In recent years the drive to improve educational standards in secondary schools in England has become a high profile national issue. The ever increasing attention and publicity given to educational issues through the media how much of a political, social and cultural concern education is. More specifically, one can observe the various ways in which the culture of education has changed and the direction it is being led in, through the increasing reforms and policies being developed. Research in education in the 1980’s and early 1990’s has explored how the UK educational system is influenced by a technocratic ideology (Bain, 1990; Bauer, 1993; Tinning, 1990). At the core of this ideology is the concept of technocratic rationality where the field of education is described as a system which is based on principles that closely resemble those of business institutions, large corporations or factories and organizations which are founded on ideas of industrial productivity. Through much of the sociology of education and educational policy research today, it can be seen that the current reforms to education are strongly linked to such an ideology and to political concerns in ensuring economic success through a focus on raising standards of achievement and increasing employability skills, which are seen as the key to success for both individuals and the British economy. Investment in human capital and lifelong learning are seen as the foundation for success in a global economy and have played a critical role in the formation of policy, whereby the focus is increasingly on providing an appropriately trained workforce (Ball, 2003; Hargreaves, 2003; Helsby, 1999, Mahony & Hextall, 2000). What this has led to it is argued, is a ‘culture of performativity’ (Ball, 2004, 2008; Hargreaves, 2003; Youdell, 2004) where the aims of educational reforms are to raise standards and achievements through mechanisms such as inspections, performance management and school league tables, which are used as measures to judge the capabilities or worth of schools and
individual teachers in achieving these goals.

Behind such reforms lies the view that we now live in times where gaining knowledge has become a priority in succeeding, and as such “education reform and much of the shift in the ways in which education is viewed and the purpose to various policies being implemented is linked to the increasing relationship between knowledge and the economy” (Ball, 2008, p. 19). This relationship, termed ‘knowledge economy’ (Hargreaves, 2003) is a much-used term in relation to contemporary education policy. A knowledge economy is based on the assumption that the ability to produce and use knowledge has become a major factor in economic development and critical to a nation’s competitive advantage (Ball, 2008). Knowledge becomes something to be sought and used as a product in exchange for value and as such knowledge becomes a commodity, used for the creation of skills or for a profit. As reforms are influenced by the discourse of the knowledge economy, policies are used to emphasise the requirements upon schools to prepare students for the workplace and therefore teachers’ work may be changed as the government seeks various ways to develop policies that will align the educational system more closely with the requirements of the labour market (Helsby, 1999). With knowledge viewed as a commodity, human capital in the form of human knowledge and competencies are seen as the key components of value in a knowledge economy. Consequently, education policy becomes influenced by business-oriented ideologies expressed through discourses based on markets, targets, audits, quality performance and management (Avis, Bathmaker, Kendal & Parsons, 2003). The commodification of knowledge has led to performativity and managerialism in schools and throughout education. From this perspective the success of education is measured in terms of achievement of numerical targets which are to be ‘evidenced’ through increasing data collection and assessments of children’s learning; of teachers’ performance; and of student teachers’ meeting standards.

Over the past two decades the educational system in England has been under continuous reform through various policies and initiatives that intend to reshape the system and improve education for all in this way (Ball, 2008). Schooling within a ‘culture of
performativity’ becomes characterised by increased competition, accountability and measurement of manifest aspects of ‘performance’, which are amongst the dominant features of this discourse. In England, regulation and control is embodied in recent policy documents such as ‘Every child matters’ (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2004), one of a plethora of text produced by the state which it is claimed form part of the ‘normalising technologies’ which regulate the behaviours of teachers (Foucault, 1978). Concomitantly, a construction of professionalism is promoted that values rationality, and there are indications that increased disciplinary and regulatory powers are a feature of associated policy. According to research within sociology of education and policy (Ball, 2003; 2004; 2008, Hargreaves, 2003; 2005; Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid & Shacklock, 2000; Youdell, 2004), the prevalence of these issues within education influence teachers, students and the school as a whole, through their increasing focus on control and regulation, competition, individualisation, standardisations, efficiency and effectiveness.

An understanding of how we may have reached a culture of performativity can be seen by tracing some of the performativity-based initiatives that became prominent within England since the early 1990’s. The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) was developed under the Education Act in 1992 as responsible for inspecting standards of independent and state schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs), which placed a greater emphasis on school inspections and the resulting school performance league tables (Storey, 2007). Related to the ‘standards agenda’ (Day, 2004) that is considered part of the growing rise in performativity, the Standards and Effectiveness Unit was established in 1997 to implement the government’s policies for raising standards of education in schools. It specifically related to the monitoring of pupils achievements and to measuring the capacities of teachers to help the government meet its targets of higher standards and achievements. Furthermore, in 1998 as a result of the Green Paper Teachers: meeting the challenge of change a performance management initiative was developed which intended to track the performance of teachers systematically through appraisal processes. Leading on from this, in 2000 the performance related pay initiative was pursued to relate pay and performance to teachers work, while in 2001 the Teachers Standards Framework (DfES, 2001) developed for teachers and school leaders to identify
their professional learning and development needs. This was updated in 2007 as the 
Professional standards for teachers which laid out in more detail the standards teachers 
are to meet at every part of their career from newly qualified teachers through to 
advanced skills and excellent teachers’ categories.

These developments in education policy have been accompanied by ongoing debates 
within the sociology of education about the potential consequences of this for teachers’ 
work and identities. A growing body of research suggests that this cultural shift may 
impact heavily on teachers’ work (Ball, 2003; Day, 2004; Sachs, 2001). For example, 
one particular result of this shift is that teachers’ work becomes highly monitored for 
efficiency and effectiveness through measurement of outcomes and individual 
performances. One of the leading scholars of performativity, Stephen Ball (2003) 
suggests that teachers’ work is highly affected by “the terrors of performativity” (p. 215). 
Performativity he suggests is “a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that 
employs judgments, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition 
and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)” (p. 216). 
Through this culture teachers’ identities may be challenged and changed, while at the 
same time what it means to be a teacher or to teach is based on performance criteria, 
surveillance, judgments and a lack of autonomy or personal choice. Similarly, Blackmore 
and Sachs (2007) suggest “the colonization of education by markets and the new 
managerialism have produced new regimes of performativity … these new regimes 
produce new work identities and understandings of professionalism as educational 
organizations take on new responsibilities” (p.2).

While such research has suggested how teachers’ work and professionalism may be 
influenced by performativity in general, there is limited research within the field of 
physical education which explores how features of performativity may influence 
teachers’ work and identities and specifically how PE teachers themselves experience the 
current educational culture. However, although not discussed in this paper, it must be 
acknowledged that previous research in the early 1990’s has considered how a 
technocratic ideology may impact on teachers’ work within physical education (see
Colquhoun, 1992; Tinning, 1990; 1991). This research aims to expand the current literature and knowledge of performativity within the context of physical education through an exploration of how performativity is recontextualised within a specific subject area. Exploring such issues will allow for a fuller understanding of the complex issues which may be affecting teachers' work and identities by providing empirical evidence to what has been suggested theoretically within the field of education.

**Physical Education**

The perceived role of PE has expanded in recent years and it is now more widely appreciated as playing an important role in achieving broader educational objectives such as whole school improvement, community development and effecting personal behavioural and attitudinal change among pupils (Houlihan & Green, 2006). PE is no longer seen as being merely part of the curriculum rather it’s unique contribution to lifelong learning and education is also increasingly acknowledged (Doll-Tepper, 2005), and more and more various groups join forces to promote PE and sport more readily through multiple competing discourses such as sport, health and education. For example, the sport discourse competes with discourses surrounding the purpose of PE within schools, such as physical activity for the purposes of health and issues surrounding the discourse of healthism (Evans, Rich & Davies, 2008) as well as competing with discourses of education surrounding issues related to the content of PE in the school curriculum (i.e. sport vs. dance or other forms of physical activity) and their educational objectives. Furthermore, the structure of education is further influenced by discourses surrounding the politics of education, for example the broader social/educational agendas influenced by government powers and broader social interests. What these discourses share, is a growing move towards performativity (Ball, 2008). In this sense, performative discourses have reached in and regulated the very purpose and value of PE. For example, health has now become subject to performance and measurable outcomes, and with the development of initiatives such as the National Competition Framework, schools are increasingly using out of school sport to develop their status within the market culture of open enrolment (Houlihan & Green, 2006).
More specifically, health agendas are now centered towards performance outcomes. For example, there is an emergence of ‘performative health’ (see Evans, Rich & Davies, 2008) issues accompanied by a proliferation of policies geared towards measuring and defining young people’s bodies (i.e. through the measuring of BMI). As a result, PE teachers’ work alters and this connection of PE with health discourses forces schools and PE teachers to become accountable for the status and marketability of their schools (Evans, Rich, Davies & Allwood, 2008). Moreover, what becomes evident then are the ways in which diverse features of schools are increasingly placed under surveillance (i.e. examination PE, regulation of bodies) (Webb, McCAuGhtry and Macdonald, 2004). Teachers’ work and identities are suggested to be placed under constant surveillance in order to ensure the marketability, efficiency and effectiveness of schools.

For these reasons the lack of research within PE is surprising since the context and culture of physical education can be seen to be steeped in demands of performative measures and accountability, as it is a subject that is the focus of competing discourses and policy initiatives framed in this way (Houlihan & Green, 2006). The growing association between health discourses and PE illustrates how performativity can be seen to have fundamentally changed health education by placing health amongst one of the ‘measurable’ outcomes for which teachers and schools are to be responsible for. For example, in the United Kingdom, a Public Service Agreement target has been established which seeks to halt the rise in obesity among children under the age of eleven by 2010 (DoH, DCMS, DfES, 2004) and the ‘National Healthy Schools Programme’ place schools and teachers in a position to prove and advertise their ability to care for and focus on pupils’ health. In addition, it allows parents to have the ability to ‘choose’ an ‘appropriate’ school for their child, based on school scores and league tables (Youdell, 2004). Moreover, initiatives and policies such as Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL), ‘Every Child Matters (2004) and The White Paper (Higher Standards, Better Schools for All, 2005) all illuminate the attention being given by the government to improving the health of children through the intertwining of physical education with issues of health and as a result the increasing pressure for PE teachers to meet such needs.
Therefore, physical education has been placed in a position from which it may be seen to have a responsibility to addressing these issues. As such, policies have been put in place to promote or ‘ensure’ such needs can be met, which may have actively altered or influenced the work of PE teachers and their role within schools. However, how are teachers experiencing this active change in education to ‘ensure’ such outcomes? As has been previously discussed, research within education, and particularly within sociology of education and educational policy, has focused on the ways in which aspects of performativity have gained prominence and researchers are concerned with the effects of performativity upon teachers’ work and subsequently students learning. This paper is based on a PhD research project which aims to develop an empirically informed account of how school PE and its teaching may be influenced by contemporary cultures of education and explore how PE teachers negotiate a position within and around discourses of performativity. Specifically the research aims to answer the following research questions:

How are PE teachers’ work and pedagogies impacted by contemporary cultures of education pertaining to performativity?

How do PE teachers navigate cultures of performativity in education in relation to their identities and sense of autonomy, control and agency over their professional lives?

**Theoretical framework**

To explore how teachers experience contemporary cultures of education relating to performativity, poststructural theories were used to guide the research. Poststructural theories work with the understanding of knowledge and ‘truth’ as (re)constructed, multiple, unstable and fluid; that reality is not fixed; and that power relations determine what meanings become dominant in particular contexts; and furthermore, challenges
essentialist notions of identity/self (Wright, 2006). Through poststructuralism’s key features of discourse, language, power and the subject came an exploration of teachers’ experiences with discourses of performativity, any possible effects of this culture on their identities as PE teachers, and the ways in which teachers’ may negotiate and/or resist such discourses. Furthermore, considering the contexts within which teachers’ work takes place, Foucault’s theories of power were relevant to the main focus of this research in exploring the individual experiences of teachers and how they negotiate their identities within a performative culture. Foucault’s technologies of power and of the self were used as the main analytical tools to guide the analysis of the data.

Various studies have shown how technologies of power are dispersed within the field of education (Ball, 1993) and within physical education more specifically (Gore, 1998; Macdonald & Kirk, 1996; Webb & Macdonald, 2007; Wright, 2000). In order to understand further the social effects of the shifting culture of education within PE, it is important to consider the broader networks of power within which students, teachers, and schools are enmeshed; that is, how technologies of power are enmeshed in physical education teachers’ work and how technologies of the self construct teachers’ identities and sense of professionalism. With regards to how a shift towards an increasing emphasis on standards and performance influences teachers work, Foucault’s (1990) technologies of power show how power has the ability to ‘govern’ schools, students and teachers at the micro-level of the classroom, while also drawing attention to the associated resistances students and teachers may have towards such ‘governance’.

Furthermore, through Foucault’s (1990) technologies of the self, teachers can be seen to be in constant reflection of their performance and their identity. This is important since as the culture of education shifts to issues which may challenge teachers’ work and sense of self, then teachers can also be seen to be in a constant struggle with their bodies, thoughts, and behaviours so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness (Markula & Pringle, 2006). This may have an impact on their sense of self as a teacher as well as a professional.
Therefore, with regards to teachers’ experiences of performativity, a poststructural perspective aided in exploring the ‘discursive resources’ (Macdonald et al., 2002) through which individuals ‘constitute themselves as subjects and the consequences of this in terms of power and their social and cultural positioning and responses’ (p. 143), in order to illuminate how power and the discourses of this performative culture are enmeshed within PE teachers’ work.

**The Research Process**

As the focus of this project aims to explore individual teachers’ subjective experiences of performativity and the ways in which teachers’ identities are influenced by the surrounding discourses of the educational culture, underpinning the research process of this project is a belief that to understand the subjective world of human experiences requires an opportunity to explore individuals’ worlds by appreciating how they construct meanings of their world through particular discourses and the multiple realities that arise relative to each individual’s particular context.

Therefore, the focus of this research on teachers’ experiences of performativity and how the shifting culture of education may interact with teachers’ work and identities demands methods allowing an opportunity for teachers to express their personal perceptions, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about the issues at hand, without intending to produce facts or generalised opinions about those experiences, but rather to allow for each individual teacher’s experience to surface as a unique and significant appreciation of how they relate discourses of performativity to their work and identities (Macdonald et. al. 2002).

Such an aim led to two semi-structured interviews with 17 female and male secondary school PE teachers across various schools in the midlands, along with informal observations and policy documents gathered as contextual data sources. The aim was to allow participants to feel able to express their own views about what was important in their experiences of dealing with issues of performativity while keeping the study reflexive enough to allow teachers to bring what they considered important issues to the
discussions. Therefore, an initial interview was conducted exploring teachers’ perceptions of issues surrounding the current educational climate, such as their opinions on new policies and initiatives and the possible influences of these on their schools and their teaching, while a second interview took place to further explore the initial themes teachers felt were important to their experiences. The observations within each school explored how discourses of performativity may be prevalent depending on different school contexts and how each context may produce different features of performativity upon teachers’ work.

Furthermore, as the context of individual schools is important to understanding teachers’ experiences, both the broader and local features of performativity which can be seen to influence schools, were taken into account. Broader features include national initiatives which include aspects of performativity that are imposed across all schools within the UK. In contrast, local features signify policies and initiatives that individual schools chose to enforce. As such, features of performativity may be different according to the local context of each school. For this reason various types of schools were chosen (Sport colleges, Catholic and Public schools) which will allow for an exploration of how teachers’ experience performativity both within national discourses and at local sites. Schools were chosen to reflect a range of social, cultural, and policy contexts enabling the in-depth analysis required to capture the interplay between discourse, cultural forces, social institutions and identities. The reason for the different types of schools is not to gain a representative sample, rather to gain a diverse range of teachers’ views from a diverse range of situations and experiences. The research does not intend to compare schools; rather it intends to incorporate an analysis of the local contexts and structures of each school in relation to issues of performativity, since we cannot discount the influence of different schools structures on how teachers experience these issues.

In addition, in order to explore a diverse group of teachers, the sample was chosen to include teachers at different stages of their career (from early teaching to heads of department), to consider a variety of ways in which teachers at various stages of their careers may experience performativity. For example, particular discourses such as the
‘standards agenda' may impact on teachers' relationships with performativity as they begin their careers, while it has also been suggested that resistance to performativity has mostly been evident amongst teachers towards the end of their careers (Troman, 2008), suggesting a possible link between teachers’ years of experience with teaching to the ways in which they experience, navigate and engage with discourses of performativity.

Finally, the interview transcripts and field notes were managed using NVivo qualitative data software and analysed through discourse analysis to understand how teachers may experience, navigate and negotiate with discourses of performativity. In line with a poststructural framework, discourse analysis was used to examine how teachers’ identities are constructed as an engagement and negotiation with discourses of performativity, through which they are shaped and in which they are positioned (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2002). The process of discourse analysis, guided by Carabine (2001), includes: getting to know the data fully by reading and re-reading transcripts to increase familiarity, which further guided interpretations and then aided in identifying the various themes across the data. The next steps included looking for indications of inter-relationships between discourses, while also looking for absences and silences which may indicate resistances and counter-discourses. Having considered the discourses coming through the data, the analysis identifies the effects of these discourses on teachers’ work, identities and sense of professionalism. Because discourses are perpetuated by social structures and practices, the importance of deconstructing them lies in the possibilities available to provide alternate readings and examine the multiple and shifting subject positions (Blackmore, 1999; Wright, 2000). This provide a useful framework through which to document how PE teachers variously experience and/or resist discourses of performativity within their work.

Preliminary Results / Discussion

Evidence of Performativity

The most common theme developed by teachers in this research in terms of the effects of performativity on their work was linked to ‘time’ and ‘pressure’ where teachers felt time
constraints were very difficult to deal with in order to keep up with the increasing administrative tasks and pressures to achieve the added responsibilities to PE teaching. ‘Time’ and ‘pressure’ were issues linked to many different areas surrounding teachers work such as the intensification of teachers work; having the ability to teach the subject the way they would like to; feeling as though features of performativity may be taking teachers away from teaching PE; aspects linked to professionalism and opportunities for CPD; the increasing pressures in ensuring policies are met as well as the ensuring quality of lessons and to issues surrounding the value/credibility of PE linked to the amount of time given to PE as subject with schools. As such ‘time’ and specifically ‘lack of time’ was seen as one of the major affects of performativity upon PE teachers’ work and sense of professionalism within today’s educational culture.

In relation to time, one of the main impacts of performativity affecting teachers work is the issue of intensification of teachers’ workload. There is growing research showing how teachers work is becoming increasingly intensified (Hargreaves, 1994, Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid & Shacklock, 2000), for example, by the increasing demands on teachers to meet standards and the increasing time spent on work outside the classroom. When an educational system is based on ideas of technocratic rationality and a performance culture, and focuses on meeting standards, productivity and efficiency, teachers’ work is seen to become intensified through the increasing need for data collection (i.e. of students’ participation rates in sport or physical activity in and out of school), the need to provide evidence (i.e. exam results, meeting targets and attainment levels) and the increased focus on assessment procedures (i.e. both for staff and students). Participants in this research spoke of this issue when asked if they feel any aspects of their work have significantly changed over the past 10 years. For example,

Patricia suggests:

I think it has yeah. I think there are more initiatives, mainly through this school sports partnerships SSCO role… It is a lot different. Obviously the data that you have to supply in terms of participation, out of hours, there is a big drive which we never had before. Didn’t have to be that accountable before, but that’s
changed things.

Kiki suggests:

I think evidence. Evidence has changed, that you have to provide evidence for everything that you’re doing with the children. So… target setting, monitoring and evaluating of what’s going in the department, having all these targets for staff as well as for children’s learning, and that’s what’s changed the most in teaching. Not actually what you’re doing, but the accountability of what you’re doing.

Anthony suggests:

Yes, there are major areas of development, differentiation, the whole paper work in many ways has just gotten bigger and bigger. You’re expected to record more. You’re expected to … spend more time on assessing I think I would say. There was a time when you taught and then you just did a quick assessment at the end of the module. And that would help you. You gave a mark towards your reports scheme. Now we tend to do continual assessment, but sometimes it’s the tail wagging the dog, if you understand the expression. Are we here to test them? Or are we here to teach them? And I think testing has simply gone over board. Ridiculous amounts. And I hope that governments are seeing sense… I hope they look closely at all their other exam schemes in only promote those that they feel actually improve the children and give you some grades. There is no point in testing for the sake of testing.

The intensification of teachers work can be seen to be linked to the increased accountability they feel in the work they do. Ranson (2003) argues educational accountability has been more about regulation and performance than educational improvement and the encouragement of democracy in schools and as such may have affects on teachers’ job satisfaction and morale as well as on their personal sense of autonomy and professionalism. One of the major risks of increasing accountability for teachers is the tension between driving teachers to meet particular targets and results – an end result - without considering the process to achieving such goals. For example, there is
a risk of ignoring the individual characteristics of students assuming they can all perform
to the same standards at the same times as well as ignoring the individual contexts of
each school in terms of the resources and opportunities available at each local site
(Moller, 2009).

Furthermore, while teaching is seen to be increasingly intensified (with an increasing
need to meet standards, increased accountability and increased obligations), it is also
suggested that there is also a de-skilling or depersonalisation of teaching taking place
which may reduce teachers work, as Girioux and McLaren (1996) suggest, to that of
‘technician’ or ‘white collar clerk’. Race (2002) suggests, depersonalisation portrays
teachers’ work as “more routinized and de-skilled, with teachers having less discretion to
exercise their professional judgments that seem most suited to their own children in their
own classes” (p. 14). This is important because it may lead teachers to be in conflict with
their sense of professionalism, to low job satisfaction and morale, loss of autonomy and
personal judgements, and to increased intentions to leave the profession. For example,
Monica alludes to a loss of a sense of professionalism due to the increased need to
provide constant evidence for what she is doing through pupil assessments:

M: I like to think we can assess and monitor them because that's what we should
be doing, that's what the curriculum says we should do. And you can, you know.
You do tracking documents, you have bench marks, you have starting places, you
have end of key stage 3 criteria, you have GCSE results, all those things go
towards monitoring. For me, personally, if I see that kid go from there to there, I
know as a professional, now, in an OFSTED report that wouldn't go down
because your professional judgment doesn't necessarily count on that so you put
in all the assessment and monitoring procedures that you need to do. For me, it's
my tracking documents and how kids have gone from there to there in that length
of time.

Similarly, Anna speaks about her autonomy as a teacher being taken away as she feels the
need to ‘say’ and ‘do’ specific things within her classes according to OFSTED otherwise
she could be judged as an inadequate teacher. She finds that there is no space to be ‘spontaneous’ and use her own personal judgement to work with the students she has in her classes:

A: They’re expecting you to say certain things within your lesson at certain points within your lesson rather than having that freedom that if you know things aren’t quite right, being able to on the spot just twist is slightly so that children do get the best learning.

Interviewer: So they don’t offer the teacher a little bit of ….
A: Spontaneity.

A lack of a sense of autonomy within their teaching is an important issue when considering teachers’ work as it can be seen to impact on how and what teachers teach and students learn. The shifting educational culture can be seen to be affecting teachers’ sense of autonomy through the intensification, deprofessionalisation and greater accountability of their work which is undoubtedly linked to the drive to increase standards and achievements within education.

The pressure for teachers to meet standards and targets seems to be placed at the forefront of teachers’ work. Teachers spoke of the need to ‘perform’ according to such requirements through the surveillance of their work and the need to provide evidence of meeting standards which they also suggest has taken away from the enjoyment of their work and of their PE lessons. To illustrate this point further it is helpful to consider the current drive within education to foster creativity within schools and teaching. In similar ways to which the government has placed an increasing emphasis on the importance of physical activity and sport within the educational culture, creativity has also been placed at the forefront of educational initiatives within schools and research has shown that the co-existence of creativity policies in education, alongside policies that generate performance criteria, targets, market competition and league tables of achievements (Ball, 2003; Jeffrey, 2003; Troman, Jeffrey & Raggl, 2007) makes for tensions for those involved in learning and teaching. For example, one such tension is that teachers are
encouraged, on the one hand, to innovate, take risks and foster creativity, and on the
other, are subject to increasing accountability (Jeffrey & Woods, 1998) played out
through the publication of school league tables based on national assessment data,
alongside inspection and performance-related career progression. Likewise it seems, for
physical education, a tension arises in trying to foster enjoyment within the learning
process of PE where teachers feel they can no longer plan their lessons as freely as they
are continuously trying to ensure lessons consist of discrete criteria for teaching and
learning, since these play a role in the judgements or assessments they receive. Nicholl
and McLellan (2008) discuss the ways in which secondary school design and technology
teachers experience the parallel agendas of creativity and performativity in England.
Their analysis suggests that whilst valuing creativity in principle, teachers struggled to
resolve the dilemmas of fostering creativity in their subject alongside performativity
initiatives causing a situation in which synthesis of the two was seen as very difficult and
where accommodation to the performativity discourse was inevitable. The concern is that
performativity forces seemed to be stronger in some aspects of teachers’ work which
preliminary results of this research are also beginning to show.

However, further analysis of the data has also begun to show that the affects of
performativity may be both positive and negative within the context of physical
education. The following will outline some preliminary themes which have provided such
evidence.

**PE and 'Status/Credibility'**

As various groups such as the government, schools, sport agencies and the wider
community, including PE teachers themselves, connect PE with various surrounding
discourses, what also arises is a continuous attempt in trying to define PE as a subject as
well as the role of PE teachers. PE as a subject as well as PE teachers’ work, have
generally been at the center of many debates surrounding PE’s purpose within schools.
On going research within the field has considered how, since PE is seen as a practical
subject, its status within schools has been marginalised and has explored why it is that the
subject of PE is often not recognised in the same way as other subjects in the curriculum
(Sparkes, Templin & Schempp, 1993; Stroot, Collier, O’Sullivan, & England, 1994; Woods & Lynn, 2001; Wright, 1996). References to the value/marginality of PE within schools was also made by the teachers in this project and in most cases their comments were evidence of the continuing marginality of the subject which was further linked to performativity in that the emphasis placed on schools is to raise exam results in the core subjects of English, Maths and Science, while PE is left ‘at the bottom of the pile’:

A: Oh Yeah. Because we’re the bottom of the pile.
E: Do you think we still are?
A: Yeah, yeah. Because the PE results aren’t as important as the Maths, English and Science are. Cause that is what the schools are judged on.

Likewise, when asked how PE may be valued within her school, Irene felt a lack of recognition of her teaching:

I: I don’t think it’s highly regarded.
E: Really..?
I: No, it’s… the core subjects are sort of more respected, for example, English and Maths and Science, where the grades are far more important to them than PE. It’s a bit of a jumping ground, in particular when it comes to GCSE.
E: What do you mean the grades are more important?
I: Em.. the governors I think want to know more about what the kids are doing in their English, Maths and Science than what they’re getting in their PE lessons, they’re not really bothered about it… my GCSE class got 100% pass rate, it wasn’t recognised. They have assemblies at the end of… when we get the results out and they only focus on English, Maths and Science they do even recognise us up there…PE.

This is an important issue when considering the context of PE teachers’ work and affects the ways in which teachers may form their professional identity. A teacher’s sense of professionalism is ultimately affected by the status of their subject and will be analysed in
greater detail as the research progresses. However, as PE is pulled in various directions by competing discourses which emphasize performativity (Houlihan & Green 2006), in some cases, this may have had a positive influence on the status of PE in schools, such as with the recent initiative programme of Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL, DfES, 2004) where a stance has been taken by the government on the importance of PE in schools and the benefits of PE upon children. Furthermore, what the data has begun to show is that although research in the sociology of education has shown performativity may greatly affect teachers work and professionalism with an intensification of their workload and a loss of autonomy to their teaching identities, what seems unique to PE is possibly a greater acceptance of performativity as it is seen to play an important role in raising the status of the subject. For many PE teachers, an acceptance to features of performativity was evident as they felt that the increasing policies and initiatives enforced on schools, specifically those related to health and sport, promote a greater ‘awareness’ of the importance of physical education for pupils. For example, teachers expressed the linking of health discourses to PE as positive since it was seen as an avenue to increase ‘awareness’ of the importance of physical activity in pupils’ lives and therefore was seen as a tool to raise the status/credibility of the subject within schools.

To date the data indicate that a multiple features of performativity are evident within physical education in secondary schools which are impacting on teachers’ work and identities in multiple ways. Preliminary analysis suggests that although research in education suggests a strong negative impact on teachers work, performativity may be more readily accepted by PE teachers as it is seen as having a positive impact on the subject’s status and position within schools. Further analysis will need to verify such indications. Although there are indications of normalising affects of performativity and acceptance to it’s particular features, how teachers navigate through the various discourses surrounding PE and the educational culture – that is, how they may accept, resist, challenge and position themselves within such discourses will be further analysed within this research project to illuminate how contemporary cultures of education may affect PE teachers work and sense of professionalism.
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HM Treasury (2007). Public Service Agreement 22: *Deliver a successful Olympic Games and Paralympic Games with sustainable legacy and get more children and young people taking part in high quality PE and Sport.*


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