections between policy context, institutional practises and student subjectivities.

Constituting the subjects of school sport

Processes of educational triage are incorporated within the power relations that permeate the discursive practises of schools. As such, these triage processes are implicated in the constitution and regulation of student identities. Foucault identifies schools as disciplinary institutions that necessarily act upon the subjectivities of individuals. Further, he argues that the disciplinary power embedded within institutional discourses has both regulatory and constitutive functions. He locates both individuals and institutions within historically and discursively constituted 'relations of power' through which power is diffused from within society, rather than imposed from above (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). The constitutive function of disciplinary power occurs through the interaction between what Foucault terms 'techniques of domination' and 'technologies of the self', so that

> [o]ne has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, one has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion or domination (Foucault, 1980, cited in Carrette, 1999, p. 162).

This view has important implications when applied to the role and functioning of educational discursive practise in the constitution of student subjectivities, and is particularly salient in a consideration of processes of educational triage. If, as Ball explains,

> [i]n the processes of schooling the student is compiled and constructed both in the passive processes of objectification, and in an active, self-forming subjectification, the latter involving processes of self-understanding mediated by an external authority figure—for our purposes, most commonly the teacher (1990, p.4)

then the constitutive function of educational discursive practises which serve to maximise possibilities for some students, while marginalising and disenfranchising others, merits critical attention.

The discursive production of student subjectivities and identities has increasingly become a predominant concern in educational research. Central to much of this research is a Foucauldian understanding of discourse, which, in contrast to an analysis of discourses as systems of signs, treats discourses as 'practises that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). For education, discursive practises encompass a broad array of conditions imposed by educational institutions, and include those practises, both implicit and explicit, which posit individuals within historically and discursively located relations of power. These discursive practises and the power relations inherent within them, Foucauldian scholars argue, have a constitutive function in relation to student subjectivities and

identities, and as such are crucial sites for critical analysis. Organisational practises such as timetabling and record keeping, pedagogical practises such as curriculum and examination, and disciplinary techniques such as surveillance and regulation, have all attracted the attention of researchers who have been concerned to demonstrate the ways in which student subjectivities and identities are constituted by and within educational discursive practises.

In particular, school sport and physical education classes offer numerous examples of ways in which students' bodies are subjected to surveillance, regulation and discipline. In the past decade school sport has been the subject of studies concerned to demonstrate how the pedagogical practises of disciplining the body function in the production of embodied subjectivities. (See, for instance, Gore, 1998; Kirk & Spiller, 1994; and Wright, 1996, 2000). Gore's (1995) study, for example, explores the productive capacity of power in pedagogy through the development and application of coding categories derived from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish.* The categories enlisted by Gore include surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualisation, totalisation, and regulation, and the application of these to a physical education context. This work, as well as the work of Wright, for example, demonstrate how the practises that make up physical education function to produce particular types of subjects whose bodily practises reflect certain normalised ways of both using and thinking about the body and, ultimately, the embodied self.

These practises of 'work' on the body, however, do not occur in a vacuum, but rather within an array of discursive practises that reflect broader socio-cultural assumptions,

both implicit and explicit. As Wright (2000), points out, physical education should

also be seen as

> constituted intertextually by drawing on a complex range of discourses from education, sport, the academic disciplines associated with the study of human movement and, most recently, discourses linking exercise and fitness with health. These intersect with broader cultural discourses around gender, sexuality, ethnicity and bodies widely circulating through day-to-day interactions and particularly through the media (p. 158).

For Wright, then, the notion of intertextuality is an important tool for understanding

the multiple discourses through which sporting bodies are constituted. At the most

fundamental level, intertextuality, a term proposed by Kristeva (1986), can be

understood in terms of the relations between texts, as well as between readers and

producers of texts, which together enable the production of multiple meanings.

Moving beyond written texts as sites for analysis, intertextuality becomes a useful

means for interrogating the interplay between discourses, as well as their material and

symbolic effects in an array of discursive sites. As a conceptual tool, intertextuality

offers an account of how the meanings which circulate in discourses are connected to,

dependent upon, and transformed by the matrix of contexts, conventions, and

knowledges that discursively constituted subjects deploy and draw on in the

negotiation of their own discursive experience.

This understanding of intertextuality suggests that the potential for agency is

embedded in the subject's capacity to draw on their experiences and knowledges (be

these explicit or tacit) of discourses and the multiplicity of subject positions they

occupy in relation to these. Also useful here is Butler's (1997a) understanding of the

discursive agency of the performatively constituted subject. According to Butler,

subjection brings with it the intelligibility and legitimacy necessary to deploy

discourse and render intelligible and subject another – the subject can act with, but does not 'possess', discursive agency. However, this agentive potential is by no means assured. Integral to the intertextual nature, constitutive force, regulatory function, and political potential of discourse is the persistent possibility for misfire – for discourse to mean, and constitute, contrary to the intent of the discursive subject by whom it is deployed (Butler, 1997a, 1997b; Derrida, 1988). Made subject and subjected through discourse, the subject can act with intent, but cannot ensure or secure the constitutive force of his/her discursive practises.

The consideration of the intertextual nature of physical education and school sport, then, offers an additional means through which the constitutive power of discursive practise may be interrogated. Critical engagement with the intertextually constituted discourses which inform organisational, pedagogical, and disciplinary practises deployed in school sport and physical education settings provides an important extension to the microanalyses of the regulation of bodily practises and its constitutive effects.

Importantly, the discursive practises considered here are intertextually constituted, embedded within and powerfully reflecting prevailing masculinist assumptions and practises within the broader school community. Consequently, the assumptions and practises associated with school sport and physical education classes may also be seen as a fundamental aspect of the production and policing of student's gender identities, as well as in the production and policing of hegemonic forms of sexuality extant within the school's discourses. As Wright (1998) concurs,

> [w]hile it can be argued that the whole school system is organised around promoting dominant versions of femininity and masculinity, physical education and school sport as educational practises centrally concerned with the body are the primary sites in the (re)production of such dominance (p.21).

The role of sport in the inscription of prevailing forms of masculinities is an important facet of educational research, given the extent to which sport and physical education are entrenched within educational discourse as a normalised aspect of schooling. Further, perhaps more than in any other formal school activity, it is in school sport and physical education classes that students' physical selves are compulsorily made public, displayed, monitored, measured, compared, opened up to scrutiny, and subjected to resultant derision or valorisation. Martino's (1999) study takes up this issue, demonstrating how high-status masculinity is conferred upon male students whose success at football and/or surfing places them in a privileged position in a hierarchy of masculinities (1999, pp.248-249). Boys in Martino's study who either failed in their attempts at or refused to participate in fashioning these particular 'desirable' forms of masculinity, on the other hand, were shown to be subject to rejection and derision by their peers. In this way sport, enshrined as it is in the normalised practises of schooling, functions as a technology for the regulation of predominant and enduring forms of masculinity. At the same time, it act as a mechanism for the positioning of subjects within hierarchical relations of power on the basis of their capacity (or their perceived capacity) for satisfactory performance of those valorised forms of masculinity.

Of interest to the analysis offered here is the way in which prevailing forms of masculinity are inscribed within school sporting practises. In particular, the ways in which students seen as outside prevailing forms of masculinity are constituted as

undesirable social, sporting, and educational subjects by the formal institutional and mundane practises of educational triage surrounding sport and physical education classes. This paper, then, takes as its starting point the constitutive power of educational discourses in relation to student subjectivities and identities, and acknowledges the importance of school sport and physical education in the production of embodied subjects, as well as in the construction, maintenance and policing of hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995). Importantly, while these practises are at times overt, they may also be seen as implicit aspects of schooling. For example, while the constitutive effects of the overt regulatory practises of school sport, which focus on the bodily dispositions of individual students, may operate explicitly, the productive power embedded within institutionally sanctioned knowledges operates more insidiously. The compulsory nature of physical education in schools provides a useful example of ways in which individual subjects are implicitly cited and inscribed by and within official discourses relating to the body. In addition to considering the functions of overt operations of institutional power, then, this paper is equally concerned to explore those implicit assumptions and practises which function to maintain and police the hierarchical relations of power at work within the school context.

Methodology

This paper draws on data generated as part of a small-scale ethnographic study undertaken during the final term of the 2001 school year. The study school is in outer-Western Sydney and is a co-educational, multi-ethnic, comprehensive, public high school located in a working class community with relatively high levels of poverty and low social and geographic mobility. The study brought together research approaches developed within the tradition of school ethnography (see Delamont &

Atkinson, 1995 and Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) and more recent adaptations of qualitative methods informed by post-structural theory (see Silverman, 1997). In this paper we interrogate observational and interview data concerning a mixed-age boys' Special Sport class devised by PE staff for students identified as having been continually bullied in various sport groups and who were, as a result, neither enjoying nor participating in these mainstream sport classes.

As one of us (DY) has discussed elsewhere (Youdell, 2000 & 2003) adopting the Foucauldian understandings of discourse, discursive practises and subjection outlined above has important implications for understanding and analysing data generated through empirical research. This theoretical framework implies a methodology that turns away from the truths of modernist social science research and goes beyond the interpretive endeavour of interactionist research. At the centre of Foucauldian data analysis is an understanding of constitutive and regulatory effects of discourse and disciplinary power as these are cited through and circulate within institutional and individual discursive practises. Empirical data – be these documents, statistics, interviews or observations – ceases to be conceived of as more or less accurate records of events or institutional facts, and are recognised instead as themselves discursive monuments (Silverman, 1997). This does not reduce the analyses offered to works of fiction or, as has been charged, inescapable relativism. Rather, reflecting the incredulity towards Truth that is at the heart of post-modern thinking (Lyotard 1984), such analyses are inevitably and unapologetically equivocal. Yet the analyses offered are not arbitrary, nor are all possible analyses equally plausible. Instead, analyses within this framework endeavour to identify those discourses, be they prevailing, marginalised or otherwise, that circulate within a particular discursive context and to

deconstruct the constitutive and regulatory effects of these. As such, these analyses are necessarily concerned with the application, testing and development of theory.

Utilising the theoretical and methodological framework outlined, this paper draws on observational and interview data to argue that the group of students in the Special Sport class is subject to processes of educational triage through which they are constituted as disaffected and undesirable social and educational subjects. The deployment of these processes obstructs the students' efforts to constitute themselves in other, more acceptable ways, thus functioning to ensure that they occupy hierarchically stable, marginalised subject positions within the school community. The processes of educational triage embedded within the school's discursive practises, then, function to constitute identities that ultimately maintain the extant power relations within the school. Together, the discursive practises considered here provide a powerful example of the ways in which the normalised practises of schooling can function to marginalise and disenfranchise students who, for a range of reasons, do not meet the requisite expectations of a predominantly masculinist school culture.

Making misfits: introducing 'Special Sport'

Special Sport is the referent used by school staff for a class of 24 male students from Years 7-10, with an approximate age range of 13-16. The class meets weekly, during the designated 2-hour sport period, and is supervised by one female teacher. The school's and individual teacher's practises in relation to the students in this group – descriptions of the group; treatment of individuals within the group; the marginalisation of the group's teacher; and the marginalisation of the group in

relation to other sport groups within the school – function as central mechanisms for the classification and marginalisation of the students in this sport class. At the same time, by constituting this group as the denigrated Other, the privilege of valourised masculine physicality is silently inscribed.

During the first week of fieldwork at the school, the suggestion was made by the male head of department that the Special Sport group run by Ms. Sims might be an interesting class to observe. His description of the class, and the reason for its existence begins:

> I suppose you'd describe these guys as the losers of the school. Naah, I suppose you can't really *say* that, but these are the group in the school that are always getting picked on by the other kids, so we set up a special group for them. Before this they weren't enjoying sport, weren't participating, and they were truanting sport. But now we've put them into a group all together, they seem to be getting on ok, and enjoying sport a lot more (October 2001, Fieldnotes).

Although the term 'losers' is quickly corrected, it appears to be corrected not because the teacher believes it to be an inaccurate assessment of the students in the group, but rather, because he is mindful that the description might be recorded in some official form by the researcher. His use of the term 'losers' constitutes the students intertextually within the winner/loser binaries prevalent in sporting rhetoric. In the language of sport, winners occupy high status positions, both as the individual embodiments of success, as well as desired and desirable team members. On the other hand, losers occupy low status positions commensurate with embodied incompetence and failure from which sporting teams are keen to distance themselves. As 'losers of the school', the members of the class are interpellated as having already failed, both individually and collectively. Thus the low status subject positions they occupy

negates their potential for being perceived by others as successful, or even as potentially successful – they are impossible sporting subjects.

The segregation of these students from regular sport classes, together with the apparent failure of staff to address the bullying behaviours of other students functions to reinforce their positions as victims. The classification of the group as 'losers' who have failed to satisfactorily negotiate the bullying to which they have been subjected, and have thereby failed to meet the implicit requirements of hetero-masculine physicality, are constituted as victims who are complicit in their own disempowerment. This complicity is underscored by the fact that, prior to the establishment of the Special Sport class, the boys in the group had begun 'truanting sport'. This is seen as problematic not because the bullying to which they were being subjected had resulted in avoidance strategies on the part of the students, but because 'truanting sport' is considered a serious offence in its own right. Indeed, the school's *Information For Students and Parents* booklet states

> **WARNING!** ABSENCE FROM SPORT CAN JEOPARDISE THE AWARD OF A SCHOOL CERTIFICATE [emphasis using bold and capitals in original].

As such it is perhaps unsurprising that the reduction of truancy, in general and from sport in particular, is the focus of considerable attention in the school, with discourses of truancy elided with discourses of aberrant behaviour. Consequently, the designation of this group of students as truants implies a kind of willful complicity in their constitution as undesirable social subjects.

The negative attitude of the head of department holds considerable currency amongst the predominantly male PE staff, as the following example illustrates:

> Another male member of the PE staff, Mr. Pratt, enters the staff room and is told by the head of department that the researcher will be observing 'Ms. Sims' group'. Mr. Pratt rolls his eyes, shakes his head disapprovingly and replies, 'Ahhhh, *SPECIAL* Sport'(October 2001, Fieldnotes).

Interactions such as these between members of staff are constitutive practises which function not only to cite the students' marginality, but also to inscribe the group's subordinate status within discourse. Importantly, the unquestioned acceptance of negative constitutions of the students by staff has a normative function, serving both to normalise the practises of assigning students to marginalised discursive positions, as well as to normalise and reinforce the predominance of teachers' views within the discursive hierarchy. Additionally, use of the term Special Sport cites and inscribes enduring educational and popular discourses in which 'special' carried the connotation of physical disability, emotional dysfunction, social disaffection, or intellectual deficiency. While the term 'special' has been largely rejected by disability politics, this neither negates the term's meanings in the school, nor undermines its constitutive force. As a consequence, the intertextual constitution of the Special Sport group as deficient relies on terminology appropriated from mainstream disability discourses and now circulating as apparently neutral educational, but more often popularly derogatory, terms in the general parlance of the school. The degree to which the term 'special' functions as a signifier of the group's undesirable status within the discursive hierarchy, is illustrated in comments by the class teacher:

> A lot of the other kids in the school tease and hassle these boys for being in this group. Of course Mr. Pratt doesn't help. Whenever he makes announcements during assembly about where their sport's going to be held, he always says, 'And Ms. Sims' *Special* Sport will meet in the quad'. So they're

always getting singled out, then they get picked on because they're in this class. Some of them really resent that (November 2001, Fieldnotes).

The constitutive power of teachers' narratives is further illustrated in excerpts from an interview with the same teacher:

> R: How do you think that group is seen by the other sport groups in the school?
>
> Ms. Sims: Up until this term, it was just another sport group. But then since this term Mr. Pratt's been referring to them as Miss Sims' *Special* Group, so they've copped a good deal of ribbing from some of the other kids, 'cause, 'Why are you Miss Sims' *Special* Group?', that sort of thing. And I've said 'Well, because , they've changed sport'…and we do sports that they don't normally do in house sport…So I said, 'Well, we're special, 'cause we do special sport. Not because we're S*pecial*, because we do special sports for the kids who are having trouble with other kids, or something like that'. And they'll go 'Aw, you're in Miss Sims' *Special* Group, what are you all, a bunch of ignorant wimps?', and say things like that, but they say, 'We're in Miss Sims' special group, 'cause we do special sports that you don't normally do in sport, because you've gotta have permission to be in this group' (November 2001, Interview).

Despite apparent attempts on the part of both the students in the group and their teacher to resist their constitution as 'special', and to contest the term's derogatory connotations, other staff and students persisted in invoking their shared understandings of intertextually produced meanings to constitute members of the group as inferior social subjects. The negative constitutions of the group pervade the school's discourses to such an extent that even when attempting to speak in the group's defense, their teacher is unable to extricate them from her own explanations of the group's activities to other students. This is also reflected in her initial explanation of the group's make-up to the researcher, describing the group as 'social misfits'.

Together, these factors illustrate mundane practises of educational triage, in which teachers' narratives function overtly in the constitution of marginalised student identities and disempowered subject positions. The hierarchical power relations operating within the school are reinscribed and reinforced by both the descriptors chosen and the attitudes displayed by staff and other students in relation to the class. Importantly, however, the constitutive force of teachers' and students' narratives is reliant to an extent on collectively held understandings of the marginalised positions already occupied by members of the group within the school hierarchy. Of particular interest here are descriptions and conceptualisations of the group which prioritise the students' marginal status as unsuccessful and undesirable *social* subjects. These are then deployed as justification for these students' segregation into a 'special' group constituted as incompetent to negotiate social relationships within the broader school community.

The disparity between the various accounts of the group, and the actual makeup of the group, highlights the extent to which the low status hierarchical position the group members already occupied within the school's discourses is reflected in the prioritised accounts. Despite their initial description by Ms. Sims as 'misfits' and by other staff as 'losers' who were perpetually being bullied in other sport groups and were selected to be in the group to prevent them being subjected to further bullying, over time an alternative picture of the group began to emerge. One boy in the group, whom Ms. Sims described as a 'good student' and an 'extremely competent sportsman', had elected to be in the class so he could be in sport together with his younger brother, who was in the class because a physical disability precluded him from participation in regular sporting activities. In fact, there were three groups of brothers in the group.

Several of the boys in the class were considered to be 'good students' in terms of their academic performance, while about 15 students in the group had been formally classified as having mild intellectual disabilities. Additionally, a number of the boys had elected to be in the group because, unlike a number of other elective sport choices, this class required no additional fees in order for students to attend.

The disparity between official accounts of the group and the actual composition of the group raises a number of significant issues. First, conceptualisations and descriptions of the group that prioritise their status as 'victims' and 'losers', while simultaneously obscuring other features of the group, have a normative effect. That is, the position of individuals within the prevailing discursive hierarchy becomes the dominant feature by which they become, and continue to be, known within discourse.

Second, the constitution of the group as a homogenous cohort of marginalised and undesirable 'Others', conflates factors such as socioeconomic status, physical or intellectual disability, family association, and preference for nonvalourised sporting activities. Not only does it conflate these factors with one another, it also conflates them with failure to successfully negotiate a place inside the particular masculinist discourse that pervades the school. In doing this, the group's members are consigned, both individually and collectively, to subordinate positions in the school's discursive hierarchy.

Third, the derogatory terminology deployed in descriptions of the group, together with the persistent omission of other pertinent information about the class and the students in it, reflects the extent to which this group functions as a repository for the

school's hopeless cases. The student welfare rhetoric that we might expect to see deployed in teachers' discussions of such a group is circumvented. Constituted as hopeless cases, the students are located outside the bounds of such official school discourses. As such, they are also beyond the reach of school intervention – scarce school resources need not be allocated to this group, institutional practises of educational triage are legitimised.

These constitutive discursive practises, therefore, may be seen as processes of educational triage that ration educational opportunity (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). These triage processes are guided by teachers' understandings of students' social identities. Although these social identities are marked by social class, disability, and gender (or specifically, un-masculinity), they are subsumed in an official discourse of innate individual ability and concomitant potential for success (or failure). As such, triage practises constitute these students as hopeless cases, thereby inscribing once again their subordinate position in discourse. Furthermore, as indicated above and as we will demonstrate in the next section, these processes of educational triage also function to 'legitimately' limit these students' access to educational resources.

Rationing resources: bored games

The discursive practises discussed above demonstrate the extent to which the subject positions occupied by students in the school's discursive hierarchies are constrained by processes of educational triage. These triage processes function to limit students' access to material and human resources, as well as the respect and courtesy of teachers and peers, in accordance to hierarchies of status and worth. In the case of the Special Sport group, which functions as a repository for those students constituted in

discourse as hopeless cases, the limiting of educational resources and opportunities is inscribed in the school's normalised institutional practises:

> Ms. Sims explained that this group was initially intended as a 'board games' group, for the kids who don't really like sport, and for those who have some sort of problem that prevents them from participating in regular sporting activities. The idea of a 'board games' group wasn't particularly successful, though, because 'none of the kids would ever bring in any board games' (November 2001, Fieldnotes).

Despite the earlier assertions by some members of staff that this class was formed for the purposes of removing students from groups in which they had been continually bullied, another official explanation for the class was the provision of activities which members of this group would find more enjoyable than regular sporting activities. Yet the school appears to take no responsibility for providing the class with the material resources appropriate to its designated activities. Such institutional apathy toward the group's resource needs is particularly significant when taking into account that the cohort includes students who have chosen this group as a sporting option specifically because financial constraints preclude them from participating in activities that require parents to pay fees.

Limiting material resources in this way functions both to highlight the low value attached to non-sporting activities, as well as to inscribe once again the group's low status in discourse. Already constituted as 'losers' in the school hierarchies, this group is outside the dominant masculinist culture of the school in which sporting activity is valourised as a defining feature of successful masculine identities. Seen to have either failed or refused the sporting activities most openly associated with desirable masculinities, the resource needs of the students in Special Sport attract no discernible attention.

The lack of material resources allocated to the group is mirrored in the allocation of staffing for the class. While the group consists of a total of 24 boys, more than twice the student to teacher ratio of other sport groups in the school, only one teacher is allocated to the class. Significantly, Ms. Sims also occupies a marginalised position in the school's discursive hierarchy. As a consequence of illness she has been required to give up her previous responsibilities for teaching and coaching the more prestigious 'grade sport' groups, which involved taking teams from the school by bus to compete with other schools. Instead, she has been reassigned to the task of supervising Special Sport. Despite Ms. Sims' established record as a competent sport teacher, her preclusion from supervising high status groups on the basis of illness functions to construct a low status subject position for her within the school's hierarchy, which she has been obliged by the school executive to occupy:

> Ms. Sims: …I get stuck on house sport because I developed an allergy to the propellant in deodorant. I used to always take grade sport. I used to take cricket, volleyball, softball, hockey. Then I got this allergy, the kids won't stop spraying on the buses, therefore I've had to walk home from Garvey and Raybourne [neighbouring suburbs], and I just got sick of it. The boss wouldn't let me drive to sport, so I've been stuck on house sport ever since.

> I: Why wouldn't the boss let you drive?

> Ms. Sims: Because he said there was no one to supervise the kids. But my kids were never the last kids dropped off, so there was always a teacher on the bus. But that was just the case.

> I: So did you feel like you were being punished for having an allergy?

> Ms. Sims: Yeah, I think I did, actually. Because I used to coach like, lots of cricket teams, through to championships, like I coached the indoor cricket team when they were State Runners-Up, and now I can't take any of it because I can't virtually go outside the school. I can't go on excursions, 'cause the kids take deodorant on excursions…and they purposely get out and spray it at you. And I've had kids do that. Spray it at me on purpose, that has happened. The boss just didn't do anything about it. We've got a new boss now, but, the other boss, he told me he would suspend kids that sprayed deodorant at me on

purpose. And one kid did, and I took her down there, and he said, 'See what you've done. Say sorry. Go back to class'. And that was the end of it, he didn't do anything. (December 2001, Interview).

As this interview data illustrates, processes of educational triage function not only in the constitution of student identities, but in the constitution of teacher identities as well. Despite the contribution she made to the high status sporting programmes in the school prior to the onset of allergy, Ms. Sims has been *re*constituted as a residual member of the PE staff. As a consequence of her illness and the subsequent lower status subject position she now occupies, she is required to work with the residual student group on an ongoing basis. In this way, both teacher and students are constituted intertextually through prevailing discourses of sporting success and the demonstration of uncompromised physical competence those discourses necessarily imply. As neither the teacher nor the students in the group can meet the discursive requirements for satisfactory sporting performance, allocating them to the residual sporting group inscribes them once again as undesirable social subjects.

While it could perhaps be argued that Ms. Sims' expertise in teaching and coaching could have been seen by members of the school executive as a valuable resource to allocate to the students in Special Sport, the school's failure to satisfactorily address her professional interests, and the official response to her illness would suggest otherwise. The school's refusal to support Ms Sims in her desire to continue teaching the grade sport groups, despite her offer of negotiating alternative solutions, such as providing her own transport to sporting events, illustrates the completeness of her *re*constitution as an unsuitable, or impossible, teacher of PE within institutional discourse. This institutional response has such constitutive force that it closes down the possibility for her to constitute herself otherwise, to deploy discourse

efficaciously. While it might be suggested that liability concerns may have dictated this response on the part of the school, the fact that she had on more than one occasion been forced by illness to leave the official transport provided, and had been left to make her own way back to the school on foot, over distances of several kilometres, while experiencing the effects of potentially dangerous allergic reactions, would seem to indicate otherwise. Indeed, the apparent lack of concern for her health and safety is indicative of the degree to which triage processes are implicated in administrative decisions which view some members of the school community as worthy of 'treatment' and support, while the needs of others held in lower esteem are left unattended. Triage processes, it would seem, are so powerfully embedded in the school's discursive practises that even the school's legal, professional, and ethical obligations are subjugated to their effects.

The rationing of resources, then, may be seen as processes which have a constitutive function in relation to both students and teachers. The following section will consider ways in which triage processes function to police and maintain the subject positions occupied by marginalised individuals and groups within the school community.

'On quad': the discursive limits of success

Processes of educational triage constitute identities through the maintenance of discursive hierarchies and the unequal distribution of resources. These triage practises may also be understood as a means by which groups and individuals are bounded by discursive limits placed on their capacity to successfully negotiate a satisfactory place in discourse. In the case of Special Sport, triage practises perpetuate these students' low status in the school, as well as placing discursive limits on their potential for successfully renegotiating more a more desirable place in discourse. In addition to the

allocation of minimal resources to the group, the group is segregated and relocated to the most undesirable area of the school grounds each week for outside sessions. This serves to normalise and police their status as undesirable social and educational subjects – as hopeless cases:

> The quad is concreted and flanked by the caged canteen on one side and classroom buildings with walls of windows on the other three sides. Metal benches skirt the edges of the quad. The concrete surface reflects the heat and glare from the sun. The heat is intense. The surface is marked out with a series of sports pitches. All outdoor activities for the group take place 'on quad', including games like cricket and soccer. When playing cricket, soft balls are used and Ms Sims continually warns the group that they will be required to personally meet the cost of repair for any broken windows. Activities such as running are seldom engaged in. (October 2001, Fieldnotes).

The designation of the group to this area on a weekly basis reflected the discursive assumptions of the group's innate inability to successfully achieve in sporting terms. The physical limitations inherent in conducting sport in such a location functions to further normalise the students' experience of playing sport with neither incentives to achieve, nor expectations to improve. For this group, whose perceived inability to achieve in sporting terms is inextricably linked to their constitution as 'losers' in the hetero-masculine discourses of the school, these triage processes reproduce the conditions of impossibility.

Additionally, these factors serve as stark examples of the ways in which spatial organisation within schools functions to maximise effective surveillance of students and reinforce hierarchical power relations, allowing architecture to function as 'another instance of governmentality, one that is instrumental in reproducing the social relations that supervise modern life'(Symes & Preston, 1997, p. 212). Further, such hierarchical use of spacial organisation corresponds to Symes and Preston's

suggesting that location in schools is used as a form of behavioural control. Their suggestion that spacial organisation allows for positioning and ranking of students according to ability is apposite, as is Symes and Preston's suggestion that spacial organisation permits surveillance and supervision of students whose behaviour fails in some way to comply with expectations.

The allocation of the 'quad' to the Special Sport group, while the other sport groups use the ovals, tracks, and other purpose-specific outside sporting facilities, functions to both display and underscore the undesirable and subordinate position of the group within the school hierarchy. Factors such as the unsatisfactory playing surface and the magnified heat within the 'quad' convey the implicit suggestion that this group of students has, in fact, been ranked according to ability, and allocated an undesirable area for sport, corresponding to their presumed undesirability as sport participants. The fact that the area is surrounded by walls containing windows (including windows of several staff rooms at the school) functions to reinforce the views expressed by staff that this is a difficult group of students, characterised by behavioural problems and a general inability to 'fit in', imbuing the decision to place the group in this area for sport with an implied panopticism. This effect is magnified by the demand that the students regulate not only their behaviours while engaging in school sport, but also the degree of vigour with which they participate. The threat that breaking windows, even accidentally, would result in being required to pay for the repairs functions to effectively restrain students' level of physical activity and to constrain play, thus inscribing once again their status as marginalised participants in sporting activities. Consequently, the spacial distribution of the Special Sport group functions as what Kirk and Spiller identify as 'a differentiating space' in which the spatial distribution

of students allows for not only supervision, but also for the establishment of 'a highly

visible hierarchy of competence and worth' (1994, p.90).

Fighting chances: triage and institutional complicity

Processes of educational triage, then, are central structuring features of the school's discursive practice. In the preceding sections we have considered how educational triage functions to constitute marginalised identities, maintain discursive hierarchies, and limit possibilities for students' to be constituted in other, less denigrated ways. Our analysis suggests that these triage processes, and their discursive effects, are fundamental to the production of the institutional contexts and conditions for which schools are ultimately accountable. In this final section we will make use of these conceptual tools to examine a critical incident – a fight that took place during a Special Sport class – that is illustrative of how institutional discursive practices render schools complicit in the production of such incidents. That is, our analysis indicates that this incident can be understood as a consequence of the triage processes embedded within the school's discursive practices.

> Special Sport is being held on quad for the fourth consecutive week. The weather today it is so hot that Ms. Sims has made a special request to be allowed to use the adjacent canteen area, which has a concrete surface and is surrounded by brick walls and iron bars, but it is at least shaded and slightly cooler. She remarks to me that on particularly hot days like today, the boys seem more agitated than usual, and she would prefer to have some assistance with the class.
>
> The boys play several games of 'indoor' soccer, and as they do so, appear increasingly tired, overheated and fractious. The ball is suddenly kicked into the corner near the goal being defended by Chad, a tall, quiet student. Chad runs into the corner to pick up the ball. As Chad bends over, Carl, a boy on the other team, runs toward the ball, crashing into Chad and yelling, 'You dickhead, Chad!' Chad stands up, grabs Carl by the shirt, pushes him against the brick wall, and punches him in the right cheek with a fully closed fist. Upon impact, the left side of Carl's head slams with considerable force into the brick wall. Carl takes two steps to the side, stumbles, collapses, and briefly loses consciousness.
>
> Several other boys begin yelling at Chad and each other, and a few punches are thrown before Ms. Sims manages to separate them and get to Carl. Carl regains consciousness, but his speech is unintelligible. Ms. Sims sends him with his brother and two other boys to the office to seek medical attention, and

sends another to request assistance from PE staff. When one male staff member arrives, Ms. Sims explains what happened and asks him to supervise the class while she goes to check on Carl. The teacher replies, 'No. I'd rather go check on him myself' and walks off.

Meanwhile Chad sits nearby in silence, staring blankly and visibly shaking…A couple of other boys comment to Chad that Carl deserved to be punched, one congratulates him. But Chad does not respond to or look at the boys addressing him. The group becomes increasingly subdued as Chad becomes less and less responsive.

The boys who accompanied Carl to the office return, saying that Carl's mother is unable to collect him from school. After the bell, Ms. Sims goes to inquire about Carl. After school, I notice her leaving the school in her car, accompanied by Carl and his brother. (November 2001, Fieldnotes).

This incident highlights the importance of calls (Fitzclarence, 1995; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997) for critical consideration of the ways in which educational institutions, their values, assumptions, and practices, are implicated in the production of violence, and underscores the relevance of triage processes to this debate. As a direct consequence and in further inscription of their low status within the school's discursive hierarchy and the school's concomitant triage practices, the students in Special Sport are continually obliged to conduct sporting activities in an unsuitable and potentially hazardous location, with little alternative for appropriate variation and without the staffing levels afforded to other sport classes. Such practices function to normalise the school's extant power relations; constitute the students and their teacher as hopeless cases; and inscribe the discursive predominance of hetero-masculine authority. These are discursive constitutions that are further inscribed by the male P.E. teacher's overt refusal to assist in the way requested. As such, this analysis lends support to the charge that

[i]f schools implicitly subscribe to and endorse hegemonic versions of masculinity, particularly in their more exaggerated forms, then they are complicit in the production of violence…If they operate in such a way as to

marginalise and stigmatise certain groups of students then they are complicit (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997, p. 125).

The suggestion that institutional structures and practices are implicated in the production of indiscipline and other 'undesirable' behaviours amongst students is not new (see Slee 1995). However, as Slee notes, educators and education policy makers alike persist in locating the 'problem' in the person of the individual student, a focus that effectively removes the school from the plane of critical scrutiny. The notion of educational triage provides a framework for examining the role that the school plays in producing violence, and our analysis demonstrates the utility of deploying this notion within an understanding of the constitutive and regulatory potential of such institutional discursive practices.

While the school's complicity in creating the circumstances in which the fight occurred merit critical attention, the subsequent management of the incident further illustrates the extent to which the school is implicated by processes of educational triage:

> Ms. Sims discusses the incident and its follow-up. She explains that after the fight, she drove Carl and his brother home because the boys' mother and grandfather were unable to collect them from the school. She also indicates that medical attention was not sought for Carl. When asked whether Chad had been offered any support after the fight she states that, in line with school discipline policy, Chad was placed on an automatic 3-day suspension. Ms. Sims notes that this is the only incident of this sort he had ever been involved in, a fact that she stressed in her formal reporting of the incident. (November 2001, Fieldnotes).

The apparent failure of the school to recognise and attend to the immediate physical and emotional needs of both of these students in accordance with departmental guidelines inscribes once again their low status in discourse, constituting them outside

the official requirements relating to the school's duty of care. The maintenance of discursive hierarchies takes precedence, it seems, over the school's legal (and, it could be argued, ethical) obligations, highlighting the extent to which institutional complicity is enacted through processes of educational triage that are embedded and normalised within school discourse.

Conclusion

In this paper we have shown processes of educational triage operating through the discursive practices of the institution and of individual teachers. In terms of educational triage, the Special Sport class is both a repository for, and productive of, hopeless cases. The very establishment of the Special Sport class is a feature of these normative sorting and selection practices. Reflecting analyses offered by Gillborn and Youdell (2000) the paper has demonstrated how the title given to the class; its particular staffing allocation; the apparent absence of material resources; and the nature of the space allocated to the group can all be understood as institutional practices of educational triage that limit severely the educational opportunities available to this group of students. In addition to limiting educational opportunity, however, we have shown how these practices are constitutive of students' and teachers' subjectivities. These subjectivities are inscribed again and again through the naming practices of teachers (and, reportedly, students) ensuring that the Special Sport students occupy marginalised and denigrated subject positions. That is, the subjectivities available to these students are constituted outside acceptable social, sporting, or educational masculinities. Finally, our above analysis of the fight demonstrates that, in addition to constraining educational opportunities and

constituting denigrated subject positions, practices of educational triage can also be directly implicated in the production of school violence.

In a competitive context marked by limited resources, it seems that processes of educational triage may become central organisational tools in schools already burdened by the demands of the quasi-market—tools that we have shown have important, and highly troubling, implications for equity and student subjectivities. The significance of the connections between policy reform, institutional practices, and student subjectivities is yet to be fully recognised. The analytical tools developed and deployed in this paper have the potential to make an important contribution to this field of research and the analysis offered begins to explicate these important connections.

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