Education, Oppression and The (Im)Possibility of Resistance

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In this article Geraldine Van de Kleut and Connie White examine what their two geographically and politically different teaching locals have in common with each other and with the current global education movement. They further discuss their mutual struggles to find spaces to practice social justice under the oppressive mandates of a neoliberal education regime. In light of these understandings and the research findings around teacher resistance, the authors argue for the need for educators at all levels to engage in resistance and research of resistance to the repressive demands of current neoliberal settings in schools.

Introduction

Geraldine: There is a boy in my room who could read if I sat down with him every day for 15 minutes. He is a huge behaviour problem and won't read because he sees no future in it. I think I could teach him. I am not, because if I did, I would only be able to see my other kids, who are taking reading on, once every two months for individual conferencing instead of once a month, which is a pathetic amount as it is. I could make a difference to him if I chose to make less of a difference to the others. No human being is garbage and I am throwing him out. It makes me sick. I could make a difference to him and I am choosing not to. I hate it.
Connie: I do understand. I do. The lives of my students, who lived in poverty, are invisible in the curricular and policy demands I was expected to enact in my classroom. It's as if these kids don't exist and your discussions this year bring back so much of it to me. I know the choices are horrific. They really are. But you are not choosing not to take the time and teach him to read. Dorothy Smith (1996) would make it very clear that you are a part of the institution that has chosen not to. I know you know that on one level but you are with a child you care about and that is another level altogether. Make sense?

(On-line chat: December 2008)

We met through a Distance Education Graduate program ten years ago. It was a

time when stories from our classrooms and reflections on our practice propelled us into

probing conversations that often took us in new directions for our teaching. We were

always in search of new possibilities that might bring change to those we taught,

especially those who lived on the margins of our educational system and our societies. A

child who could not read, a child who hated writing, a child who resisted what we offered

through our negotiated curricula[1] or any child who presented anomalies to our

assumptions about learning became the informants who pushed our thinking and

ultimately caused us to change our practice (Harste, J., Burke, C., and Woodward,

V.,1984). We were teachers, collaborators, researchers, and scholars. Our work excited

us. It gave us hope. And while we were always cognizant of the fact that we were

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[1] When we refer to negotiating the curriculum, we draw on understandings gleaned from the work of Garth Boomer, 1992.

working within and against the hegemonic discourses and practices of a white, middle

class, patriarchal institution we often found the spaces, the autonomy and the support

from others to create new knowledge and respond to our students' needs.

Schools have been changing over the past ten years. The quotes at the beginning

of this paper are taken from a recent on-line discussion and they demonstrate that our

conversations about teaching have been changing as well. The exchange illustrates that a

student's resistance has not shown Geraldine what she must do to help him, but rather

what she must choose not to do if she is to be in compliance with her district's teaching

mandates and assessments. Reflecting back, Connie connects to a time she spent in a

small rural school where most of the students lived in poverty and failed school's middle

class curricula. By referencing Dorothy Smith's (1996) well-known studies in

institutional ethnography, Connie attempts to lessen the burden Geraldine is feeling,

telling her that as a 'worker' of the institution she is not given choice about what she can

do. Geraldine and Connie both know this understanding does nothing more than invite a

renewed sense of despair and hopelessness.

Today Geraldine is back in the classroom, teaching in a school that serves both

white and First Nations children in Ontario, Canada after a two-year tenure as literacy

coach for her district. She is a PhD candidate, whose research interests seek to interrogate

the 'whiteness' of the curriculum she is expected to deliver to her First Nations students.

Connie has taken a position as Assistant Professor in the California State University

(CSU) system in Southern California, where she teaches pre-service and in-service

teachers who come from a diverse, multi-cultural and multi-lingual population. These

teachers in turn teach children who come from diverse, multi-lingual and multi-cultural

backgrounds. Her research interests also lie in making visible the cultural and social biases that permeate the scripted programs and curricula her students must teach.

We are teachers, with a history of commitment to social justice. We have wanted and encouraged our students to question us, to resist our expectations whenever they recognize we are asking them to become passive consumers of the biases in our teaching. We have found ourselves pushed to places of discomfort by our students when they have taken up our invitations to interrogate the world of school as we have presented it to them. We have learned much about our teaching from these uncomfortable places (Van de Kleut, and White, 2009). We understand that as white, middle-class women we are always complicit in the perpetuation of social injustice and that our teaching practices are always political (Green, 2008). But what we find most troubling about acknowledging this complicity in our teaching today is that once we begin to understand our role in the oppression of our students and want to resist by moving the other way (Tatum 1997) the mandates of our job forbid it.

It is the increasing frustration in the conversations such as the one above that demanded of us a closer look at our teaching environments and the constraints under which we found ourselves. We understood our teaching contexts to be completely different, separated politically, geographically, and by the mandated curricula within which we both labored and the age and circumstances of our students. Yet all too often, we found ourselves talking about the effects of our work on us in exactly the same ways. How could this be?

Our work to make sense of this conundrum led us to literature that outlined the global effects of neoliberalism and the standards movement on educational settings.

Through these neoliberal agendas, children's minds are being robotized and stilled. Teachers are growing exhausted and helpless in their fight to make sense of senseless curricula and never-ending high stakes testing, while they watch their students' ability to learn in school atrophy with the passing of each and every day they are in the classroom. Teacher-educators' desires to invite teachers into academic conversations and invigorating debates about current theories and practice are being overshadowed by expectations (backed by threats of loss of accreditation) to teach in ways that are responsive to shortsighted federal and local standards.

Such anti-intellectual, undemocratic and intimidating practices in the world of education are wrong. Children like the little boy in Geraldine's quote show us this. He is in fifth grade. He cannot read and thus far school has not convinced him he has any reason to do so. His teacher wants to teach him, but her time has been claimed by mandated instruction and accompanying assessments. The child resists the identity of 'the ideal student' bestowed upon him by the white, middle class school system and instead claims recognition of his existence through bad behavior, almost certain to bring punishment. Teachers are afraid to resist the mandates of the mind-numbing curricula they must teach. Those who attempt to do so often find punitive consequences in store for them. They learn they must submit and tow the line, compromise their ideals or leave the school or the profession altogether (Achinstein and Ogawa 2006). Teacher- educators' stories of their own resistance to the anti-intellectual requirements bestowed on their teaching are seemingly absent from the literature.

Determined to be teachers who work for justice, we've looked for research on teacher resistance and find it to be in short supply. Most of what we've found portrays

teacher resistance as insubordination and bad professional behavior (Knight, 2009). Teachers are chastised for not being team players, full participants in the scripted moves designed by their districts and their school administrators. According to the thesis of such writings, the knowers are located outside the classroom; the consumers of outside knowledge are the teachers and children found inside the classroom walls. Resistance is pathologized and thought to be an 'illness' that should be cured if schools are to get 'on with business'. We've discovered entire books dedicated to guiding school leaders on persuasive ways to bring dissenting teachers into the fold. (Whitaker, T., 2002; Scherz, J. 2004)

This is not the kind of teacher resistance research we are looking for. While it can be informative from the perspective of further elucidating the erroneous and widespread views that teachers are not 'knowers', capable of constructing knowledge and responding to the ever changing needs of their students, the kind of research in which we are currently interested takes the teachers' perspective. It responds to such questions as why is resistance frightening, necessary and sometimes even worth the risk. Why is it that resistance in schools is not seen as generative and informative?

We believe such research can work to illuminate institutional oppression of teachers and children. Most importantly we believe research and stories 'from the field' help us reach beyond the local for broader understandings of the rationale behind scripted teaching, the policing of such teaching and high stakes testing. We believe research by and with teachers can move us toward making the systemic nature of education systems more transparent, thereby offering understandings of why the de-professionalization of teachers is an intended political act.

Sleeter (2008) writes:

Multicultural and democratic educators have long envisaged schools as servants

of democratic life, helping young people cultivate knowledge, intellectual tools

and experience working across diverse viewpoints and identities to address

shared social concerns. (p.9)

Teachers want to name themselves as democratic educators, dedicated to teaching and living ideals of a democratic society, a society that cares and works toward the common good. However, the reality of their teaching world is that they cannot. Rather than being servants of democratic life, schools today are in the service of those concerned with their country's corporate interests and competition in the global economic markets. Teachers are implicated in the re-creation of social injustices every day they enter the classroom and carry out the politically motivated agendas of policy makers and government bureaucrats. The role they are forced to play in constructing the youth of today as privileged and disadvantaged workers for the corporate world of tomorrow is not an accident.

Our research questions have led us to look more closely at what our two locations had in common with each other and with larger global movements, and what we could do to combat what we saw as powerful oppressive effects on our teaching practices. This paper is a result of that work. While we do not present research here per se, we present a pressing call for research of a particular kind which we intend to undertake. This paper outlines the general context of our two locales, and then gives a deeper analysis of the effect of neoliberalism on schools and schooling which is illustrated by an account by each of us of particular oppressions within our own local contexts. It then gives an

account of the research around resistance by teachers in school settings, illuminating both the demand of critical pedagogy to resist oppression in schools and the paucity of current examples of this resistance that exist in the research literature. Finally, the paper concludes with a call both for resistant teaching practice in neoliberal school settings, as well as the need for research accounts of this resistance as it is enacted.

Neoliberalism in School Settings

Neoliberalism and the standards movement have been taken up as the only discourse for schooling in both of our contexts, and, indeed, in many places around the globe. Part of the reason for this widespread acceptance among all the stakeholders of education is that the discourse appeals to widely held beliefs about the threat to survival of nations in a global economy. Schools are seen to have failed in preparing students for jobs in the new world order, and parents take up this fear and recast it as a fear for their children's individual economic success. Accountability, surveillance, standards, and testing all contribute to a public belief in a reform of schools that is measurable, factual, and supported by hard science, and that will better fit students, and therefore their nations, for a competitive global market economy.

When such a discourse is taken up as the only discourse within which school is conducted, other possibilities for schooling leave the public consciousness altogether. As Lipman (2009) states:

The hegemonic project has succeeded in redefining education as job preparation, learning as standardized skills and information, educational quality as measurable by test scores, and teaching as the technical delivery of that which is centrally

mandated and tested. By defining the problem of education as standards and

accountability [neoliberal education programs] have made simply irrelevant any

talk about humanity, difference, democracy, culture, thinking, personal meaning,

ethical deliberation, intellectual rigor, social responsibility, and joy in education.

(p. 373)

Such a redefinition of education is ubiquitous and global, and goes unremarked in

discussions of school reform. Hatcher's (1998) list of the defining characteristics of

Official School Improvement as it is enacted in Great Britain is equally applicable to

conceptions of school reform and schooling in U.S. and Canadian contexts:

1. Its goal is 'raising standards' but not explicitly reducing inequality.

2. It defines success in terms of academic performance assessed by national

    assessment criteria. There is no conception of 'education for emancipation' as

    an aim.

3. It regards the school as a socially neutral institution. It has no conception of

    school as socially reproductionist.

4. It exaggerates the extent to which schools can compensate fro inequalities in

    society.

5. It favours a diverse and stratified system of schools, especially at secondary

    age.

6. It favours grouping students by 'ability'.

7. It tends to operate with an abstract universalist model of the learner—

    deracialised, degendered, declassed.

8. It has a conception of the curriculum as ideologically neutral.

9. It adopts an authoritarian approach to policy formation, implementation and

   management. (p. 269)

Hatcher's list points to the global reach of neoliberal discourses of schooling, and the

silences and omissions that go unremarked within such discourses.

Accounts of the resultant changes in teacher work paint a disturbing picture of job

intensification and insecurity, increased scrutiny, and the imposition of tasks valueless to

teachers and students (Achinstein and Ogawa, 2006; Bushnell, 2003; Gitlin and

Margolis, 1995; Hatcher, 1998, 2008). Policy documents and procedures as they are

enacted in school settings serve to place teachers and students in the equivalent of

Foucault's (1979) panopticon: because the system is constructed so that at any time one

might be scrutinized for compliance, compliance is self-monitored and virtually assured.

In Ontario, as in California, schools whose performance does not match provincial or

state benchmarks are subject to increased scrutiny and increasingly prescriptive

mandates. The full weight of the neoliberal management of teacher work, and the

disappearance of spaces for alternative perspective and practice, is difficult to understand

or appreciate by those who work outside of classrooms.

As literacy teachers, we are particularly concerned with the changes in literacy

teaching practices in neoliberal settings. As Brandt (2001) states:

Literacy is a valued commodity in the U.S. economy, a key resource in gaining

profit and edge. This value helps to explain, of course, the lengths people will go

to secure literacy for themselves or their children. But it also explains why the

powerful work so persistently to conscript and ration the resource of literacy. The

competition to harness literacy, to manage, measure, teach, and exploit it,

intensified throughout the twentieth century. It is vital to pay attention to this

development because it largely sets the terms for individuals' encounters with

literacy. (p. 21)

Literacy practices, as Brandt goes on to argue, make their way into schools and

classrooms because they are sponsored by powerful individuals and groups. In California,

for example, David Packard of Hewlett-Packard has invested forty million dollars in

training teachers to use the scripted program Open Court Reading (OCR) (Helfand,

2000). As Gee (2004) reminds us, literacy practices are always about reading and writing

something; what that something might be in the context of OCR, and why Hewlett-

Packard maintains an interest in particular Californian students becoming the kind of

people who read and write that something to the absolute exclusion, at least within their

schools, of anything else, is an absorbing question that is beyond the scope of this paper.

Hewlett-Packard's sponsorship of OCR, however, illuminates the fact of sponsorship of

literacy practices as well as another important point about literacy practices in neoliberal

school settings: although the broad strokes of policy and practice are similar across

school settings, local implementations of these policies differ from setting to setting. In

the districts of California sponsored by Hewlett-Packard, teachers follow the rigorous

scripts of OCR; in other districts teachers follow other publisher programs or the

mandates of their school board. Such large variations in practice exist that it seems

difficult to generalize across settings in ways that call attention to shared problems, let

alone propose solutions. After all, there seems to be little in common between a

preservice teacher literacy methods class in California, and an elementary school

classroom in Ontario. However, as the following two stories illustrate, while local practices vary across settings, their effects are remarkably similar.

The Ontario Script—Geraldine's story

In the fall of 2006 I became a literacy coach. The person who hired me supervised all curriculum and teaching matters for our board. Although my job at the time, as one of six coaches, was to pressure and support teachers—create anxiety in them about their practice, and then ease that anxiety by helping them implement new and improved practices before beginning the cycle again—I mitigated my own discomfort with the role by focusing on bringing trade books into the classroom and initiating conversations about teaching and learning with teachers that there is seldom time or space to have.

In the fall of 2008, I reentered the classroom, only to find that the bureaucratic demands of teaching had increased astonishingly in the two years I was out. Particularly irksome was the writing program, begun during my tenure as a literacy coach and now applied universally across the board, supported by a structure of dates and tasks, and carried along in an endless current of paper. According to my board, all teachers from JK to Grade 8, were to teach the same six forms of writing—recount, narrative, explanation, persuasion, report, and procedure—at precisely the same time. Each unit was to begin with a 'cold' piece, a diagnostic task that was assigned to students without instruction, on the same date. The school divisions were to meet to standardize their anchor charts for the teaching cycle, and each teacher was to teach the lessons and assign several other performance tasks. The final assessment was created at the board level and distributed to teachers along with a rubric; teachers met to discuss how the pieces were marked at a

school level within their divisions. The new literacy coaches were teachers at each school who were given one afternoon every week to attend board meetings and bring information about board programs and mandates, particularly this writing program, back to teachers.

The second year of the program began with an increased commitment to this writing program by board personnel, and a concomitantly increased flurry of memos and emails to ensure teacher and pupil compliance. Despite a decrease in standardized test scores across the board in writing (referred to in meetings with principals as an 'implementation dip'), student writing in classrooms became restricted to particular kinds of forms, assignments, assessments, and assessment guidelines. Genres which were assigned longer periods of time were assigned more, and more restrictive, assessment requirements. The list below comes from one of the many emails given to me by the literacy coach, compiled from a meeting for coaches:

Instructional Cycle

This is to be done with the longer writing formats

Diagnostic

Mid-point Assessment

Cross Curricular Connection—another writing piece

Demand Task—sent by program

In addition, all teachers across the board were given a chart that gave an astonishing week by week breakdown of tasks assigned to all teachers and students, beginning the first day of school.

At the beginning of this second year of teaching I determined not to follow this rigorous schedule, and to make public to whoever inquired that I was not doing so. Although it was my intent to teach the first two genres in the schedule by the end of the first reporting period, I intended to do so at my and my students' pace, using the assignments and assessments that suited us. My nonconformity is known to the staff of my school, my administrator, and the school board consultant assigned to our school. The result so far has been a marked indifference. This indifference has called into question for me my own previous compliance, and is an encouragement to further test where I might take back classroom control without official acknowledgement or censure.

Whether or not I do comply with this schedule or these demands, I am constantly made to consider the forces of control that are brought to bear upon me and the possible consequences of the things I do and do not do. Such systems of control narrow the options to either compliance or resistance, and close the door to the other possible things I might do and think of doing had I space and energy. The dissatisfaction of my colleagues, who do comply, surfaces in complaints, cynicism, lack of engagement, and a school-wide climate of professional impotence. While this is a writing curriculum, its influence is felt in many areas of curriculum and governance, and changes practices for the worse in both in my school and in my classroom.

The California Script—Connie's story

In Spring 2004, I was offered a position as assistant professor in literacy education at California State University Northridge. This university served many young people who came from working class and multiple ethnic and language backgrounds.

During my public school teaching career, I had worked primarily with children in poverty or from working class poor families and my dissertation work looked at how public schools positioned children from these families into 'classed systems' within the institution. How school literacy practices worked against these children and families was a focal point of my studies. I felt I had something to offer the young people who came to CSUN to learn to teach and I felt certain I would also learn from them.

It did not take me long to realize that my theories and practices around literacy teaching were not a perfect fit with many of my literacy colleagues at CSUN and they were definitely not a fit at all with the Los Angeles Unified School District, the school district where most of our students were placed as student teachers and most of our graduates would apply for jobs. The pre-service teachers I taught were far more concerned about knowing how to pass the mandatory Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) required for certification and learning how to teach the LA Unified School Board's adopted basal reading program Open Court (OCR) than they were about the theoretical perspectives I wanted them to consider and debate. Beyond this, I found myself reminded that I was missing out on important self-study groups (supported by a Reading First Teacher Education Network grant), where literacy faculty gave demonstration lessons on 'best practices" for teaching the California Five Pillars of Reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension). "We don't want to lose you" were the words uttered at my office door when I failed to make an appearance at yet another self-study gathering.

The University's Retention Tenure and Promotion (RTP) process directs that all faculty seeking tenure and promotion provide evidence that they are meeting the university expectations under the following headings.

1. Professional Preparation

2. Teaching Effectiveness and Direct Instructional Contributions

3. Contributions to the Field of Study

4. Contributions to the University and Community

Each of the major focal points for the RTP process has subsections, which give greater detail to which the hopeful candidate would want to adhere. For example, under Teaching Effectiveness and Direct Instructional Contributions, guidelines read: "Teaching effectiveness is a primary criterion for tenure as well as promotion to any rank. Evaluation of teaching effectiveness shall be based upon class visits by the Department Chair and the Department Personnel Committee or their designees, student evaluations of teaching effectiveness, and other sources of evidence of teaching effectiveness deemed appropriate by the Department" (p.5).

Evidence that the university requirements are being met is gathered in a Personal Information File (PIF). This file is examined at several levels each year (Department, College, the Dean of the College). Every alternate year including the year the candidate applies for tenure, the Provost also examines the PIF and reads the accompanying files. The first time I submitted my PIF to the Department Personnel Committee my syllabi were found to be at fault by senior literacy faculty. The California pillars of reading were not mentioned in the text of my syllabi and then later when I placed them there, my

syllabi were found at fault because they were not explicitly linked to specific practices in my calendar of plans.

The letter I received following the Department review of my PIF (2008) gave me cause for alarm. I could see problems with my quest for tenure if the letter were to travel on to other levels without revisions. Perhaps more importantly I could see institutional discourses and practices operating through my PIF working to construct an entirely different kind of teacher than I'd shown myself to be when I came to the university. According to the this letter I was to enhance the list of topics in my syllabus and ensure that the course content met with "the departmental outline as well as standards of the state and the national accrediting bodies. During accreditation review we must assure outside evaluators that there is parity between sections of the same course." I was then instructed to "seek advice of a senior member of the EED literacy faculty to gather ideas on how (I) might adjust the content of (my) syllabi through coordination with my colleagues."

I have never been a teacher who simply gathered ideas from others. I consistently worked hard to both inform and question my practice through my research, my readings, my teaching and my collaborative conversations with colleagues who were doing the same. This part of RTF process it seemed was working to clone me as a different kind of teacher altogether. I felt cornered, and worried for my professional reputation and my teaching practice.

Resistance was an avenue that was open to me on one level. I had the right to appeal my letter, which I did. I also had the right to seek union advisement, which I did. When I read the letter from the Personnel Committee Chair to a union advisor, her comment was: "Oh they want you to teach just like they do". Of course the

admonishments, along with the directives to seek counselling from senior literacy faculty seemed to pave an inescapable road to compliance with this wish. Recommendation for tenure begins with the Department Personnel Committee.

Even legitimized resistance (appeal and union support) does not promise success. The Department Personnel Committee Chair did not change her letter in the ways that I requested through my appeal. I was however, able to place my letter of rebuttal in the file that traveled through the next levels of the RTP process. Until the letter from the Dean affirming my work and granting me another year of service toward tenure arrived in my mailbox, I was never sure what the outcome would be. There were no calls by the next levels to comply and change my teaching methods. However, I was cognizant of the fact that given different readers at the different Retention Tenure and Promotion levels, the outcome could have been quite different.

Each semester I hand out evaluations for my students to 'grade' my teaching, each year I am observed teaching and each year I put together my PIF, I know my work as an assistant professor, a teacher of literacy is under surveillance. I must read the political landscape with care when I vote for membership to the Department Personnel Committee and when I respond to students' wishes to be taught simply how to pass the tests and perform scripted reading programs. Whether and how I decide to comply or resist is as well orchestrated as I can make it. However, I know there are no assurances. Threats of losing my place in line for tenure or causing Accreditation visitors (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education or The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing) to file a poor report for our College or Department are threats that govern my practice every day.

The Revelations of Collaboration

Prior to undertaking this collaborative work, we understood that conversations about our teaching work took place in the context of the differences between our two settings. This assumption colours many of our discussions, and causes us to note over and over the similarities between the effects we feel as if it is a new and surprising discovery. It took many months of joint discussion for us to realize that our two educational settings had much more in common than they had differences.

Jan. 28, 2009: A Chat Between Connie and Geraldine

Connie*: Yes I do realize you teach First Nations students although what absolutely amazes me is that the issues you continually raise in conversation are so similar to the issues I dealt with in my poor rural school district (Jevon's school) and pretty darned similar to the issues many of the Inner city teachers I work with here have. So is it the school? the curriculum? or the student population?*

Geraldine*: interesting*

Connie*: See while I realize you are teaching First Nations kids I also forget it as you talk because it sounds 'like my old home'.*

Geraldine: *but I think the issues are the same all over… so it isn't whiteness, so much as teacherness and schoolness and curriculumness*

Connie*: I think so.. wherever we try to stuff a middle class, white male curriculum down the throats of students and their parents we try to impose identities that are justifiably unwanted, for the most part unneeded and threatening (in alienating ways). The only ones who digest such curricula well are the white middle class or those who have been*

whitened and re-classed. Although in today's "new Literacies' world, even these students

are unhappy with the school curriculum .. it limits and stifles.

Feb. 21, 2009

Geraldine: …there is an undeniable fit between what is going on in your state and my

province and that connection opens the way to talking about broader political forces that

use superficially different means to accomplish the same ends and our collaboration is a

way of demonstrating inalienably that these ends are being accomplished, and we are

helping them to be.

What, then, are the similarities between these settings? In both, the spaces in which both students and teachers once found room for alternative practice, creativity, and exploration are closing as imposed demands become more onerous, and directed at much smaller segments of practice. In both, individual teachers are constructing resistance in order to be able to practice with integrity. In both, the resistance these teachers practice, and the settings in which they practice it, leaves the teachers exhausted, demoralized, and unclear as to the efficacy of their efforts. And, perhaps most surprisingly, while the imposed programs in the two settings look completely different, their effect on teachers and students appears remarkably similar. Evidently, within neoliberal educational practices a wide variety of apparently dissimiliar practices produce a narrow set of similar results.

Within the discourse of neoliberalism, as Hatcher (1998) points out, schools are seen as socially neutral; as institutions which, far from reproducing social inequity, allow individual students the opportunity to escape their impoverished circumstances. This line

of thinking is constructed as equity: if teachers teach all children in the same way, regardless of their contexts and circumstances (teachers are admonished that the students' home circumstances 'stay at the classroom door'), and students work hard, everyone will achieve success. What is missing from this discourse is any kind of critique of the ways in which schools do reproduce inequity. Students and teachers learn and perform the texts of school: in Connie's setting both the rigid call and answer format of Open Court and the entire PIF process, and in Geraldine's the way in which genres work, as if knowledge of text form itself invested students with power (Luke 1996). Despite calls within state and provincial curriculum documents that students be taught critical literacy, literacy itself is impoverished within these systems, and critical literacy entirely absent. Kohl's (2009) observation of the current state of schooling applies equally to both settings:

> When I talk about an educational panopticon I mean a system in which teachers and students are under constant scrutiny, allowed no choice over what is learned or taught, evaluated continuously, and punished for what is considered inadequate performance. In this context students and teachers are forced to live in a constant state of anxiety, self-doubt, wariness, anomie, and even suppressed rage. (para.6)

Under such circumstances, teachers are called to either teach without integrity or to resist practices they know hurt themselves and their students.

We are teachers who view literacy through a socio-cultural lens, and who have formed their teaching praxis around issues of justice and equity. The bulk of Connie's research work concerns people in poverty, and Geraldine's intent in moving her teaching position was to consider issues of whiteness, colonialism, and racial inequity in her school setting. Neither of us is currently engaged in this work. The effect of the

imposition of the standards movement in education has been to prevent our consideration

of the effect of oppressive school practices on marginalized groups, and focus our

attention on the effect of oppressive school practices on ourselves.

We see the need to resist the restrictive practices in our settings. Like Apple

(2009), we believe that:

> The continuing struggle over schooling—over what is and is not taught, over how
>
> it is taught and evaluated, over how students with different characteristics are
>
> treated, over how teachers and other school employees are respectfully dealt with,
>
> over how the relationship between schools and their communities can be
>
> democratized, and so much more—is absolutely crucial to the pursuit of social
>
> justice. (p. 45)

In order to consider the forms such struggles might take, it is helpful both to consider the

calls to teachers to resist in the literature of critical pedagogy, and the accounts of actual

resistant practice as it has taken place in schools.

Resistance Research and the Call of Critical Pedagogy

According to Bullough, Jr. et al (1984), the role of the teacher has been defined by

Plato as a public servant submissive to ruling authorities and by what Bullough Jr. et al

call a "technocratic ideology" (p. 346). These twin influences shape a role for teachers

"characterized by rapid work pace, little, if any, involvement in establishing aims,

impersonal student-teacher relations, and much time spent doing "necessary" clerking

and management tasks" (p. 346). They go on to state:

> Because teachers are public servants, their view of teaching as primarily technical
>
> informs their practice, and how they spend their time reinforces how they

understand their work. Teacher mindedness and practice complement one another

to form a vicious circle of self-limitation. (p. 351)

The resistance Bullough, Jr. et al note in their study does nothing to change

schools and schooling, and provides an example of what Bushnell (2003), in her study of

New York City elementary school teachers' resistance labels "water-cooler discourse—

teachers complaining about their lack of autonomy, decision making, and authority—that

[does] not evolve to action" (p. 266). In a similar vein, Rousmaniere's (1997) account of

the role of teachers in 1920s New York acknowledges both a steady intensification of

teacher work and a token compliance on the part of teachers to external demands that,

while it expresses teacher resistance, does nothing to address or change the system itself.

Such accounts contrast sharply with the call to work as transforming intellectuals

issued to teachers by critical pedagogues. Transforming teachers harness student

resistance and connect it to historical enactments of resistance by oppressed peoples. As

Anyon (1981) states, "Transformative pedagogy would attempt to effect a political

consciousness in students. It would develop and politicize students' own cultural

expressions, identifications, and resistances" (p. 127). Other calls include turning the

school setting into a critical site of learning and resistance (Giroux, 2004), engaging

students in a process of "demystification" that will address current injustices and seek to

change them (Greene, 1978), and enacting a disruptive pedagogical practice that enables

students and teachers to "form a joint resistance to social injustices" (Mills, 1997, p. 52).

Each of these calls has in common a link to what Apple (1996) calls "a larger social

vision and…a larger social movement" (p. 109), and is intended to engender and support

a teaching practice that resists narrow and technical interpretations of teacher work,

prescriptive curriculums, and both authoritarian and manipulative ideological

manifestations of teaching. Such calls take to heart Bates' (1975) important insight

regarding the theory of hegemony:

>…the old order cannot be made to vanish simply by pointing out its evils, any
>
>more than a new order can be brought into existence by pointing out its virtues. A
>
>social order, no matter how exploitative, cannot be understood simply as a
>
>conspiracy of wicked rulers. Rulers who can make a society work, who can make
>
>millions of people do their bidding and make them do it without the lash, are
>
>competent rulers. The meek may be blessed, but they shall not on that account
>
>inherit the earth. If the wretched of the earth have always been on the wrong end
>
>of the stick, it is because someone else knew which was the right end. It is not
>
>enough for workers to gripe about the boss. They must make themselves better
>
>than the boss, not only in their moral conduct, but also in their technical know-
>
>how. (p. 365)

Teachers, then, must surpass those who would dominate them in wisdom, morality, and

knowledge and create a new order. Rabinow and Rose (2003) state:

>The essential political problem for the intellectual is…that of ascertaining the
>
>possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing
>
>people's consciousnesses—or what's in their heads—but the political, economic,
>
>institutional regime of the production of truth. (p. 317)

The difference between teacher resistance as it exists in the research studies cited above,

and teacher resistance as it is envisioned by poststructuralists and critical pedagogists,

could not be more stark.

A complicating factor in accounts of teacher resistance is the restructuring of the work of schools by neoliberal agendas. Like student resistance, teacher resistance is pathologized in neoliberal accounts; it is a problem that must be addressed and overcome (Gitlin and Margonis, 1995), rather than a principled decision or a source of information. Researchers such as Knight (2009) and Tye and Tye (1993) propose hopeful and technical solutions to what are essentially political dilemmas, asserting that teachers can be made to feel self-confident and empowered to the extent that they will enact school reform and improve student achievement. Like Fullan, Hill, and Crevola's (2006) prescription of more, and more focused, schooling for students who resist, such recommendations seem more likely to increase teacher resistance than ameliorate it.

Teachers who resist neoliberal intensification, scrutiny, and the trivialization of teaching and learning lose their jobs or get transferred to less desirable locations (Achinstein and Ogawa, 2006). The use of data to guide instruction, centred firmly in positivist ideology, result in an education that is simplified, linear and progressive, rather than complex, circuitous, and recursive; as Finn (1999) states, "Schools have little to offer, and so they ask little in return. They stop asking for real effort on the part of students. In return, the students offer enough cooperation to maintain the appearance of conducting school" (p. 59). Most disturbingly, when teachers who have previously taught in ways that are widely regarded to be authentic and meaningful begin to teach in the neoliberal equivalent of Foucault's (1979) panopticon, their teaching is transformed:

> As the controls were imposed, and the regulations increasingly standardized, the quality of teaching and learning at even these exemplary schools began to suffer. Teaching, curriculum, and students' roles in classrooms were transformed by the

standardizations and by the categories of compliance they imposed. Within the

observational data there began to emerge phony curricula, reluctantly presented

by teachers in class to conform to the forms of knowledge their students would

encounter on centralized tests. The practice of teaching under these reforms

shifted away from intellectual activity toward dispensing packaged fragments of

information sent from an upper level of the bureaucracy. And the role of students

as contributors to classroom discourse, as thinkers, as people who brought their

personal stories and life experiences into the classroom, was silenced or severely

circumscribed by the need for the class to "cover" a generic curriculum at a pace

established by the district and the state for all the schools. (McNeil, 2009, p. 385)

These are teachers who understand relevant, meaningful learning, and yet the effects of

standardization appear to be inexorable. According to McNeil:

…[the teachers] struggled to hold on to school lessons that held credibility in the

world outside schools, to lessons that sprang from teachers' passions and

children's curiosities, to lessons that built on a cumulative base of new

understandings for these students…The work of resistance itself, however, took a

toll on time, energies, and the activities that could not be salvaged as the controls

became more tightly monitored. (p. 385)

Self-confidence and empowerment have no relevance as an antidote to these teachers'

resistance; instead, their resistance is a response to an undermining of authority and a

lack of power, and becomes increasingly ineffective as authoritarian managerialism

(Hatcher, 1998) becomes increasingly effective. Although such teachers know that the

problems they face are "culturally and politically sculpted and not of their own making"

(Brookfield, 1995, p. 265), the exhaustion and demoralization these teachers face, as our accounts illustrate, *are* their own to manage and endure.

There are few examples of successful teacher resistance to the inroads made by neoliberalism on teacher professionalism. Apple and Buras (2006) point to the Citizen School project in Brazil and activists in Taiwan, while teaching accounts that focus in inequities of race, class, gender, and sexuality are drawn in large measure from university classrooms (Findlay and Bidwell, 2001; Macdonald and Sanchez-Casal, 2002; Stewart, 2007) rather than elementary or secondary ones. As Shutz (2004) observes, "...colleges and universities are more likely to allow instruction [on inequity] than contexts populated by younger students" (p. 21). As has been noted with Marxists seeking vainly for an interested proletariat in North America, the call for principled, courageous, and knowledgeable teachers willing to act as transforming intellectuals in elementary and secondary schools, and able to do so in their particular local sites, seems to be falling largely on deaf ears. When a school reformer of long standing such as Purpel (2009) advocates the abandonment of the idea that schools can *ever* "play a critical role in the quest for a much more just and loving community" (p. 25), the very possibility of effective teacher resistance is called into question. Nevertheless, as social justice teachers, we cannot abandon the students we teach to the systems in which we teach them. It seems evident to us that our efforts to resist, as well as the efforts of other resistant teachers wherever they may, need to be collected and told in order both to inspire further resistance, and to counter the abandonment of students and schools.

Conclusion

The call to do research on teacher resistance such as that which is suggested by Achinstein and Ogawa (2006), Sleeter (2008), the authors of this paper and others has a political agenda. Answers must be demanded to such questions as why a teacher who is mandated to teach democracy in her classroom, is not given the democratic right to discuss questions with her students (as in the Sleeter study) or why an exemplary teacher with high marks, who spoke out against OCR was released from her position by the District (as in the Achinstein and Ogawa study) or why a teacher can not choose to take the time in her highly scripted day to teach a fifth grade student to read (Geraldine's dilemma) or why a teacher-educator's evaluation is so tightly tied to the scripts of her pre-service student teachers her own tenure is threatened (Connie's concern). Such qualitative research, carrying the stories of teachers and children to the forefront of discussions on education issues for the 21st century seeks to make the political agenda currently pervading all that is done in the name of success in schools transparent.

Smith (1998) writes, "Today a remarkable edifice of invisible control has been constructed, permitting the most far-reaching measures of social domination to escape significant public attention" (p.15). Like the students Kohl (2009) observed "arms folded over their chests with their hands clutching their shoulders" (p.1) outside the school cafeteria students, teachers and even teacher-educators everywhere are being constructed as controlled and obedient participants in a neoliberal education agenda. Where such expectations of student behavior as Kohl describes are sanctioned, they become normalized as 'the ideal student' behavior. Schools who boast their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in neon lights outside their schools for all to see, offer no hint of the

abilities and talents that have been lost in the quest to satisfy the government visions of ideal schools, teachers, and students. Parents, convinced that such schools promise equal opportunities in the global quest for good paying jobs, persuade their children that they must behave, follow the rules, do what is asked without question. If marching with arms folded across their chests or hands clasped behind their backs marks them as obedient students on track for their piece of the 'American Dream' then they must comply. Dehli (2008) writes:

> In neo-liberal or advanced liberal regimes of power, individuals are both encouraged and obliged to act, to participate in social community affairs, while at the same time securing their own welfare. Thus, the freedom to participate in spaces such as local schools is also a duty, whereby individuals and communities are made responsible for 'their' sphere of action, for 'their' health and well being, as though the conditions and problems of contemporary living are contained within the individual and the local. (p.57)

The freedom to choose is so illusive it is virtually absent in schools under today's neoliberal regime. The discourse of school presents success and welfare of the individual as a unitary possibility, that of participating willingly and responsibly in the current educational mandates. Teachers cannot choose what, who or how to teach their vision of education for the common good. Children are not to question their world, except in school-sanctioned ways. Parents are duped into believing that coming into full service of their children's school brings with it the entitlement to expect a good financial future for their youth. The request to opt out at any level is viewed as pathological, thereby not being a choice at all.

Teacher resistance made public through research challenges notions of dissent as pathological, even as it makes the resistor feel pathological in her opposition. We argue for the need to bring teacher resistance away from the water-cooler (Bushnell, 2003) and into the field in ways that it can be analyzed and critiqued. It is only under these conditions that counter discourses to the current persuasive neoliberal discourses of education can be created. Janks (1997) writes:

> Ideology is at its most powerful when it is invisible, when discourses have been naturalized and become part of everyday common sense. This is what results in writers using a discourse of paternalism unconsciously because it is available. By being there it and the other available discourses constitute our identities and our constructions of the world. (p.341)

Multitudes of teachers resist in their classrooms and schools every day, but such resistance rarely sees the light of day in the broader picture of education. Isolated stories of resistance do little, if anything, to make the agendas of the powerful ideologies dictating schooling practices today visible or to challenge them in any substantive way. This isolated resistance is risky business for teachers who depend on their chosen profession as their livelihood. Losing one's job, being moved to new locations or falling under increased supervision and surveillance are powerful motivators to keep segregated resistors silent and impotent.

That said, as sociocultural educators committed to making our classrooms, our schools and our world a more equitable place for all, we see no alternative other than to research resistance, our own and others. It is through our experiences of sharing the need to resist in our own teaching locales that we have come to understand how similar the

restraints and limitations on our own teaching are. It is in our conversations that we have

spoken the unspeakable for social justice teachers. Geraldine has chosen not to teach a

student to read, while Connie prepares her students to teach in ways she, knows

perpetuates the status quo of who gets access to privilege and power. Our conversations

and review of the research and literature have opened the way for us to bring new

understandings to our need. It is through conversation and questioning we interrogate

how our teacher identities are being similarly constituted within educational discourses in

such different locales.

      We do not think that researching teacher resistance is going to bring about a

revolution or result in sweeping changes. As Shultz (2004) says:

> I am convinced that the search for single, fully adequate ways of seeing or of acting,
> even in specific contexts, is not only doomed to fail but actively misleads scholars
> and their readers about the inescapable complexity of the world. (p.21)

We do believe, however, that to understand the complexity of the world we must come to

know it better. Research is one way to achieve this. If we want to make the "remarkable

edifice of control" and "social domination" to become significant enough to get the

public's attention (Smith 1998, p.15), stories of teacher resistance must come out of

hiding; must be theorized and made public for all who are invested in the care and

education of the children of the future.

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