

Mastering the 'good (enough) student' - subjectification of young people in education and training

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This paper reflects on what is at stake for young people when they engage in education and training. Questions of subjectification, conformity, inclusion and survival (and their opposites) frame this discussion and highlight the importance of examining what we do to and with young people in education and training. It draws on Foucault's governmentality theorisations and also Judith Butler's work on subjectification to explore the production of students who are acceptable in terms of institutional norms of behaviour and governmental goals of the desired neo-liberal subject. This paper uses accounts from young people in post-compulsory schooling to examine the fraught nature of this process and its impacts on young people's ability to maintain their viability as students.

Introduction

This paper explores the process through which post-compulsory schooling shapes young people. It is well-established in a range of critical literature that education plays a powerful role in the production of the responsabilised, free, autonomous and entrepreneurial neo-liberal adult, however the goal of this paper is "to see how norms take hold" (Butler 2006, p. 532) during the school years. In particular, the focus here is on the creation of the viable and intelligible student, willing to engage with what the education market has to offer. Achievement of this status is understood in this formulation as a precursor to the formation of the adult self of neo-liberalism. This paper argues that the post-compulsory years of schooling exert a powerful shaping force through processes of subjectification which offer recognition and inclusion for those who are able and willing to conform and threats of exclusion and marginalised subject positions for those who fail to comply.

However, an exploration of governing processes looks not only at the role of authorities and institutions in processes of subjectification. It also allows for a focus on the ways in which individuals shape and regulate their own conduct and asks questions about the personal qualities required of the self-governing subject. Edwards' (2002) point that "current forms of governing mobilize subjects in

ways that promote a self-reliance that differ from those of a previous era” (p. 354) is an interesting idea to consider in relation to the ways young people engage with education and training. If it is the case that “[t]his self-reliance promotes consumption and enterprise”(p. 354), how might this impact on the ways young people view themselves in relation to staying in school? Furthermore, what does it mean for the type of ethical work young people do on themselves in their engagement with education and what might be the implications of not taking on these attributes so valued in this context?

In exploring these themes the paper utilises accounts from young people attending a senior college (hereafter known as The College) in a metropolitan centre in an Australian city. The College operates as an alternative to mainstream schooling provisions in its local area and offers a combined general and vocational education and training program. Students at The College complete Years 11 and 12, while also completing TAFE Certificates and work placements. Therefore at the time of this project, all participants were successfully engaging in education in one way or another however this had not always been the case. Specifically, in the case of the accounts provided in this paper, each of the young people involved had found it difficult or impossible to be a student in mainstream settings. All had decided to change schools to complete Years 11 and 12, some had histories of disrupted schooling and some had been out of school for extended periods before entering The College. Even those students presented in the paper who one might be tempted to see as “successful” and “included” students will be seen to suffer a range of day-to-day micro-exclusions (Youdell, 2006). The effects of these micro-exclusions make their connection with school at times tenuous also.

The subject of neo-liberal education

The processes of subjectification in schools are best understood in the wider context of the governing project of schooling. Rose’s (1999) summation of the promise of education, drawn from a genealogy of schooling, provides a good overview of the subjectifying possibilities provided by educational interventions:

They dreamed that one could produce individuals who did not need to be governed by others, who would govern themselves through introspection, foresight, calculation, judgement and according to certain ethical norms. In these ideal individuals the social objective of the good citizen would be fused with the personal aspiration for a civilized life: this would be the state called freedom (p. 78).

It makes sense in this case then that the post-compulsory years of schooling bear a considerable burden in terms of schooling’s final chances to shape the desired subjects of education. The various

strategies used to entice and shape young people might simply be seen as a strategic refinement of these broader goals of schooling, applied to young adults instead of children. In the case of the senior college, where students who have been on the margins of schooling in terms of inclusion are offered what is often called “second chance” education, it might be argued that inclusive approaches function as a more conducive mechanism to assist young people in becoming “the good citizen”, a second chance for the governmental ends of schooling to be achieved. The fact that resistant students are often willing to be enticed back into education speaks for the power of neo-liberal agendas shaping young people’s responses. As Davis states “[n]eoliberalism as a form of governmentality works by convincing students and workers that there is no choice at a systemic level. Instead, their power lies in their individual choices to become appropriate and successful within that inevitable system” (Davies, 2006, p. 436).

In his work on the genealogy of schools and processes of subjectification through schooling, Hunter (1996) pinpoints key processes of self-problematisation and the subsequent work of the self on the self required in the school context. This work is important in understanding the lives and choices of the young people presented in this paper, especially in terms of their struggles in the education system. The first step in the process involves “a kind of problematization” (p. 158) whereby a self-interrogation occurs in relation to current conduct and ways of being. As Hunter (1996) notes, “we are the heirs to a whole series of inventions for taking an interest in ourselves as the subjects of our conduct” via the power of the Christian tradition and its impact on the shaping of Western schooling traditions. Next, the individual must perform the required “ethical labour” (Hunter, 1996, p. 158) on the self to, in effect, become themselves.

These processes of subjectification will be explored in the light of the thesis of this paper which is that young people are the targets of an increasingly insistent range of interventions on the post-compulsory years which not only reveal wider societal anxieties about young people and education but also serve to compel young people to interrogate themselves in relation to their viability as students and their efficacy as responsible consumers of education. If (and when) this self-interrogation invokes a problematisation of their conduct, young people face the central bind of the subjectification process – conformity with the neo-liberal agendas of schooling or resistance and the risks it brings. The management of this bind and the strategies employed by young people in the achievement of recognition as a viable subject of schooling form the central focus the accounts below.

Subjectification in schooling practices – accounts of anxiety and viability, 'passing' and recognition

The College takes what might be broadly termed an inclusive approach to schooling. A range of academic and vocational interests and aptitudes are catered for in the curriculum, the prevailing adult learning approach provides a relaxed and collegial atmosphere between students and teachers. There are no uniforms, teachers are called by their first names, and students move freely in and around the College. The College functions for many of its students as a sometimes challenging intersecting point between exclusion and inclusion and as such provides fertile ground for examining subjectivating practices which illuminate this continuum of experience. The accounts provided by the participants revolve around a “then” and “now” binary of the students’ making. “Then” aspects of the accounts refer to their previous experiences of schooling prior to coming to The College. Generally in these parts of the accounts there is a negative view of their relationship with school and incidents of exclusion from school, both self and school-initiated. The “now” parts of the accounts refer to their time at The College where they are all, to varying degrees, successfully engaged and included. However, the argument being put forward in this paper suggests that even when subjectivating processes work to produce inclusion, they always do so within the shadow of the threat of exclusion.

The participant accounts below are drawn from a wider project which followed 10 students during their final year at The College. Each participant was interviewed over the year with the goal of 3 interviews for each participant. However, before introducing the accounts it is necessary to add some methodological caveats through which to clarify assumptions about the nature of the accounts and how they are being used here. Traditional ethnographic research methods have been widely used in education to observe and represent the experiences of participants in ways that claim to take the reader into the lived experiences of participants. However, these understandings have been problematised by poststructuralist critique and this has implications for how the accounts below might be read and understood. Following Britzman (2000) in her approach “[i]n studying the lived experience of actual individuals but not wanting to individualize or render as a psychological problem the social disarray these individuals lived” (p. 31), the inclusion of the student accounts in this paper are presented and read in a way that is consistent with the governmentality perspective. They are not read in terms of an emancipatory project where the participants overcame their problems with school, although these details may be included in the accounts as part of the participants’ own construction of their narrative. These accounts are presented with a view to questioning what might be the

nature of the self-problematisations in which young people engage to become intelligible at The College and how practices of schooling more generally, might be implicated in this ethical work. Thus “the uneasy dialogue between humanism and poststructuralism, between what is taken as lived experience and the afterthought of interpretive efforts, between the real subjects and their textual identities” (Britzman, 2000, p. 32) is very much a part of this paper.

Anxiety around viability - Charlotte and Tara

The accounts from Charlotte and Tara reveal something of a type of bind experienced by young people in terms of conformity around the norms of schooling and the (constrained) possibilities of non-conformity. This bind on a very practical level is well expressed by Charlotte who does not want to be in school but sees no choice. At the time of our interview she had already experienced a period of unemployment and was living in a youth shelter:

It got to the point where I was 18 and I needed to get a good job that would pay well because I was living out of home, because I had to pay rent and all that sort of stuff and ...there aren't many jobs that you can get without your HSC...So, it kind of limits you a bit...So I decided to come back.

School for Charlotte, until this point, had proved difficult to tolerate. Her lack of success academically and her social struggles without support due to family breakdown had led to her exclusion which took the form of her rejection of school after failing to find a way in which to maintain a coherent sense of herself as a student. Yet her decision to leave and get a job had not proved sustainable either. Without school completion or other qualifications she had run into a dead end and she knew it.

Charlotte chose not to elaborate on why her family problems made it impossible to continue at school, although she does hint at a previously unhappy relationship with school as being part of her disincentive for continuing in the midst of the family issues.

I was always pretty bad at my grades at my school...I found that teachers would mark you on pretty much on what they thought of you. And I hate to say it but like my English teacher, she ...It didn't matter what I handed in. I always got back the same mark. And it was just like, I don't know, it's just like so different here. It doesn't matter how much you stuff up or anything, the teachers will still mark your paper as if it's someone that they don't know. ..Which is good, 'cause you get a better advantage at it.

Charlotte's commentary on what she perceives as the differences in treatment between her previous school and The College hints at a type of self-knowledge born of reflection on the features and possibilities of successful studenthood. That a propensity to "stuff up" at school might, in some contexts at least, make your viability and credibility as a worthwhile student more marginal, seems clear and unfair to her. Being "known" in a particular way at school can create "baggage", the weight of which can exact a toll when pressures from life outside of school are brought to bear as well. While in this exchange, Charlotte does not delve into the nature of whatever "stuffing up" she may have been involved in, she does show that she has reflected on its consequences and has linked them to her perceived lack of viability as a student.

People judge you. I mean like, you still get people who judge you here but um, I don't know, it's just totally different like atmosphere than it is compared to like other places.

Charlotte's reflections on the subjectivating effects of the social world of the student are of interest here and link to a range of comments from the other participants. Her comment that "People judge you" again hints at her having reflected on previous lack of social success in the school environment. Interestingly, it is not her own failure or lack of social acceptability that she problematises – "everyone's kind of up themselves" – but there is no doubt that she has known what it is like to be below par according to the standards of prevailing schoolyard social acceptability. That this has made school life previously difficult and potentially even impossible for her is a strong subtext of this part of her discussion.

Tara's account of coming to The College is in many ways different to Charlotte's and yet it contains parallel themes of becoming unintelligible in a schooling context. Tara's account tells of an ambitious restlessness in relation to her education and future. She identified this as beginning with a degree of dissatisfaction with her previous schooling. She recounted feeling a lack of fit between the local public high school she was attending and what she wanted out of education:

Like public schools, they're not there to help you really, like here...I've got a good family friend who came here and finished Year 12 here last year and she loved it. I was thinking to go to a normal TAFE up the coast but, I don't know, I just wanted to experience...To become more independent...

[Interviewer: What changed – was it the pressure of the HSC?]

No, not really. I think I just found who I ...like..., more about myself... Became more me, I don't know if that makes sense...I just discovered myself a bit more and found out who I was which ...I didn't really fit in to that place.

Traditional discourses of adolescence being a time of identity formation – discovering oneself – run through Tara’s comments very clearly. Similarly, related themes of thinking about where you “fit in” play a part in this story she tells of herself. Central to this work of self-formation is a desire to experience independence. This in turn seems to foster a developing self-reliance since she feels that she could not depend on her previous school to meet her needs. The costs and risk of dependence in such a context was too steep in her estimation. For example, Tara cites the lack of a learning culture at her previous school as the major point of frustration for her:

I still, like I love my friends there but I just ... Say we’d be in class and everyone would just be ... They don’t want to learn and like, I did. I’d get so frustrated at my classmates.

Half the teachers couldn’t control the class. That’s why I left because they couldn’t do anything about it...and so I just said I can’t stay here anymore because I’m not getting my needs, what I want.

In this reflection, Tara defines herself in opposition to the dominant school culture at her high school. The act of doing so must have entailed considerable risks for her – both social and institutional isolation. Shaping herself as an academically able and interested student in a school environment that she found to be at odds with that position rendered her as a problem in that context. In some ways it might be seen that Tara’s self-problematisation is concerned with issues of exclusion. Paradoxically, she felt herself becoming unintelligible as a student within this high school because she was at odds with what she described as the dominant anti-academic school culture and also with the people in the school she thought should be able to help her:

I was fine up until Year 10 when we got a new principal and we just...I don’t know, I just felt...like I couldn’t talk to any of my teachers or...I just felt that they were all out together to get me in trouble.

In this case the “trouble” occurs because she actively complains to the school about how she sees her situation and is frustrated by a perceived lack of action and/or empathy with her position from those whose help she seeks. However, in this case, her lack of intelligibility as a student comes from her inability to remain silent about the failures of the system, as she sees it, and her unwillingness to appear cooperative and acquiescent in the face of her rising frustration.

Passing- Johnny and Mitchell

In several of the other accounts, there are moments when it seems clear that the participants are looking for ways of being in The College which do not force them into the position of being

annihilated by conformity with models of studenthood they have previously rejected but also allow for their continued participation. Through a range of strategies, they demonstrate that they can “pass” as an intelligible student and remain included despite their ongoing sense of alienation.

Johnny had a history of disrupted education due to school initiated exclusion which began very early in his school life. By Year 10, Johnny’s only option of remaining in education had been participation in a series of alternative classrooms within behavioural management settings. Johnny had also previously rejected the possibility of a mediated inclusion via drug therapy for his ADHD. Of the drugs he stated:

You’d have it and you’d just sit there. You’d do your work but everything outside...you’re gone. You’re pretty much a ghost.

In contrast, at The College, Johnny talks about his desire and partial success in staying “under the radar”, a phrase he uses to describe his ability to not attract the sort of trouble and attention he is used to in school settings. He makes no claim to have become the “model student” but he can see there is a space which he can inhabit which is tolerable to him and acceptable in the institution, for long enough to complete his schooling. But there is always in the background the risk of exclusion:

[Interviewer: How come you were able to maintain that low profile for all that time, compared to say, your old school or the program? What was different when you came here?]

I don’t have to be here so they don’t have to keep me here. Like I knew that...

Sometimes this negotiation of passing takes the participants into unexpected territory. For example, Mitchell tells another story about his experience with playing with the norms of “the good student”. In his English class, a new teacher coincided with the introduction of a poetry topic which caught his interest:

And so I really started putting in and before I knew it, the teacher thought I was a really star student and I thought why let on that I didn’t used to be a good student, why not keep this going?

Even though he is doing what acceptable students do, that is, applying themselves to their work, Mitchell is aware that he is inhabiting something that feels, at least at first, inauthentic for him. He finds that he can perform “the good student” on his own terms when motivated to and no one need know that is not what he might describe as the “real” Mitchell. So while taking up “the good student” might feel inauthentic, it does not feel compromising or bad.

However, to get to this point, Mitchell has had to negotiate significant self-problematisation around his behaviour and its impacts -

I went through this period where I was on drugs and I was coming late every day ...

[Interviewer: You went to counselling here?]

Yeah, I went to counselling here....

[Interviewer: So what was the difference between you and the ones who got kicked out?]

I realised that I was having this problem and I realised I wasn't going anywhere. I wasn't doing any school work. I had six assessment tasks due and I hadn't done them ...and I went and saw my teachers and I got the counselling ...

Mitchell's narrative has strong themes of taking responsibility, getting help, facing up to his teachers and turning his life around. In considering his motivation for self-problematisation, the spectre of school exclusion once again suggests itself. He sees others on that trajectory – “I know like three or four people who's been kicked out for that same reason” – and makes moves to ensure that this will not be his story. In fact, he has an interesting self-awareness of the drama of his own story and the impact it might have on the listener:

And I'd never been to a counsellor before. Taking the first few steps is the hardest, you know. Like I think that's why I can say this stuff easily to you. I'm sure you weren't expecting anything like this.

...Sure I'm ashamed of that time period but I'm also very proud of the way I came out of it.

The ambivalence of the story – the shame and pride – are definite constitutive elements of this reflective account and Mitchell's new, more viable identity as a student.

Moments of recognition – Kim and Miranda

For some students, The College offered unexpected moments of recognition in terms of viability as students and as such shaped increasingly robust connections with schooling. In the case of Kim, normative expectations of appearance among teenage girls were one of the factors which drove her away from her previous school. Kim's scarring from an accident made her ability to fit the expectation of the norm impossible. However, her anxiety about her acceptability at The College was soon relieved:

Because of my [injuries], I have to wear [special clothing] all the time and so that's like a bit different in summer because everyone can see my legs and things and so I wasn't sure how that would be, but no one [at The College] cared.

Kim's relief and feeling that she can fit in at The College is a powerful indicator of the successful College culture where a wide range of sub-cultures are part of the environment. Norms of appearance and behaviour, which in some school contexts are quite narrow and serve to exclude, seem to operate differently at The College.

This is echoed in the comments of another student. Miranda's account includes observation of a certain cultural homogeneity at her previous school:

I know back at [the previous school], it's a bit more tense there. People care a lot more about what you're doing or what you're wearing. If you don't have that best brand of peroxide or something in your hair... I think people here just accept you a lot more. So I like that. I like that a lot more.

[Interviewer: Why do you think that is? Why does it happen here?]

Um at [the previous school] most of the girls kind of fall into one category, like typical teenager, like ...like pink, blonde hair, glittery jewellery. Here there aren't nearly as many, this is going to sound really weird, but people like that. Like there's lots of different people here. So everyone's a bit more accepting I suppose.

Paradoxically, the striving to conform to this homogenous image that Miranda describes was the cause of social splits. It would seem that since not everyone is equally adept at performing the "typical teenager", social hierarchies emerged:

You don't talk to people out of your own social group...

[Interviewer: Why not?]

It's kind of like you get disowned if you talk to people below your social status at the school. My god, like mingling with the plebs, kind of thing. So and it's just really strange.

However, in the freer social atmosphere of The College, Miranda embodies her rejection of such constraints in a range of ways, including her appearance:

I didn't follow the trends but I didn't look particularly outlandish...

[Interviewer: You're wearing a kaftan today!]

Call me a white African! ...I probably wouldn't have worn this in Year 10. Like OK, I've got more confidence to wear and do what I like but I did that more so than a lot of people at [the previous school].

By the final interview, the rewards of doing this work on herself are clear:

I feel so much more normal here.

This is not to say that Miranda has been coerced into changing her ways. Rather, she states that at The College, she felt freer to engage in more behaviour that would have been considered outlandish and unthinkable in her previous school context. Her propensity for loudness, excitability and experimental clothing does not marginalise her at The College. It is more the case that the College practices allow for a wider interpretation of normal and therefore for many, a greater possibility for "a viable life" (Davies, 2006, p. 436) as a student.

Discussion - A "sustainable life" (Butler, 2006, p. 533)

Without doubt educational contexts, institutional practices and processes of subjectification shape the nature of exclusions and inclusions in schools. However, in the current context, neo-liberal discourses of responsabilisation, individualism and accountability operate to shape subjects who will see *themselves* as responsible for the successful negotiation of the education system as the foundation of a desirable future. That this sense of responsibility weighs heavily on young people and drives even the most resistant and ambivalent students to keep coming back to education seems clear from the accounts above. It is also clear that it shapes the self-work they must do to become intelligible in the school context. The discussion below considers the implications of the neo-liberal responsabilisation of young people in relation to their education and explores the high stakes for this target group.

In a response to a collection of articles using the work of Judith Butler in a special issue of the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (2006), Butler makes a number of comments about the subjectification of young people in educational settings which resonate with issues facing the participants in this study. Her comments have to do with processes of subjectification around gender norms, yet her comments are also linked more broadly to the norms of schooling and how they create students who are acceptable in terms of institutional norms of behaviour and governmental norms of the desired neo-liberal subject. She frames the process in terms of the mastering of skills and the appropriation of norms, success in which allows the conferral of recognition within the institutional context as a viable subject – the "good student". What is also made clear in her discussion is the

nature of the anxiety built into this process since just as appropriation of certain norms confers recognition, failure to comply results in the withdrawal of recognition:

Put more precisely, these norms operate through a demoralization of experience: the subject is constituted through the anticipation or fear of having recognition conferred or denied. The conferral of recognition, however, does not just happen once, if it happens at all, so a certain anxiety is built into the norm, since the student must repeat the good grade, and that repetition is not assured in advance. The norm is applied, but the norm is always about to happen again (p. 532).

Butler's discussion of the link between mastering skills and the processes of subject formation shows how potentially fraught the subjectification process is. Butler's comments concern the acquisition of skills to meet the norms of academic success but they could also be applied to mastering a whole range of skills required for recognition of studenthood. These could include behavioural norms that indicate acquiescence with the discipline standards of a school, rules of social interaction between students and between students and teachers and acceptance of the values that underpin the academic and/or vocational curriculum. At issue here is the fact that along the way, the challenge of "right" conduct, exemplified by the norms of studenthood which indicate "the good student" or even "the good enough student," creates instances of inclusion and exclusion. Furthermore, as Butler (2006) points out, the ongoing nature of this subjectification process means that the anxiety around this conferral of recognition is shared by all, not just those who find it difficult to submit to accepted norms of behaviour. However, those students, who for whatever reasons continually fail to meet the norms of conduct, face a disproportionate risk in terms of recognition and in some cases become unintelligible as students in most schooling contexts. As a number of participants in this paper demonstrated, the possibility of exclusion from school, either self-initiated or school-initiated, becomes very high when this recognition is continually denied. As Butler (2006) indicates, this possibility produces an impossible bind for young people. The act of conforming under threat to a set of norms which produce the intelligible student or facing exclusion has serious implications:

For young people, it would seem, when the world reduces to such options—submitting to coercion or fleeing—it follows that the dread of social exclusion or abjection would propel a young person into conformity. To be exposed to abjection without support is no alternative way of life, especially for a young person who depends on others fundamentally for shelter, food and schooling. The situation of extreme psychic and physical jeopardy must be avoided (Butler, 2006, p. 533).

The jeopardy facing these young people and others like them is significant. In considering the implications of these ideas, Butler poses the question of whether there might be a way to access “options that exceed the binary framework of coercion, on the one side, and escape, on the other” (p. 533). What might this mean for the way we think about education and training for young people? Is it possible to think about providing education and training in ways that address this question? Butler argues the case for finding a way of working within the bind in terms of the role pedagogical practices might play in supporting a “sustainable life for an emerging and dependent person” (p.533). This reframe of the young person in education as emerging and dependent is important here since it challenges the dominant portrayal of young people as the entrepreneurial, responsabilised rational calculators of neo-liberalism, consuming services in the education market. It refocuses the discussion to questions of survival of young people in educational contexts and how pedagogical practices (amongst other institutional practices) can play a role in creating spaces where there is room to “to breathe and live” (Butler, 2006, p. 533).

The idea of “a sustainable life” (Butler, 2006, p. 533) within education and training provides the challenge for those who wish to provide inclusive places where a range of young people can participate and I think it can be argued that The College provides some clues as to how this is being achieved for some young people. Butler (2006) asks “[i]s there a way to submit provisionally and critically to such norms, and to do so in ways that change the norms themselves?” (p. 532-3). In the analysis of the subjectification of student participants within The College presented so far, there may be some examples of how this has been tried with some measure of success.

Conclusion

In the accounts presented in this paper we see something of the process of how subject formation occurs within prevailing neo-liberal governmental rationalities which sees subjects ‘emerge as “free”, “entrepreneurial”, competitive, and economically rational individuals’ (Kelly, 2006, p. 24).

Specifically, these accounts show young people being shaped by processes of subjectification which hinge around issues of viability as students and play on themes of inclusion and exclusion. They also tell us something about practices of the self which are valued and rewarded in the schooling context if they result in the constitution of the normatively imposed model of studenthood. The rewards for taking on this mode of subjectivation via choice of learning environment are the externally validated steps towards a viable adult self, as read through the governing neo-liberal discourses of responsible adulthood. Successful achievement of educational qualifications, support within the College to set clear vocational goals and the development of skills with which to pursue these goals are all on offer for those able to negotiate the demands of the institutional context.

The sense of power of the individual to act in an autonomous way in these settings and the satisfaction this brings further underpins the shaping of identity here and is a central component to the more intrinsic rewards of doing this ethical work on the self. The potential for pleasure to be derived from such individualistic pursuits is clearly expressed in many of the stories of self-formation recounted above. Having effectively “freed” themselves from the constraints and implied obligations of more mainstream educational offerings, pleasure in the freedom of having chosen this path is a feature of these accounts. These young people are, by and large (and within the stories they have told...), happy students. The question of what is at stake in the neo-liberal shaping of conduct and subjectivity is mine, not theirs.

This, in turn, leads to consideration of the paradoxical aspects of subjectivation (Butler, 2006) which occurs through both mastery of skills and “the subjugation to power” (Butler, 2006, p. 532). To a large extent, the accounts presented in this paper are narratives foregrounded by the participants’ sense of mastery. Each of the participants has found some way of being within the education system and with this mastery of norms which have the power to confer recognition (Butler 2006) comes satisfaction. However, the ever present threat of the withdrawal of this recognition is just as constitutive. This points to a certain precariousness of existence as the counterbalance to this sense of satisfaction and alerts us to the risks inherent in this type of subjectivation, the implications of which provide a challenge for educators.

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