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ABSTRACT

Originating from philosophy and science, many different ideas have made their way into educational policies. Educational policies often take such ideas completely out of context, and enforce them as general norms to every aspect of education; even opposing ideals make their way into school's curricula, teaching techniques, assignments, and procedures. Meanwhile, inside the actual classrooms, teachers and students are left in limbo, trying to comply with, techniques, evaluation forms and a growing technical educational vocabulary. Here I would like to propose an antidote to this absurdity by reminding us what teachers and students already know. Such an antidote can be found in J. L. Austin's speech act theory. In this paper, I propose we revisit speech act theory and treat it as an educational theory. That might help us dismantle false dichotomies troubling education for decades. The point is not that the discussion over educational policies and priorities should stop, but that it should be kept in appropriate perspective. A modified speech act theory can help us facilitate such a perspective.

Introduction

Originating from philosophy and science, many different ideas have made their way into educational policies. For example, the cognitive agenda prioritizes disciplinary knowledge, promoting subject-based curricula designs; on the other end of the spectrum, the enhancement agenda aims at personal happiness and emotional flourishing; such a view rather promotes learner-based curricula designs and may even invite positive psychologists to inform educational policy. This is not the end of the story. A naturalistic model suggests we view ourselves as natural beings with brains, hormones, neurons and genes interfering with our personal growth; thus, we need some neurobiology to inform educational practice. The situated cognition or situated agency discussions highlight how our familiar social, political, cultural environment shapes us into what we are. An autonomy ideal argues that education should nurture autonomous individuals, while the political ideal insists in cultivating a more humane society. The list is ongoing.

Philosophers of education have long reflected on the frivolous aspects of these agendas (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2008; Edwards, 2012; Goldman, 1999; Griffiths & Tann, 1992; Haynes, 2006; Kristjansson, 2007; Schrag, 2011; Smeyers, Smith, & Standish, 2007; Smith, 2002; Standish, 2012a, 2012b; Suissa, 2008; Zevin, 2010). But even from the perspective of common sense, it is not hard to see that each of the ideas above has some merit; nor that they are all rather vague. Also, that none really qualifies as a general theory that you can apply to everything all the time. Or that, if you do take them as general theories, most would contradict the others.

What might be evident to common sense, however, can be perplexing to educational policy. Educational policies often take such ideas completely out of context, and enforce them as general norms to every aspect of education; even opposing ideals make their way into school's curricula, teaching techniques, assignments, and procedures. Meanwhile, inside the actual classrooms, teachers and students are left in limbo, trying to comply with evaluation forms, tests and a growing technical educational vocabulary that defy common sense (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Here I would like to propose one more antidote to this absurdity by reminding us what teachers and students already know. Such an antidote can be found in J. L. Austin's speech act theory.

In this paper, I propose we revisit speech act theory and treat it as an educational theory. In the next sections I will (i) summarize Austin's original speech act theory, (ii) highlight its relevance to education, and (iii) propose some revisions, so that it can better serve educational discussions. In the final section, (iv) I will just give some examples of how speech act theory might help us dismantle false dichotomies that have been troubling education for decades. The point is not that the discussion over educational policies and priorities should stop, but that it should be kept in appropriate perspective. A modified speech act theory can help us facilitate such a perspective.

Educational acts

Many have commented on the different roles of an educator (Britzman, 2009; Carr, 2003; Heck & Williams, 1984; Mulcahy, 2011; Smeyers et al., 2007; Standish, 2012a; Vick & Martinez, 2011; Watkins, 2011; Zevin, 2010). Educators are transmitters of information, facilitators for developing knowledge and skills, performers, researchers, professionals, morality coaches, authority figures, role-models etc. Each of these roles is vague and complex. Yet, any educator complies with all such roles easily, with their every speech act.

Speech acts denote, according to J. L. Austin, the various things we do with words. Austin (1962) begins his *How to Do Things with Words (HDTW)* lectures trying to distinguish between two kinds of utterances: (1) constatives provide information, and (2) performatives perform certain acts. He soon undermines this distinction and claims that whenever we say something about the world, we also do something in the world. In fact, we do three different acts: (a) A locutionary act or locution: the act of pronouncing sounds 'with sense and reference' (Austin, 1962, pp. 92–98, 101, 102). I utter, 'Do this and you'll never see me again'. It is the act of communicating some kind of information, using the proper syntax and the right vocabulary. The information may be true or false. Note that the giving of information is also an act. (b) An illocutionary act or illocution: the act that I do *in* uttering this sentence under the specific circumstances. In uttering this sentence, I made a promise; or a warning; or a threat. The context mostly signifies which illocution was performed. (c) A perlocutionary act or perlocution: the act(s) that I do *by* uttering this sentence. I persuade you to do this or I get you not to do this; and as a further result you may or may not see me again. The perlocution involves the consequences of my utterance to the audience and may happen in the future. The context again allows you to interpret my utterance and mostly signifies which perlocution will be performed. Austin's distinctions between the three acts are again pretty blurry. So after a while, he insists that the three are indistinguishable. We need to grasp 'the total speech act in the total speech situation' in order to understand what's been said (Austin, 1962, p. 147).

Reading *How to Do Things with Words* starts off with a feeling of frustration: Austin suggests a distinction and takes it back; then, he makes a new triple distinction; which he immediately, takes back again; and right after that, he implies it yet again, but this time he just focuses on the illocutionary act for the most part of the rest of his lectures. The performative force gives an utterance its meaning. Austin now outlines three main factors for the happy functioning of the performative: (a') speaker's intentions when uttering the sentence (b') the following of certain conventions depending on the context, and (c') speaker's authority. For example, if I say 'I do', I will manage to get married only if I am in an actual wedding ceremony and I am the groom or the bride.

Speech act theory is supposedly applicable to all human communication. I believe, however, that the way it is set out makes it more appropriate for certain kinds of contexts. And education is probably its very best arena. First of all, the three major factors for the happy performance of the speech act, as Austin puts it, intentions, conventions and authorities, are clear most of the time. In formal educational contexts some basic intentions are clear, prescribed from the very start; the teacher has the intention to teach and the student has the intention to learn. Many other intentions may arise in the context of a classroom, but these two are the major ones. Formal education is by definition a conventional process; schools and universities have rules, procedures, deadlines, exams; and lots of role-playing within chains of command. Within this chain of command, certain people get to be authorized speakers at certain times; teachers, instructors, students have certain authority to speak at certain cues. With conventions, intentions, and authorities all set in place, education already meets the basic requirements for the application of speech act theory.

Secondly, education provides a context in which all three dimensions of the speech act can be useful. (a) There is a huge amount of information to pass on. All kinds of information about art, physics, philosophy, math and literature are the locutions of such speech acts. (b) Education also invites students into *form of life*, to use a Wittgensteinian term; all kind of practices, like giving promises or warnings are conveyed; illocutions carry out this familiarization process. (c) Ideally, education also helps the young become better: autonomous, moral and happy, create a better society for all, etc.; education hopes to produce certain perlocutionary effects.

Not all contexts can equally support a three-dimensional speech act. If I see you out on the street and say 'hi', I hardly pass on any information. If I do, it is getting through by the illocution (that is, by my tone and gesture), and not by the very sounds with sense and reference that I uttered, as Austin suggests. In ordinary conversations, not only the distinction between locutions and illocutions can be problematic, but also the distinction between illocutions and perlocutions. Butler (1997) is right to say that in cases of an insult, for example, it is not clear how the perlocution is distinguished from the illocutions that produced it. In educational contexts, however, such a distinction is both applicable and useful. Illocutions pertain to the speaker. Perlocutions pertain to the audience; they refer to the future and more permanent results of speech acts in the lives of the students: the things they know, the jobs they get, the buildings they may buld, their future selves, cities, and societies.

The moment a student walks in a classroom then, they are open to new locutions; become vulnerable to all kinds of illocutions; as to perlocutionary effects, in a sense, these effects are what education is all about. Such a phenomenon may not be unique in the classroom; other contexts have the same effect too. For example, therapy or church can have the same effect for its believers. And yet, you don't have to believe in education for the same effect to happen. In the classroom, all the three dimensions of the speech act are pumped up; and all can be useful tools in order to look closely and analyze the different aspects of educational practice. Locutions point to all kinds of information we pass on; illocutions on all the many ways we use to do it; perlocutions on all kinds of results we get.

Yet, education happens as the result of the total speech act in the total speech situation. That brings me to the third and most important reason that speech act theory is relevant to education: its dismantling power. Speech act theory may help us isolate and analyze different aspects of educational practice but it can equally show how closely these parts are interconnected. We can hardly speak for one dimension without pulling the others ones in as well.

In order to fully explore speech act theory's dismantling power however, a small modification is needed. The original speech act theory is totally blind to the emotive force that is present in all our utterances (Gasparatou, 2016). In fact, emotions are intertwined with intentions and conventions, hence influencing the whole speech act spectrum. And in order to allow education to happen, we need to acknowledge the emotional element of speech acts.

Strengthening speech acts' dismantling power

It is rather surprising that Austin talks about all the things we do with words without even mentioning emotions. Today, there is some literature implying a relation between speech acts and emotions. Robert Solomon notes a parallel between the two; emotions, he says, are the 'preverbal analogs of what Austin called 'performatives'- [they] do something in the world rather than simply describe […] a state of affairs' (Solomon, 1993, pp. 135, 136). Butler (1997) talks about excitable speech, commenting on the power of language to hurt. More recently Stanley Cavell draws a distinction between performatives on the one hand and passionate utterances on the other; an utterance gets to be one of those two kinds (Cavell, 2006, pp. 19, 155–192; Munday, 2009). My suggestion, however, is different: every utterance has an emotive force that adds to its meaning (Gasparatou, 2016). The total speech act in the total speech situation relies on and brings on emotional forces all around.

Attending the emotional force within our utterances can allow us to further undercut the distinction between locutions, illocutions, and perlocutions, that Austin already undermines. It moreover allows us to dismantle the distinction between intention, convention, and authority; Austin demands all three for a happy performance of the speech act, and he never questions their limits. The context of a classroom is an ideal setting to see how emotions influence all three and blur even this final distinction.

Just think of your elementary school teacher. Since then, you have probably met people with far stronger authority and yet, very few can encourage you, advise you, or disappoint you as that teacher could. Authority is not just about the power structure of the relationship, but also because of the emotions that are in play. Emotions authorize or de-authorize. Especially in educational contexts, you need a certain set of intentions and emotions in order to perform educational acts. Being a teacher comes with a recommended emotional repertoire. For example, I have to care about my students; it is OK to love them; it is forbidden to fall in love with them. Step out of this prescription and you are hardly recognized as a teacher.

Now, in a classroom, a student is typically encouraged to do lots of math, permitted to learn some philosophy and totally discouraged from going fishing. Speech acts like the above are intentional, even though a teacher might perform them without being fully aware of it. I might say 'aren't you happy now' and perform any of the above; which one I perform depends partly on my emotions. Speech acts are parts of our educational strategy and such strategies come out through the emotional shades that our utterances reveal.

Such strategies moreover are tied up with all community's conventions and activities; to grasp them implies you have grasped the community's habits, its emotional repertoire, and its rules (Harré, 1986; Solomon, 1993). Real life conversation, with all its implicatures, gives rise to the social world, its practices and its rules (Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009; Schatzki, 1996); and education is part of this conversation. Education moreover, provides the young with paradigm cases for the application of social rules and strategies. We can hear a teacher say 'this is not acceptable behavior'. If this is a reaction to bullying, the speech act will typically be very different than if they react to someone eating while they teach. They might get angry in both cases, but it will be a very different kind of anger. Emotions underline very subtle distinctions of appraisal that typically reveal communal values. Moods, personal values, intentions, but also customs, communal practices, even stereotypes, and biases are expressed by our emotional speech acts.

If the happy performance of a speech act then, relies on intentions, conventions, and authority, emotions underlie all three. In fact, adding emotions to the speech act theory might enable it to better account for all human communication. Again, however, it serves better as an educational theory. For education prescribes the norm. Norms run with emotions anyway, but again the effect is maximized in educational contexts. If for example, we are in at a dinner party and I drop some wine on your trousers, I ought to apologize. If I am the teacher in a classroom, however, and I spill ink on a student's trouser, I must apologize. My reaction implies the norm; what I should feel, what I should say, how I am to say it; and also how you are to take it.

Under the magnifying lens of an educational setting, emotions influence the whole speech act spectrum. They influence illocutions and perlocutions, for both the speaker's and the audience's evaluations, interpretations and reactions are crucial here. And interpretations are open; you might feel insulted and angry, even when I didn't mean to insult you at all. And the more important the encounter is to you, the more you struggle with interpretations. Hence, interpretations change; what you found insulting at first, might, on second thought, seem like a warning. Whatever my illocutionary intentions were then, the perlocutionary effects of my speech acts are not entirely under my control. Part of this control lies with you. That is why the same speech act can have many different effects on different students. Moreover, failing to produce the intended act does not mean that you fail to produce any act. You may intend to inspire, yet manage to intimidate, putting in motion a whole set of other perlocutionary effects. Or you may produce the same effects either way. There is a certain amount of indeterminacy in teaching that is partly explicable by the elusiveness and the complexity of the emotive forces within our speech acts.

Illocutions and perlocutions are related to emotions and can subscribe to the performative aspects of education, but the same also holds for the cognitive aspect that relates to locutions. Giving information is, according to many, the primary aspect of education. Austin implies that the delivery of information is also an act. And, may I add, this is not unrelated to emotions, values, and intentions either. We typically teach math and not fishing mostly because there is a stronger value attached to math. Certain pieces of information and reasoning skills are important because we expect that our students' choices may depend on them (Goldman, 1999). Here I am not going to discuss whether we are always right in the value we attach to each subject, or whether education should include more. I just want to point out that the locutions of teaching are performative at two levels at least. First, a teacher's locutions imply what he or she acknowledges as worth learning. And second, while passing on this information they expect to influence students. We only teach what we value, and we value it because of the desired effects it hypothetically brings. Locutions are indeed significant then because they are performative. The effect of our teaching depends on the information conveyed. A math teacher is supposed to teach students some math; a philosopher teacher is supposed to teach students some philosophy. We cannot enhance our students (emotionally or otherwise) if we deprive them of correct and useful information.

However, the way the information comes out is crucial for its being grasped. Some manager or minister of education might try to present a new curriculum, and publish a new set of obligatory textbooks for school: they want to change the information to be delivered. For there is definitely a lot of performative implicature within information; a lot of performative implicature regarding which history book you read, on how many hours of literature or technology you allow schools to have, or on which novel you use in classroom. However, no matter how many curricula or books you change, one cannot change perlocutionary effects without changing teachers' emotive performance as well. Whatever you may impose on a teacher to teach, they are going to influence the information with their teaching, and their actual physical performance in the classroom (Watkins, 2011; Zembylas, 2016). So, if the point is to have less - or more - patriotic history lessons, for example, you don't just need to change the book, but also the attitudes of the teacher. The very delivery of information influences what is taught.

In fact, intentions, emotions, and attitudes influence information so much and in so many ways that sometimes one may not relate to certain pieces of information at all. After all, this is one of the reasons why we have political correctness language rules in schools. Stereotypes, however, can always find their way into the classroom. Imagine a literature teacher who never asks boys a question, whereas she dialogs about literature with girls all the time. There is surely some performative force there, even if neither the teacher nor their students realize that.

The solution yet is not to ban the performative force of teaching (Mulcahy, 2011; Standish, 2002; Vick & Martinez, 2011; Watkins, 2011; Zembylas, 2016). For, if I do not relate to the information in some performative way, I might not even listen to it. Take online learning platforms for example. E-learning is very hip and one of the arguments in favor of it is that it excludes some of the downsides of face-to-face teaching, such as sexist or racist biases (Khan, 2016; Meier, 2007). MOOCS and e-classes were explicitly designed to exclude illocutions for all the bias that they carry. Together we may have missed all the performative force that allows for student—teacher relation; or even a simulation of a relation,

an illusion or a fantasy of looking up—or down—to that person in front of you. Banning the illocutions and the emotions that drive them, we also ban the possibility for an actual involvement of both parties in the educational practice. It is not surprising then, that more and more, there is a tendency to simulate a face-to-face teaching experience. We no longer just have explanatory power points or animated lifeless models; now we also include video lectures, sometimes recorded in real classrooms so that the student can accompany the information with some performative force. And we have even made-up other ways to perform illocutions; chat rooms that came together with the invention of emoticons and acronyms, such as LOL, from the very start. Education relies on some kind of relation between the speakers. And a relation, even a bad or weak or illusionary one, depends on the emotions and the attitudes of both parties. This is an extra burden one cannot get rid of. We have to embrace it and work through it. We can change our attitudes, but we cannot extract them from our educational acts.

All this implicature of attitudes, intentions, conventions and emotions itself transmits information; it is full of content about what is acceptable, enjoyable, insulting or about how one is supposed to behave or react to this or that practice. Even mere performance without verbal locutions carries information, very crucial information indeed. Not only the informative is performative then, but also the performative is informative.

Moving beyond dichotomies

Speech act theory can help us analyze the main different aspects of education, without losing sight of their interconnections. It puts focus on the informative and the performative aims of education; it emphasizes education's standing on the intentional, conventional and authoritative ordinances of our communities; and at the same time, it weakens such distinctions: the informative is and relies on the performative and vice versa. Intentions, conventions, and authority all are intertwined together, bringing personal and communal values, norms, emotions, repertoires, moods and aspirations into play.

Not only the content of the theory is important for education then, but also its dismantling power. Austin messes up dichotomies; he creates distinctions, only to withdraw them a bit later. His method may seem messy at first. But it could be a good approach when talking about the complex phenomenon of education: it illuminates the different aspects of education while at the same time undermining their differences.

In a way then, speech act theory can bring us back to the realm of common sense. Good education depends on literacy. We want to teach and learn all kinds of worthy information. Art, biology, philosophy, math and literature, are among the disciplines we find worthy or pleasant or useful for all kinds of different purposes we hold dear. Valuing and mastering the proper information is a big part of a familiarization process into one's community. And it depends on us doing stuff with this information, like being able to intimidate or encourage, bore or excite, order or promise. Participating in a community relies on both the locutionary and the illocutionary aspects of our speech acts. Only then, education produces the ideal perlocutionary effects: it helps the young discover their potential, be responsible and somewhat autonomous, flourish, find jobs, create communities and lead their own lives. Intellectual habits, character traits, ideals and ambitions are nurtured. Within every speech act, all the above are put in motion. The information is being passed on. The invitation to a variety of practices is being delivered. Individuals and societies change. All the aims of education, for which policymakers argue, are produced speech act by speech act. Hopefully, this theory then can mess up a variety of dualisms that haunt education for decades and show it for what it is: a series of informative and performative, mental and physical, communal and personal, cognitive and emotive intentional speech acts. It may then, be worthwhile to reread, and even a bit rewrite, speech act theory as an educational acts theory.

Speech acts, for example, can facilitate today's discussions aiming at bridging the cognition-emotion dualism, thus helping us dismantle the debate between the enhancement agenda versus the cognitive agenda (Gasparatou, 2016; Dunlap, 2012; Jones, 2012; Zembylas, 2016). In the context of the updated speech-act theory, the cognitive and the emotive run together within our every utterance; and this is why they produce the (perlocutionary) effects we expect from education (Gasparatou, 2016). Emotions

cannot be well distinguished from all other attitudes, intentions and conventions that make up illocutions. They are neither well distinguished from cognition, the processing or delivering of information.

Speech acts can also include some versions of naturalism. We have social, but also biological restraints and potentials. Education indeed relies on our mental life, our social habits and our physical bodies (Barad, 2003; Mulcahy, 2015; Patten, 2011; Zembylas, 2007). Even Austin allows for a small participation of one's body when talking about the physical act of pronouncing noise (Austin, 1964, pp. 92,101,11–114; Gasparatou, 2013). We ought to extend this theory and allow for the whole body to contribute to the production of a speech act; brains and minds, hormones, gestures, facial expressions, glances, and blushes are part of the act. Speech act theory can bridge the gap between the mental and the physical; add to the discussions about how the body influences educational processes (Barad, 2003; Mulcahy, 2015), while reminding us that educational acts are always intentional (Schatzki, 1996; Solomon, 1993). Perhaps they are not always conscious. Even emotional and bodily expressions are intentional though, and always open to interpretation.

Speech acts are cuts of a conversation of us with the others on all three levels: we exchange locutions, illocutions and perlocutions all the time; we are shaped by other people's acts and we shape others and ourselves by our own. Which brings me to the last and most important dichotomy we suffer when we talk about education: the one between the teacher and the student. There are indeed many chains of command in education. Even today, after the rise of democratic or progressive education, in many parts of the world and even in subtle ways, the traditional model of a didactic teacher rises every time we insist on the teacher—student distinction. The teacher is often perceived as the speaker in a classroom and the students as the audience. However, in real contexts and real classrooms, there are no single speech acts. To speak of a single speech act is to take a snapshot in a conversation. Speech acts—in education also—come in series of interactions between people.

Acting as a teacher sure comes with a certain set of prescribed speech acts. Such a realization runs, however, in different directions. First, educational acts bring the podium seat with them. Each of us is a teacher and a student (Zevin, 2010). Perhaps not always, not at the same time, or not as much. Yet, even in a classroom in which I teach, I also get taught. My very ability to teach or facilitate discussions relies on whether I engage with my students' speech acts. Their speech acts constantly provide me with input, propositional and otherwise. An angry student carries their anger's authority; a cinephile student carries his hobby's authority; a religious student carries his religion authority, and so forth. Being able to engage in an exchange of speech acts you are able to change seats all the time; already you are educated enough to do it; and you can act both as an educator and a student. Moreover, certain speech acts may also disarm me as a teacher. An insult may cost me any authority; insisting on some incorrect information may also have the same effect. What both have in common is lack of responsibility. Educational acts are intentional and normative and thus, carry a demand for responsibility on all parties involved in education. Speech act theory then can provide us insights that may help us analyze the dynamic between teachers and students and further the discussions on non-authoritative teaching practices (Biesta, 2010; Cornelissen, 2010; Mercieca, 2012; Watkins, 2011). After all, education happens all the time and to all directions as long as any conversation takes place.

The topics mentioned above are just some ideas about how speech act theory, modified and treated as an educational theory, can help us analyze issues and weaken dichotomies that have been troubling education for decades. Let me add one final comment that may add up to the value of re-examining speech act theory as an educational theory.

Whenever discussions about educational policies turn on a dispute, policy-makers have decided what kind of argument should decide on the issues: data. On this, there is no much dispute. Verificationism is dominant today; whatever we do in education needs to be described, documented, measured and assessed by concrete data (Gasparatou, 2017; Standish, 2012a). Since the method of assessment of each ideal is almost unanimous, it is rather surprising that the debates like the above are ongoing.

Now, I don't have anything against data. So far as we realize they are a small part of the educational speech act game, relevant to our other intentions, emotions, attitudes, biases and stereotypes, open to interpretations and capable of producing all kinds of effects. Austin, when he presented his speech

act theory had a similar reaction to verificationism. He did not deny that there are certain levels of our utterances, of which verification is desirable, namely the locution. Yet, he shows that the locution is blind if you do not know what to do with it. Moreover, he suggests that a locution is also an act: what words you actually use, just like what kind of data you choose to employ, is very much performative. It is not surprising then, that with all these data we have been collecting, all the different kind of tests, evaluation forms and metrics, we are still undecided on most important issues that educational practices put forth. Perhaps we should be looking at a different direction.

Educational speech acts are normative. They include values, emotions, judgments, rules. Logical positivists, the strongest defenders of verificationism, knew that in the realm of normativity there can be no verification. They would call it the realm of non-sense; Austin and others would rather call it the realm of performativity. Whatever you may call it, education is definitely within this realm.

So, if nothing else, seeing education in the light of speech act theory can make us realize what would not count as the ultimate criterion; what would not be the final word in educational debates; and what would not be an improvement. We cannot pretend that educational acts will ever be assessed blindly and solely by metrics. Education is messy, just like all human communication and relations. But if we try to ban the messiness of our educational speech acts, we ban education.

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Notes on contributor

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