

'The kid most likely': Naming, brutality and silence within and beyond school settings

Violence in educational settings is a complex issue, and the topic of a considerable body of international research literature (see, for example, Casella, 2001; Elliott, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998; Mills, 2001). This volume of research asks authors and readers to *rethink* what is known and believed about school violence, and in this chapter I draw on three narratives in order to query the brutality of discourses within which children are labelled and silenced. The chapter is concerned with systemic violence (Watkinson & Epp, 1997) and its discursive effects, calling into question: labelling practices that name children as particular 'types' of social subject; silencing practices that denigrate, disregard and dismiss those most vulnerable in unequal relations of power; as well as those discursive silences that tacitly enable the reproduction of violence. Through the figure of 'the kid most likely'—in other words, children who are constituted as those most likely to experience educational failure, to commit criminal offences, to pose risks to themselves and others—the chapter considers how discursive practices of naming and silence powerfully reproduce and normalise symbolic and material violence within unequal relations of power.

In a collection of essays originally published in 1974, Michel de Certeau points out how violence is inscribed in technical procedures and scientific knowledges aimed at eliminating and appropriating other existences in the project of producing discursive and cultural 'unities'. He calls our attention to 'what ceases to speak and to be spoken' through the practices of othering, of colonizing, of categorising, and of naming. In educational settings, such practices occur in myriad ways. At times they may take the form of overt instances of discrimination, harassment, vilification, exclusion and violence. Yet they are also woven throughout many everyday assumptions, taken-for-granted approaches and accepted wisdom seen in normative discourse as necessary and appropriate for contemporary educational practice. For Certeau, the discursive effects of practices that marginalise, silence and exclude call into question the foundational claims from whence such practices derive their rationales. He writes, "All the progress of our knowledge can be measured by the silence that it creates" (Certeau, 1997, p. 139). I undertake this discussion, then, in the current context of national and global politics—in which young people are increasingly subjected to

heightened levels of suspicion and surveillance, ideological manipulation through policy manoeuvres such as 'values education' and 'national curriculum', and marginalisation and oppression through the dehumanising agendas of neoliberal rationalities of governance. Certeau's insight pertaining to the violence of such endeavours informs my own approach to researching and theorising the ways in which social institutions operationalise and reinscribe the cultural production of violence. In this chapter, I want to argue that practices of naming and silence operate *together* to effect violent norms and social relations that all too often go unmarked in those official discourses that most powerfully impact on the lives of young people.

Who then, is 'the kid most likely'? Do we know him? (For decades of statistics on educational underachievement, learning and behavioural disorders, schoolyard bullying, and violent crime insistently remind us—through the kinds of questions that they ask and 'answers' they construct—that the 'the kid most likely' is almost certainly male.) Do we recognise him? (For visual culture provides us with innumerable images through which he is popularly constructed—in the US, for example 'the kid most likely' has for decades been depicted as the product of Black and Hispanic communities living in urban poverty, and in Australia he has been depicted as the child of Indigenous, migrant and single parent families, although in recent times he has morphed globally into the jihadist terrorist 'of Middle Eastern appearance'.) A genealogical tracing of the discursive emergence of those young people who are categorised as most likely to be 'at risk' and to pose a risk to themselves, to others, and to the moral, economic and social order more broadly is beyond the scope of this chapter. It is worth noting, however, that such tracings are the subject of a considerable literature concerned with highlighting their discursive effects on the lived experience of young people. As Susanne Davies points out, while philosophies associated with eugenics and social Darwinism may no longer be openly espoused as providing explanations for human character, behaviour and worth, their long discursive history has left indelible marks on everyday thought and practice within social institutions, playing "an important role in rendering those least well-positioned in society vulnerable to professional and state intervention, abuse and exploitation" (Davies, 2005, p. 13). Indeed discourses of youth 'at risk' play an important role in naturalising notions of essential dispositions and qualities, of centres and margins,

that powerfully shape the lived experience of those least powerful. As Linda Graham and Roger Slee observe:

Naturalisation effaces. In naturalising a particular mode of existence, we construct a universalised space free from interrogation, a ghostly centre which eludes critical analysis and thus recognition of the power relations embodied within notions of normalcy which exert influence over other ways of being (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). When we identify categories of children, whether we refer to children at risk or children with a disability or children whose first language is not English, we not only make difference *visible* but work to maintain power imbalances and structural inequity by reifying *unnamed* attributes that carry social, political and cultural currency (Graham & Slee, 2005, p. 16).

The point I want to make here, then, is that 'the kid most likely', while a heterogeneous construction with a multiplicity of formulations, is nonetheless insidiously inscribed on the bodies and lives of numerous children and young people upon whom the consequences and effects of brutalities and biases against 'the kid most likely' are continually brought to bear.

It is these brutalities and biases that provide the provocation for this chapter, and in the sections that follow I share three very different stories that together raise powerful questions about the complicity of pedagogic knowledges, professional practices and policy contexts in the cultural production of violence against 'the kid most likely'. My analysis is informed by Certeau's suggestion that "If, by violence, we mean a growing distortion between what a discourse says and what a society does with it, then this very discourse functions as a manifestation of violence. It becomes itself a language of violence" (Certeau, 1997, p. 30). Certeau's is a critique of hypocrisy, of the violence that is produced in those disjunctions between what is said, known, accepted, believed, allowed to pass without censure or comment and what is actually *done*. In the context of the following examples, then, the questions I want to raise pertain to how certain practices of naming and silence illuminate those disjunctions, and raise questions about how violence is produced and maintained as a cultural formation in which we are all complicit, and of which we are all victims.

The worry

Jonathan Talbot¹ is a worry. "He looks so innocent," one of his teachers remarks, "but he's a real worry." (Field Notes, Westland Preschool, 2006). During my weekly research visits to Westland Preschool, I observe much in Jonathan's behaviour that is unsettling—he grabs, pushes, kicks, punches, bites, and uses books, toys, boxes, chairs and other objects at hand as weapons that inflict pain and (potentially serious) injury, onto other children. His behaviour presents a risk to the safety of himself and others, and his teachers openly express concern that unless something changes—soon—he is likely to eventually be excluded from formal schooling, to become "another statistic" (Field Notes, Westland Preschool, 2006) with a risky and uncertain future. Despite his teachers' almost continuous monitoring of his whereabouts and activities, Jonathan is persistently found at the centre of turmoil. I acknowledge the difficulties that such circumstances create in the everyday life of Westland Preschool, and the subsequent demands on the time, physical stamina and emotional energy of its teaching staff.

Yet it is cultural knowledges and practices, rather than Jonathan's behaviour, that is the object of my research in early childhood settings, and I am therefore mindful of exploring how the discourses encountered and produced in everyday life shape the social relations and subjectivities of young people in cultural contexts such as Westland Preschool. To that end, I observe with interest the ways in which violence intersects with and pervades discourses of learning, of teaching, of parenting, of childhood, of being a social subject with a legitimate past, a viable present, and a possible future. Week after week, I note how discursive *irruptions* take place, observing how Jonathan and the other children and teachers at the preschool engage in complex performances of the symbolic and embodied violence that pervades what Judith Butler refers to as the 'domain of sociality'.

Of particular interest are the ways that Jonathan's de-legitimated subject positioning is articulated by his teachers and exploited by the other children at Westland Preschool. Turmoil is repeatedly instigated not only by Jonathan, but also by the other children, who have developed a sophisticated repertoire of techniques for surreptitiously

¹ Names of all research participants and research sites have been anonymised.

provoking, labelling and excluding him. The outbursts that often erupt as a result persistently invoke responses from teachers that reinscribe Jonathan's status as 'the kid most likely' within a medicalised and pathologised grid of intelligibility. "With Jonathan," one exasperated teacher informs me, "you could almost go down the list and tick every box for ADHD, Oppositional Defiance Disorder, you name it." (Field Notes, Westland Preschool, October 2006) While professional educators have a well-defined vocabulary for naming—what Nikolas Rose refers to as the "proliferation of an 'expert' discourse" within which "a whole raft of professionals...have come to operate a quasi-psychological ethics" (Rose, 1999, p. 264)—the children at Westland Preschool demonstrate their own recognition of behavioural discourses, categorising Jonathan's behaviour in ways that document his transgressions and constitute him as a particular type of undesirable social subject. They routinely initiate conversations with me using Jonathan as a starting point:

"Jonathan hit me..."

"Jonathan got in trouble..."

"Jonathan's always naughty..."

"Jonathan's a naughty boy..."

What they don't say—but what I have observed on numerous occasions—is that Jonathan is often deliberately excluded from their play, ignored, pushed, shoved, hit, and deliberately provoked. For the most part, such provocations take place outside the view or hearing of teachers, and in many cases the children watch closely to ensure that their provocations of Jonathan are not witnessed by their teachers. His tendency to lash out with physical retribution, though, means that those who initiate struggles with him are likely to end up in tears. Over several weeks, a familiar pattern emerges: one or more children actively incite a negative response from Jonathan by hitting or shoving him, snatching a toy away from him, or excluding him from play; when he lashes out, the screams of those who have provoked the retaliation are heard by teaching staff, who intervene immediately and carry Jonathan kicking and screaming from the offending scene; he is then scolded loudly and placed on a chair to sit alone; the wounded party is consoled and then accompanied and supported in confronting him with the declarative, "I don't like it when you do that, Jonathan." The volume and veracity with which the injured child is explicitly instructed to repeat "I don't like it"

is often proportional to tears of the injured child. The teachers' reading of Jonathan's offence and its severity is such that raised voices and clenched teeth figure routinely in these instances of 'assertiveness training' and 'conflict resolution' into which the other children are being inducted.

Such scenes are played out numerous times each day, as Jonathan's *general* visibility as the performative playground bully is compounded by his "*compulsory* visibility" (Foucault, 1977, p. 187) as the naughty child who is repeatedly publicly reprimanded, isolated and humiliated by teachers and students alike. I am not intending to imply wilful abuse or dereliction of the teachers' duty of care, and am indeed mindful of the complexities they face in managing a complex social environment. I also acknowledge their attempts to reason with and attend to the needs of a demanding and difficult child, and recognise the necessity of preventing injurious behaviour in educational contexts where there is a duty of care to ensure children's safety and wellbeing. However, the circumstances within which Jonathan's story takes place provide a powerful example of the kinds of tacit injustices that make institutions complicit in the cultural production of violence.

There is an unjust brutality, for example, in the persistent naming of Jonathan and his behaviour as aberrant, while the complicity of others is masked by their tearful performances as innocent victims. Institutional complicity is underscored by explicit pedagogic techniques that effectively invest the other children's *unnamed* transgressions with institutional authority, giving rise to a disciplinary system that "enjoys a kind of judicial privilege with its own laws, its specific offences, its particular forms of judgement" (Foucault, 1977, pp. 177-178). In this disciplinary system, Jonathan's legitimacy as a learner with the potential to recognise the feelings of others, to improve on his behaviour, and to develop more meaningful forms of social interaction is effectively revoked by essentialising discourses that cast his behaviour as biologically fixed and determined. For example, one morning in the preschool playground one of the teachers asks if I have seen Jonathan, and I reply that he is playing in the sandpit with two other boys, pretending to have a party that involves lots of cake. The teacher replies by saying that:

Jonathan's learned nothing this year, you know. Absolutely nothing. He can't even do a simple puzzle. And with the behaviour, most of the kids who come here, well they might hit or fight or something, but they learn pretty quick not to. But not him. It doesn't matter how much he gets in trouble, it never makes any difference. So something in there's not connecting... I don't know what's happened today though—maybe his parents have put him on some sort of medication without telling us. (Field Notes, Westland Preschool, October 2006)

Even on those occasions when Jonathan *can* be seen playing peacefully with other children—sharing, taking turns, cooperating—his behaviour is unable to be understood or recognised within the terms of social learning, of empathy for others, or of developing greater self-control. Instead, even *desired* behaviours are silenced, stripped of legitimacy and attributed to interventions made possible through medical knowledges, rather than to the kind of agentive capacity that is routinely attributed to the other children. Jonathan's naming as a pathologised social subject thus contributes to his silencing as a learning subject.

Importantly to the purposes of this chapter, the dialogic relation between naming and silence is a crucial dimension of the imposition of disciplinary judgement upon the 'kid most likely', and I share the following example as a way of exploring its potency.

On a recent noisy and chaotic morning at the preschool, the children engage enthusiastically in a period of 'free play'—some are dressing up in the home corner, clanking around the room in glittering high heels, arguing over dollies and their paraphernalia; a group of boys plays, as they regularly do, a game involving plastic dinosaurs and doll houses, staging hostile takeovers of the doll house chairs and its plastic television. They conduct fierce and noisy battles between the dinosaurs, who loudly devour one another in order to gain control of the imaginary " 'mote control". Other children play with wooden puzzles and blocks that have been laid out on tables, and several boys chase each other around the room imitating the raucous noise of the Bathurst races they have watched on television at the weekend.

Jonathan sits on the floor with a group of children who are playing with a bowl of plastic fruit and ice cream cones, while a teacher sits nearby monitoring their play. One of the other children takes over the bowl of plastic food and refuses to let the others continue to play with it. The teacher tries to gently cajole her into sharing with the other children, and Jonathan tries, unsuccessfully, to grab a piece of the plastic food, and a struggle over the bowl ensues. The teacher intervenes, picking up a now kicking and screaming Jonathan and placing him on a chair at the opposite side of the noisy room. The general clamour that has filled the room up until this point is powerfully

disrupted when Jonathan's foot randomly connects with a wooden screen that lands with a thunderous crash on the hard linoleum tiles on the floor. There is an immediate hush of surprised, complete, awful silence—every child freezes, every teacher halts, and every eye in the room is drawn first to the site of the toppled screen and then to the small child responsible for the mighty sound. For several seconds no one moves or speaks as all stare silently at Jonathan, who nervously wiggles his leg, glancing back at them in turn. Eventually one of the teachers takes a step forward and says loudly and harshly, with an unmistakable tone of disgust, "Jonathan Talbot!" For several more seconds all stare silently, before first some and then others return to their play with now lowered voices. (Field Notes, Westland Preschool, 2006)

I want to map my reading of this scene onto those prior discursive moments—those of bullying, injury, exclusion, domination, pathologising, and naming to which Jonathan is routinely subjected—in order to suggest that the violence of these normative practices is insidiously woven into the space of silence brought about by the crashing wooden screen on the preschool floor. This is no neutral silence, but rather it is a silence that interrogates, insinuates, articulates prior events and anticipates others yet to come.

The teacher's angry and disapproving declaration of Jonathan's name speaks a past, present, and future marked by transgressions for which *he* will be held fully accountable—not the contributing factors occasioned by others, not the policies and pedagogies of the educational institution, not the 'psy' inspired discourses that "make it possible for each individual to relate to themselves and the course of their life in particular ways" (Rose, 1999, p. 270). Indeed, even as it reproduces the violence of prior events, the moment of discursive silence marks the *complicity* of social knowledges and practices which precede and exceed the individual. Nowhere, except in the silence of glances, a child's awkward squirming on a chair, the glare of an angry teacher, and of a room full of people with nothing to say, is that complicity marked.

In the judgement silence pronounces on the complicity of others, of institutions, of accepted knowledges and pedagogic practices, there is of course a productive possibility—a moment in which the question of how things might be done and thought otherwise is made possible. Yet the authoritative, angry and punitive speaking of a single name seemingly forecloses the potential gain, replacing the discursive query with a decisive answer that effects that most damaging of all violences—

erasure. The question I want to raise and to hold open, then, is not the question of 'who is to blame' or of 'what should be done'. Nor am I endeavouring to uncover the 'truth' of Jonathan's behaviour, nor to attempt, in this space, any ultimate resolution. Rather, I am compelled to call into question how discursive power and its effects are operationalised and invisibilised through what is spoken *and* what is not in naming the 'kid most likely.'

The degenerate

He is visible and vocal, openly commanding attention through the brusque physicality of his presence in classrooms, sporting groups and playgrounds. He routinely struts across the schoolyard, making comments about students he dislikes and voicing his opinion at every opportunity. As a PE teacher at Plains High School, there is no shortage of opportunities for Mr. Pratt to exert influence on those around him. Elsewhere (Saltmarsh & Youdell, 2004), Deborah Youdell and I have written about our ethnographic research at Plains High School, with particular reference to the ways in which Mr. Pratt's narratives, attitudes and behaviours toward some individuals and groups in this western Sydney high school functions to constitute "marginalized student identities and disempowered subject positions" (Saltmarsh & Youdell, 2004, p. 10), reproducing practices of educational triage that effectively ration students' educational opportunities (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). In our earlier work from the Plains High study, we note how Mr. Pratt's derogatory comments are instrumental in marginalizing a sport class whose students are seen as failing to satisfactorily negotiate the masculinist discourses valorised within the school. We also note how other teachers remain silent during Mr. Pratt's denigration of students, and we argue that:

...the unquestioned acceptance of negative constitutions of the students by staff has a normative function, serving both to normalize the practices of assigning students to marginalized discursive positions, as well as to normalize and reinforce the predominance of teachers' views within the discursive hierarchy (Saltmarsh & Youdell, 2004, p. 9)

Here I want to follow on from that work, bringing to bear once again Certeau's contention, cited at the beginning of this chapter, that "All the progress of our knowledge can be measured by the silence that it creates"(Certeau, 1997, p. 139). In particular, I want to ask how the voice of one and the silence of others work together

to establish a scene of violence and complicity that powerfully interrogates pedagogic knowledges and policy claims premised on notions of inclusion, safety and respect. Drawing on field notes recorded in the same study, during a lunch period spent in the Sport Teachers' Staff Room, I recall with considerable discomfort a scene in which Mr. Pratt establishes his discursive dominance amongst those in the staff room, before brutally targeting a student who appears at the door. In this scene, I have been invited by one of the other teachers to eat my lunch in the sport teachers' staff room, and the following discussion takes place:

Mr. Pratt (speaking to me): So what university are you from?

SS: Macquarie

Mr. Pratt (Now sitting with his back turned toward me): I don't rate Macquarie. My wife goes there. I don't rate it.

Mr. Carlo (One of the other male sport teachers): I went to Macquarie Uni once. I started a science degree there.

Mr. Pratt (looking at Mr. Carlo, and saying in a goading, patronising, mock-feminine voice): Ooooo, Mr. Carlo! A scientist!? Oooooo... Where's your little *bow tie*?

Mr. Pratt then begins flipping through some papers on his desk. He reads through one letter, and says in a disgusted tone: Well...some of these parents...like Joe Thompson's parents...*parents*...consider themselves to be *above* the Education Department!

He wheels his chair around to face me, and says angrily: Tell you what. In your notes, you oughta put, '*Teachers* get treated badly because *parents* are *SPASTIC*! No, you probably can't put *spastic* in a report. How about *MENTALLY DEFICIENT*. Parents are mentally deficient. (Field Notes, Plains High, 2001)

Multiple practices of naming and discrediting, speaking and silencing take place here, as Mr. Pratt assumes the place of one who is entitled to speak a language of derision and to foreclose even tentative attempts by others to recover the potential embarrassment of having a guest (me) openly insulted. Mr. Carlo's entry into the conversational space—as one who, if not prepared to mount an open challenge to Mr. Pratt's attack, might nonetheless be able to preserve a semblance of courtesy through the contribution of an additional perspective—is quickly undone. Even Mr. Carlo's mention of the traditionally masculine domain of sciences is subverted and used

against him, while the other teachers sitting in the room remain completely silent. The diatribe against parents that ensues extends the reach of Mr. Pratt's power to encompass not only the professional space of the staff room, but also the personal space of lives, responsibilities and familial ties beyond the school. His invocation of the Education Department establishes his location within 'institutions of power', within which institutional strategies operate to maintain 'a proper place' from which to speak (Certeau, 2002), while simultaneously de-legitimizing the professional status and personal worth of those others in the room who might happen to be parents. Shortly thereafter, as the other members of staff continue to eat their sandwiches in silence, the following incident takes place:

Alan, a Year 9 boy, with whom Mr. Pratt often appears inexplicably annoyed when they encounter one another on the playground or in school corridors, comes to the door of the staff room. Mr. Pratt looks irritated, and with an exaggerated sigh tells him to leave, saying that he'll be out to talk to him in a minute. When Alan steps outside the room, the door remains open and I can see him waiting, close enough to be able to hear what is being said in the staff room. Mr. Pratt says rather loudly to Mr. Carlo, "I'll tell you what. You know those 'Most Likely' Awards they give out at the end of school? Like 'Most Likely to Be Rich and Famous' or whatever. Well, that kid there, I'd give him the 'Most Likely To Become a Paedophile' Award. He just gives me the creeps. The way he looks at you, the way he comes up to ask you questions, the way he sidles up to the Year 7 boys. I'll tell you what, if he starts turning up here with lollies, we're *really* gonna have to worry." He steps just outside the door to answer Alan's query. Alan has almost certainly heard what has just been said about him. (Field Notes, Plains High, 2001)

Mr. Pratt's behaviour here, as in many other instances that were observed throughout the duration of the study, is extreme, yet his comments and conduct nonetheless routinely go unchallenged by others with a duty of care for the students that he targets and denigrates. This scene is no accident or exception. Having established, at the expense of myself and others in the staff room, his entitlement to dominate absolutely in this and any other social domain of his choosing, his vilification of Alan goes unmarked and unchallenged. No one in the staff room makes eye contact, nor do they speak in defence of a student who has been constituted as 'the kid most likely' in terms that every publicly available educational discourse—of professionalism, of pedagogy, of social inclusion, of procedural fairness, of ethical practice, of duty of care—would consider inconceivable, impermissible, unspeakable. The severity of this arbitrary

charge against the student lies not just in the immediacy of the accusation, but also in its potency within broader discourses of social legitimacy. Indeed, according to Nikolas Rose:

"The limits of the permissible appear to be fixed only by two characteristics of our contemporary regime of freedom. There is conduct that is non-consensual, that is to say, where the freedom of another is violated: the epitome is the image of the paedophile. And there is conduct that is excessive, that manifests a lack of the exercise of will and free choice, whose epitome is the alcoholic or the heroin addict but which extends, as well, to the pathologies of 'liberation' exemplified by 'excesses' of the gay sex scene in the era before AIDS"(Rose, 1999, p. 266)

By constituting this student as the kid 'most likely to become a paedophile', *and* as one who poses a particular risk to younger boys, Mr. Pratt demonstrates the skill with which he is able to manipulate discourses of both violation and excess to establish his own position of absolute entitlement within an institution of power. His homophobic and misogynist derision directed at colleagues in the staff room is masterfully redeployed against a far less powerful target, in a public demonstration of the extent to which "normal defines and oppresses what it designates as abnormal" (Dyer, 1997, p. 264). In this scene, where the speaking of violence is accompanied by the complicity of silence, Alan is simultaneously positioned as degenerate threat *and* as victim "upon whom the theatre of identifying power is performed" (Certeau, 1986, p. 41).

While I am not intending to imply that such abuses of power are always so readily evident in other schools and other places, I *am* suggesting that incidents such as these establish the limits of pedagogic theories and educational policies to effect social change within the epistemological terms that they have established. These limits are established precisely *because* they articulate the complicity of institutionally sanctioned hierarchies (between students and staff, and between staff differentially located by gender, race, sexuality and other identity categories), of professional behaviours (in which, for example, colleagues do not openly criticise other members of staff in the presence of students), and of powerful discourses of homophobia, racism, misogyny and heterosexism around which naming and silence are choreographed.

The Lost

His death was the subject of five separate inquiries, and there will be no more chances for Liam Ashley to learn the lesson that his family had hoped a couple of weeks in custody would teach him. Facing charges of breaching bail, illegal possession of a knife and a pipe, burglary, trespass, breach of curfew and driving whilst forbidden—crimes largely in relation to having broken into his parents' home and taken his mother's car for a drive without permission—17 year old Liam had reportedly exhausted his family's repertoire of responses to his difficult behaviour, and his parents hoped that a few nights in custody might act as a turning point. When he appeared before a New Zealand court on the 24th of August 2006, then, no bail was requested by the defence, and the court determined that Liam would spend the following two weeks in custody while on remand awaiting sentencing and the preparation of a probation report.

According to media reports, and later confirmed by the New Zealand Ombudsman's Report (Belgrave & Smith, 12 June 2007), Liam was taken from court and placed in the back of a prison van owned and operated by Chubb NZ, the company contracted by the NZ Corrections Department to conduct prison transfers, home detention, and a range of other services. Liam had already complained, whilst he had been held in custody awaiting his hearing, of being picked on by other prisoners. Despite the magistrate seeking assurances that Liam would be kept separate from adult offenders while in custody, he was placed in a compartment of the transfer van with two adult prisoners, one of whom, George Charlie Baker, had a known history of violent offences. En route from the court to the Auckland Central Remand Prison, Liam was violently attacked by Baker who beat, strangled, stomped on him and broke his neck. Upon arrival at the prison Liam was pulled from the van unconscious and critically wounded. Although revived at the scene, he died in hospital the following day, and Baker was subsequently convicted of his murder and sentenced to a minimum 18-year prison sentence.

There are two crucial aspects of this story that I want to raise here as matters of critical concern with relation to naming and violence. The first of these is the complicity of neoliberal reform agendas in developed nations that have persistently

subjected the provision of public services to market models. The corporate ethos adopted in the delivery of public services diminishes the needs of those most vulnerable to costs that must be managed efficiently in order to deliver the greatest fiscal returns to the corporate sector and shareholders, and budget surpluses to government. Investigations into Liam's death, including the findings of the New Zealand Ombudsman's Report (Belgrave & Smith, 12 June 2007) have raised numerous questions about the contracting out of government services to private companies. Such strategies discursively constitute those who require public facilities—whether they be schools, hospitals, prisons, immigration detention centres—in the dehumanising terms of economic units to be taught, surveilled, treated, rehabilitated, monitored and processed. Indeed, when such questions were raised in the NZ Parliament in relation to Liam Ashley's death, the Minister for Corrections, Damien O'Connor, explicitly denied that the use of private contractors to provide services such as prison transfers was a cost-saving measure on the part of the Department for which he is responsible. Such a denial speaks to the hypocrisy with which decisions justified to electorates on the basis of their economic rationality are abjectly denied when the human toll of their brutal effects is occasionally laid bare in form of broken lives and broken bodies. As Certeau observes:

There is no law that is not inscribed on bodies...From birth to mourning after death, law 'takes hold of' bodies in order to make them its text. Through all sorts of initiations (in rituals, at school, etc.), it transforms them into tables of the law, into living tableaux of rules and customs, into actors in the drama organised by a social order (Certeau, 2002, p. 139).

The materiality of law in this case powerfully inscribes the internal logics of neoliberal policy and its language of efficiency and profitability on the body of the prisoner-child who becomes the ledger upon which its substantive costs are tallied.

Importantly, though, there are other factors that merit consideration, and these link Liam's story with the other two considered in this chapter in significant ways. Amid the clamour of public inquiries, media speculation and political debate that took place in the aftermath of Liam's murder, his parents offered accounts to the media of an educational history marked by labelling, pathologising and social exclusion. In a statement released by Liam's family to the NZ press in the days following his death,

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for example, his father outlines the story of a child diagnosed with ADHD at the age of three. The Ashley's were requested to remove Liam from his first school after only a short time, due to what his father refers to as a "lack of acceptance by mainstream education"(TV3 New Zealand, 2006). Liam had later been sent to board in a residential college until shortly before he turned 15, where he reportedly thrived, but missed his family and wanted to return home, so his parents enrolled him in a local college with disastrous consequences. His father writes, "Due to a lack of understanding and tolerance from the mainstream system, we were once again asked to remove Liam from the school" (TV3 New Zealand, 2006). These accounts of labelling, exclusions and disruptions speak to the institutional and discursive power invested in essentialising, medicalised explanations of behaviour that does not conform to normative expectations. As I argued in relation to the stories of Jonathan and Alan, while the processes of naming and of silence are complex and multifaceted, they nonetheless play a powerful role in young people's experiences of and beyond schooling. As Deborah Youdell points out:

The 'who' a student is—in terms of gender, sexuality, social class, ability, disability, race, ethnicity and religion as well as popular and sub cultural belongings—is inextricably linked with the 'sort' of student and learner that s/he gets to be, and the educational inclusions s/he enjoys and/or the exclusions s/he faces. (Youdell, 2006, p. 2, original emphasis)

This is not to suggest a case for either causality or predictability, nor is it to imply that identifying contributing factors and circumstances might establish the 'truth' about what went wrong, what might have been foreseen, or what could have been done otherwise. Rather, it is to argue that the naming and silencing to which Jonathan, Alan and Liam have each been subjected cannot be dissociated from the 'who' each might be able to be and become. The discourses by which Liam Ashley was named from the earliest period of his childhood as a particular 'type' of social subject appear to bear remarkable similarity to the discourses through which Jonathan Talbot is daily being spoken prior to his entry into formal schooling. Similarly, labels of deviance and criminality such as those used by Mr. Pratt to denigrate and humiliate Alan at Plains High, are materialised with tragic consequences in the story of Liam Ashley.

Reflection

In each of these three stories, discursive practices of naming and silence have brutal consequences for the child who represents the figure of ‘the kid most likely’. While their circumstances differ in many ways, each is arbitrarily labelled within school settings by medicalised discourses that position them within the terms of abnormality, deviance and risk. Each is impacted upon by discursive silences that effectively override accepted knowledges about pedagogic practice, professional responsibilities and institutional accountabilities. Such silences simultaneously call into question and establish the limits of these forms of social knowledge that are upheld as necessary for ensuring the wellbeing of children. In particular, these three narratives call for closer examinations of the complicity of individual practices, professional discourses and institutional structures in the production of symbolic and material violence.

In each case, the constitutive force of naming and silencing is reinscribed by the complicity of witnesses who fail to speak or intervene in any meaningful way. At Westland Preschool, a small child’s efforts to fend off the taunts and provocations of others are read as ‘worrying’ behaviour. Those who observe and respond to his outbursts fail to see the injustices to which he is subjected, thereby collectively reproducing them. In the Plains High staffroom, those least powerful are arbitrarily spoken with a language of derision and contempt, while those best situated to intervene silently chew their sandwiches as though nothing of significance has happened. Meanwhile, in the back of a prison van where he should never have been, a young boy’s life is ended in a culmination of naming, silencing and institutional failures that marked his experience of schooling and later, the justice system.

These kinds of practices are everywhere implicated in producing privileged norms of recognition and conduct to which we are all subjected, and in which we are all, I would suggest, in some ways complicit. For the violence produced in the difference between what is said and what is done in Western societies is a collective, rather than an individual issue, and in the words of Certeau:

I cannot exempt myself from this common situation by flashing my intellectual union card. Violence is not in the first place a matter for reflection, nor is it an object that can be put before the eyes of an observer. It is inscribed in the place from which I speak of it. Violence defines that place (Certeau, 1997, p. 29).

Acknowledging the complexities through which violence speaks and is spoken in the places where we stand as educators, as researchers, as family and community members, is surely the crucial way forward. I would argue then for an insistent and collective speaking into those spaces of naming and silence that—be they located in the micro practices of schools and classrooms, or performed on the broader stage of national and global politics—produce the kinds of conditions of *impossibility* that claim the learning, the optimism, and the possible futures of far too many young people. As we endeavour to analyse discursive complicities not for the purposes of apportioning blame, but in order to "obtain a means of discovering what has to be done" (Certeau, 1997, p. 30), perhaps we might open up new possibilities for 'the kid most likely' to make it through, to grow up, to join in, to answer back, to speak a new language in which the brutality of naming and silence has no place.

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