

Neoliberalism as a Prevailing Force on the Conditions of Teacher Education in Canada¹

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This paper examines the impact of neoliberalist macro-policy and culture on the conditions and practice of teacher education in Canada. The origins and central features of neoliberalism are unpacked to show how the centrality of the nation state of liberalism has been replaced under neoliberalism by the distorted myth of a minimalist state that in reality reshapes social institutions along market lines and uses state regulation machinery to ensure that the market model is dominant to the point of diminishing the idea of the “public good.” This has made the world very unstable, leading to civil strife, political violence and an ongoing diasporization associated with trans-national migration. Within this unstable world, higher education and teacher education in Canada take place. I then turn to examining the impact of neoliberalist policy on higher education as a foreground to examining the impact of neoliberalist policy conditions on Canadian teacher education. Three themes are extrapolated to demonstrate this impact—the conflicted challenge between institutional legitimacy and professional identity that working in a higher education context presents to Canadian teacher educators; some unresolved issues of accessibility and accountability in Canadian teacher education programs; and the ways in which a commitment to social justice with its emphasis on inclusion, diversity, and multiculturalism that Canadian teacher educators name as important are frustrated and sometimes impeded. My thesis is that neoliberalism is using audit conditions of accountability to re-frame teachers’ work as an occupational relationship. My claim is that if economic rationalist accountability ends up trumping professional judgment, then teaching will potentially lose its professional status. And, if that happens, there will likely be no place for university teacher education.

Cet article porte sur l’impact de la macro-politique et la culture néolibérales sur les conditions et la pratique de la formation des enseignants au Canada. Les origines et les caractéristiques essentielles du néolibéralisme sont exposées afin de démontrer dans quelle mesure la centralité de l’état nation du libéralisme a été remplacée sous le néolibéralisme par le mythe déformé d’un état minimaliste qui, en réalité, remanie les institutions sociales selon les principes de la liberté du marché et utilise l’appareil de la réglementation étatique pour assurer que le modèle du marché domine jusqu’au point de diminuer l’idée du « bien public ». Le résultat en est un monde très instable caractérisé par des troubles civils, de la violence politique et des déplacements constants liés à la migration transnationale. C’est dans ce contexte instable que se déroulent les études supérieures et la formation des enseignants au Canada. L’examen de l’impact de la politique néolibérale sur les études supérieures sert de toile de fond pour l’étude de l’impact des politiques néolibérales sur la formation des enseignants au Canada. Trois thèmes démontrent bien cet impact : le défi que pose, pour les formateurs d’enseignants au Canada œuvrant dans les milieux des études supérieures, le conflit entre la légitimité institutionnelle et l’identité professionnelle; des problèmes non résolus dans les programmes de formation des enseignants

et portant sur l'accessibilité et la responsabilité; et les entraves qui se dressent parfois devant un engagement envers la justice sociale visant l'inclusion, la diversité et le multiculturalisme, éléments que les formateurs d'enseignants indiquent comme étant importants. Ma thèse propose que le néolibéralisme emploie des conditions de vérification pour reformuler le travail des enseignants comme une relation professionnelle. J'affirme que si les notions économiques et rationalistes de la responsabilité finissent par l'emporter sur le jugement professionnel, l'enseignement pourrait perdre son statut professionnel. Si cela devait se produire, il est probable que la formation universitaire des enseignants n'aurait plus sa place au Canada.

In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) released its report, *What Matters Most*, on what it would take to enable every child in America to reach the new high standards of learning being enacted by states across the nation. The report essentially concluded that curriculum reforms, testing, and accountability schemes were unlikely to succeed without major investments in teaching and teacher education. This represented the beginning of a trend toward professionalization. The NCTAF report had its critics, most of whom were of a neoliberalist market persuasion. They argued that attempting to propose professional self-regulation in teaching based on the model of medicine was wrongheaded because it changed preparation programs and licensing procedures into impediments that prevented strong candidates from entering teaching. These critics favored de-regulation over professionalization. Thus, the battle lines were drawn in teacher education between those supporting professionalization and those favoring de-regulation.

Many discourses are at work here (Grimmett, Dagenais, D'Amico, Jacquet, & Ilieva, 2008). A discourse of crisis and quality assurance or accountability, with an emphasis on professional standards, juxtaposed with a discourse of quality improvement or capacity building, with an emphasis on teachers' professional lives and their development as pedagogical beings. The latter appealed to the common good, invoking "public interest" theory, that held that minimum standards are a function of the technical expectations of the profession and that regulation seeks the protection and benefit of the public at large (i.e., regulation protects clients from unqualified practitioners). The former claimed that the only theory possible was "capture" theory which holds that regulatory bodies come to be captured (usually, but not always, for economic and political purposes) by the professions they regulate, leading to attempts to increase economic benefits by restricting supply. Hence, regulation does not protect the public at large but only the interests of the groups it regulates (Hantke-Domas, 2003). The current neoliberalist policy context has used economic rationalism to lionize "capture" theorizing such that, to all intents and purposes, public interest discourse is now seriously undermined, paving the way for the political re-framing of professional regulation according to occupational standards (Grimmett, 2008).

Around the Anglophone world, education is becoming managed as one would a private business driven by market forces, encouraged by policies of selective and specialist schools, school choice, and league tables. Governments apply pressure and support² mirroring the twin discourses of quality assurance and quality improvement. These two discourses are not equal and have become sites of contestation. In the UK, the unrelenting pressure on schools and teachers for improvement was specifically and unambiguously identified as a core value of Education policy in the Blair government's first Education White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*. The General Teaching Council of England (GTCE) was disbanded and its work taken up by a

new body, *The Teaching Agency*, a direct government agency. Similarly in British Columbia in 2011, where the College of Teachers, a pioneering venture in professional self-regulation in Canada since 1988, was disbanded and its powers of regulation transferred to the Teacher Regulation Branch of the BC provincial government. Whether control of professional standards can be wrested from government agencies remains to be seen.

The dominance of neoliberalism in the macro-policy context, with its confident belief in the power of market forces, has had far greater influence than the emphasis on quality improvement, giving rise to an audit culture readily identifiable in education. In regard of students, it is believed that outputs could be measured by standardized testing. In regard of teachers, it is believed that professional standards serve to measure teacher contributions to educational outcomes. Standards are thus not aspirational statements of what it is to be an outstanding teacher; rather, they are the tools of an audit culture that conceives of teachers as living in an unambiguous world accountable according to simple input/output variables of the teaching process, in which “professionalism” constructs them as compliant agents of government policy. Hence, while quality improvement is seen as providing teachers with knowledge and experiences to understand their work more effectively (what teacher educators refer to as “professionalism”), quality assurance uses professional standards as measures for teacher credentialing and accountability (thereby re-defining “professionalism” from learning and development to implementing government policy). The neoliberalist policy context has thus paved the way for teacher education to become ensconced in an era in which governments purposefully act to shape and re-shape the professions around the needs of their economic productivity agenda that in itself originated in capitalist business interests. Neoliberalism has spawned an audit culture that has created standards that essentially become a key instrument within its regimes of accountability. The irony here is that one of the stated aims of government policy—the quality improvement of teachers—is seriously at risk under these conditions.

The Macro-Policy Context in the Early 21st Century

The macro-political setting of the early 21st century is neoliberalism, which has led to the decline of the nation state. Previously, under liberalism, universities and professionals were central to the development of the nation state.

The Origins of Neoliberalism

The neoliberal framework had its beginnings during the 1960s and gained increasing influence from 1980 on (Olssen, 2000). But it has become hegemonic since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Dale, 2007; Readings, 1996) that led to the discrediting of the alternate competing modern socio-political system epitomized by a Marxist economic framework. As neoliberalism became the dominant discourse, there was no effective alternative to counter its apparent pervasive influence. Davies and Bansel (2007) indicated that neoliberalism has been successful because it “both competes with other discourses and also cannibalizes them in such a way that neoliberalism itself appears more desirable, or more innocent than it is” (p. 258). In other words, we have come to believe that the ways of neoliberalism are common sense and inevitable. Hence, neoliberal thought has been able to extend its hegemonic socio-economic reach into the public sphere to redefine roles and responsibilities in education, healthcare, and social welfare in terms of their economic utility

(Davies & Bansel, 2007; Fitzsimmons, 2000).

Under neoliberalism, public goods and services have been re-defined as commodities that could more effectively be delivered through private sector competition. This structure is managed by the state through third-party regulatory bodies that operate at arm's length from the state to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of scarce public resources and remove the potential for inefficiency caused by political interference or lack of accountability. It should be no surprise, then, that during a period of neoliberalist de-regulation we have seen the emergence of professional regulatory bodies in North America. But what hegemonic neoliberalism represents more than anything else is the extension of the globalization of capital and commodities into the realm of high skill human labor. Under globalization, it has come to represent a theory dedicated to making trade between nations easier. It aims for the freer movement of goods, resources and enterprises always in a bid to find cheaper resources in order to maximize profits and efficiency. To accomplish this, neoliberalism works to remove any controls (such as, tariffs, regulation, and restrictions on capital flow and investment) that are deemed barriers to free trade. The goal is to allow the free market to be the arbiter of balance between various pressures of economic demand.

Now, in the early part of the 21st century, the macro-policy context sets out to liberalize the movement of human labor—individuals who are highly skilled and educated—not just jobs, capital, and goods. Reich's (1991) model that emphasized the global movement of capital and commodities but the keeping of national borders for people no longer appears to hold. Brown and Tannock (2009) characterize this hegemonic period of neoliberalism as a “global war for talent [that] undermines conventional ways of judging fairness in educational opportunity, by attacking the ideology of meritocratic nationalism, while offering in its place the (equally) problematic ideology of global meritocracy” (p. 385). In other words, as priorities shift from national to global markets, companies have rejected any restricted practices placed on them by nation states. Free trade has eventually led to freedom of labor mobility to such an extent that nationality or local jurisdiction no longer plays a determinative role in the recruitment of talent.

The Central Features of Neoliberalism

As members of a US national network for immigrant and refugee rights, Martinez and Garcia (1996) attended the July 27-August 3 Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism in La Realidad, Chiapas, Mexico. Out of that meeting came a characterization of the main points of neoliberalism which Martinez and Garcia put together for Corporate Watch:

THE RULE OF THE MARKET. Liberating "free" enterprise or private enterprise from any bonds imposed by the government (the state) no matter how much social damage this causes. Greater openness to international trade and investment, as in NAFTA. Reduce wages by de-unionizing workers and eliminating workers' rights that had been won over many years of struggle. No more price controls. All in all, total freedom of movement for capital, goods and services. To convince us this is good for us, they say "an unregulated market is the best way to increase economic growth, which will ultimately benefit everyone." It's like Reagan's "supply-side" and "trickle-down" economics—but somehow the wealth didn't trickle down very much.

CUTTING PUBLIC EXPENDITURE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES like education and health care. REDUCING THE SAFETY-NET FOR THE POOR and even maintenance of roads, bridges, water supply -- again in the name of reducing government's role. Of course, they don't oppose government subsidies and tax benefits for business.

DEREGULATION. Reduce government regulation of everything that could diminish profits, including protecting the environment and safety on the job.

PRIVATIZATION. Sell state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private investors. This includes banks, key industries, railroads, toll highways, electricity, schools, hospitals and even fresh water. Although usually done in the name of greater efficiency, which is often needed, privatization has mainly had the effect of concentrating wealth even more in a few hands and making the public pay even more for its needs.

ELIMINATING THE CONCEPT OF "THE PUBLIC GOOD" or "COMMUNITY" and replacing it with "individual responsibility." Pressuring the poorest people in a society to find solutions to their lack of health care, education and social security all by themselves—then blaming them, if they fail, as "lazy." (Upper-case emphasis in original; CorpWatch, 1996, Trade Justice issue, "What is neoliberalism? A brief definition for activists," p. 1; <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=376>)

Although the anti-corporate stance of Corporate Watch is very evident, the analysis does not seem out of line when considering Harvey's (2007) more recent and putatively objective examination of the history of neoliberalism. His definition of neoliberalism does not differ markedly:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, *if markets do not exist* (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then *they must be created, by state action if necessary*. Beyond these tasks, the state should not venture. (Emphasis added; Harvey, 2007, p. 2)

Here, Harvey is characterizing how neoliberalism has become a political project of enclosure by the elite classes to appropriate property and resources previously located in the domain of the public sector in order to make them subject to conditions of the market. As such, neoliberalism is an ideology that serves to capture and reconfigure "cognitive capital" as a means of transforming human beings into acolytes of the forces of production in a society heavily dependent on and organized by information (Peters & Bulut, 2011). I shall come back later to this idea of enclosure of "cognitive capital" in order to show how deeply yet covertly intrusive the impact of neoliberalism has been on teacher education in Canada.

In the above citation, I have added emphasis to draw attention to the fact that neoliberalism, in re-framing the state's responsibility as creating and preserving the requisite institutional framework to maintain the proper functioning of markets, has a particular proclivity toward expanding free markets to education by eliminating the concept of the "public good." It is this tendency that has brought about the emergence of what Plant (2009) has characterized as "the Neoliberal State" where the centrality of the nation state of liberalism has been replaced under neoliberalism by the distorted myth of a minimalist state that in reality has overseen the mushrooming of the apparatus of regulation through which it seeks to exercise a continuing control over its divested functions.

The Neoliberal State

In reality, neoliberalism has created a market state, not a minimalist state. Reducing the state has proved politically difficult, if not impossible, so neoliberals have turned instead to using the state to reshape social institutions along market lines and using state regulation machinery to ensure that the market model is dominant. Hence, an increase in state power has always been the inner logic of neoliberalism, because, in order to inject markets into every corner of social life, governments have to be intrusive. Thus, the state now controls health, education and the arts more than they ever did even during the modernist post-War era of economic reconstruction and collectivism. Even universities, as once-autonomous institutions, have become entangled in an apparatus of government targets and incentives. And the consequence of reshaping society along market lines has not been one of state diminution but of increased and increasingly insidious state presence.

This positioning of public interest discourse as a sub-section of welfare economics has undermined both its power as a theory and increased the potency of capture theory as a viable explanation of professional regulation. Thus, despite its use in the fields of law and politics to support regulation on philosophical and political grounds—where the concept of public interest, because it is perceived as having to do with the enactment of political and moral values, provides the judiciary with a base upon which it can decide disputes within society—public interest discourse with its concern for the common good appears in education to have lost out to capture theory. An example of this would be where the teachers' unions in Ontario and British Columbia appeared to have gained control over the professional regulation of teaching in their respective provinces during the first decade of this century.

The Influence of Conservative Think Tanks

Many of the scholars supporting the elevation of capture theory at the expense of public interest discourse were connected with either the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (e.g., Frech, Haas-Wilson, etc.) or the Cato Institute (e.g., McCluskey & DeAngelis, Krol, Svorny, etc.). Both of these think tanks are based in Washington, DC. The *Cato Institute* is a libertarian think tank. Its mission is to increase the understanding of public policies based on the principles of limited government, free markets, individual liberty, and peace. The Institute states it will use the most effective means to originate, advocate, promote, and disseminate applicable policy proposals that create free, open, and civil societies in the United States and throughout the world.

The *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research* (AEI) is a conservative think tank founded in 1943. Its stated mission is to defend the principles and improve the institutions of American freedom and democratic capitalism—limited government, private enterprise, individual liberty and responsibility, vigilant and effective defense and foreign policies, political accountability, and open debate. It is an independent, non-profit organization supported primarily by corporate donations and contributions from foundations and individuals. Many AEI scholars (e.g., Gingrich, Hess, Wolfowitz) are considered to have been some of the leading architects of the public policy during the 2000-2008 George W. Bush Presidency. Both these institutes have been and still are committed to the advocacy of neoliberalist premises of less government, free markets, individual liberty, and capitalism as the basis of democracy. Their concerted advocacy of these premises has resulted in a diminution of anything public. Public

interest discourse was therefore derided as a form of social engineering that militated against the values of individual freedom and choice, private enterprise, and accountability in open democracy.

The Impact of Neoliberalism on the World

I now see a world with an erratic and unstable political landscape. The events of September 11, 2001 signaled the beginning of that instability. Political violence was not directed against specific and identifiable political personalities (such as JFK's assassination in 1963) but against institutions symbolizing the economic and military power behind alleged wrongdoings. The Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris (January 7, 2015) registered a modification of that instability. Political violence was directed at a highly visible specimen of mass media, signaling the widespread public sense of power moving away from political players toward centers viewed as responsible for public mind-setting and opinion-making. The people engaged in such activities were now the culprits to be punished for causing the attackers' bitterness, rancor, and urge for vengeance. If the September 11, 2001 attack "de-personalized" violence, then the barbarity of the January 7, 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack represents a foreboding harbinger of the "de-institutionalization," individualization, and privatization of the human condition, away from social responsibility and a concern for the public good. That is, in our media-dominated postmodern society, those people (e.g., celebrities, etc.) engaged in constructing and disseminating information have moved to center stage where the drama of human co-existence is played out. At the same time, there is an ongoing diasporization of the world happening, which results in the distant stranger now becoming our next-door neighbor. This in turn has led to societal problems (e.g., witness the way we deal with refugees). All around the world, we are witnessing a rising tide of anti-democratic sentiment, accompanied by a massive secession of ordinary plebians to camps located on the opposite extreme of the political spectrum (e.g. Donald Trump, Rodrigo Duterte, the newly elected Phillipine President whose campaign symbol is a fist—intended for lawbreakers, but seemingly also aimed at the established oligarchy), which promises to replace discredited high-mindedness with a yet-to-be-tried high-handed autocracy that, in the case of the USA, shouts loudly via twitter. Teacher education takes place within this changing world. In Canada, it is also located within University-based Higher Education.

The Impact of Neoliberalism on Higher Education

Fisher, Rubenson, Jones, & Shanahan (2009) examined the connections between neoliberalism, post-secondary provincial education (PSE) policy and the impact of those policies. Their thesis was that the adoption of a neoliberalist ideology over the previous two decades has resulted in some dramatic changes in PSE policies that, in turn, have brought about a fundamental transformation of Higher Education in Canada. Using a comparative, multiple, nested case study conducted at the provincial (Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia) and national level, they concluded that five themes dominated the PSE policy-making process: Accessibility; Accountability; Marketization; Labor Force Development; and Research and Development. Fisher et. al. (2009) argue that pressure for access has led to the emergence of new institutional types, raising questions about differentiation, mandate and identity, and new lines of stratification. A trend toward vocational orientation in the university sector coincided with "academic drift"—seeking university legitimacy solely through academic work (Grimmett,

Fleming, & Trotter, 2009)—in the previous community college, now new university, sector, which led in turn to convergences in programming and institutional functions across the system, bringing about competition for resources, students, and external partners. Unprecedented demand has made education a viable industry, sustaining both a proliferation of private providers and a range of new entrepreneurial activities within public institutions. The level and purposes of public funding have swung dramatically between capital grants and tuition subsidies sometimes applied across the board and at others targeted to specific social groups or economic sectors, with the end result of policymakers at times treating Higher Education as a mechanism for social inclusion, at others as an instrument for labor force development, and at others as a market sector in its own right.

In discussing an Ontario university, Fanelli and Meades (2011) are less delicate in their characterization of neoliberalist forces in the Canadian university sector. They claim that, in order to deal with unprecedented government budget shortfalls that they maintain are caused by the lead agents of the capitalist class, the public sector is now being strangled with budget shortfalls being blamed on an allegedly bloated and inefficient public sphere. Consequently, the public sector has now become a prime space for privatization, whereby market mechanisms are increasingly locked in, thereby extending commodification and marketization. They use the example of “Open Ontario Plan” and the “Public Sector Restraint Act” to demonstrate how the working class is being forced to pay for an economic downturn thoroughly centred in the private sector.

Taylor (2017) suggests that, in the last three decades, university administration has progressed toward a corporate-style management structure, where a collegial approach to institutional governance has given way to a top-down managerialism focused more on revenues and policy direction than on faculty, students, and programs. His thesis is that the use of corporate-style management practices in higher education minimizes both non-economic educational values and the traditional role of the university as a locus of knowledge creation and dissemination within society. Hence, he claims that the dominance of neoliberalism and market fundamentalism has inexorably changed the modern university as conceived by Humboldt into the amoral, asocial institution that today’s university has become. Viczko (2013) supports this view, arguing that a deeper entangling of universities in the ideational market-based competition embedded in neoliberal reforms has created tensions in how autonomy can be conceived in Canadian higher education. Guo and Guo (2017) illustrate the difficulty surrounding autonomy in their characterization of the ways in which Canadian universities have embraced “internationalization” but allowed a neoliberal approach to treat it as a marketing strategy, leading to limited internationalization of the curriculum, and gaps between internationalization policy and the experience of international students. Building on Hall’s (1960) message that society must not be blinded by prosperity, Murphy (2016) goes even further to suggest that the rhetoric of prosperity co-exists with the discourse of impoverishment in Ontario higher education. This paradoxical discourse, she argues, is tied to neoliberal reforms and the commodification of education by capital, where the “double speak” of university administrations involves a discourse of human development related to the qualitative value of education on the one hand, and a discourse of capitalist accumulation related to “investment” in capital and exchange value on the other. This “double speak” helps us to understand why and how there appears at times to be financial incentives for some units of higher education and yet also financial cuts for others.

Olssen (2016) regards the ascendancy of neoliberalism in higher education as displacing

models of working toward the public good as viable forms of governance. Rather, they have been replaced with individualized incentives and performance targets, heralding new and more stringent conceptions of accountability, leading to close monitoring by policymakers across the entire higher education sector. In seeking to understand better the deployment of neoliberalist strategies of accountability in order to assess the consequences of such changes for the university sector as a whole, Olssen concludes that “impact assessment” is a new and far more sinister form of neoliberalist control that can divert academic attention away from pure research to more applied and commercially viable projects. In so doing, neoliberalist impact assessment of research leads to the erosion of academic professionalism that a group of highly trained individuals have for centuries displayed in exercising control over their own institutions and conditions of work. In this sense, then, neoliberalism can be said to de-professionalize university academics; first, through the external imposition on universities of models of assessment by the state, and secondly, through a parallel process that operates internal to universities. Ultimately, the lack of control over work conditions and institutional policy robs universities of their political autonomy.

Within this environment, academics have become complicit. Wilkins (2012) originally analyzed how market discourses with its “pedagogy of the consumer” shaped a plurality of education sites and practices. This was largely a mapping of the global impact of neoliberalism on welfare states and people, specifically the full range of policy enactments and disciplinary practices shaping curriculum and pedagogy. Levin and Aliyeva (2015) went further to examine the extent to which neoliberalism was embedded in faculty members’ behaviours. Although there had been claims that neoliberalism had not only commandeered the agenda and actions of universities but also had become identified with the work of academic professionals, Levin and Aliyeva found little empirical evidence to show that neoliberalism had infiltrated the actual work of academics. They did, however, note that, while faculty members were not necessarily apologists for or proselytizers of neoliberalism, neoliberal principles were nevertheless tied to faculty behaviours in subtle and covert ways. These subtle and covert ways were characterized by Wilkins (2013) as “the spectre of neoliberalism haunting aspects of pedagogy, teaching, and curriculum” to suggest that neoliberalism is now regarded as a canonical narrative through which existing education relations, practices, and discourses are structured and mediated in a way that reproduces dominant epistemes of knowledge and power. Hence, in 2017 Warren claims that technologies of research performance management specifically work to produce academics and academic managers as particular kinds of neoliberal subject. For faculty members, the struggle to get ahead in their career entails making themselves visible in their field of study but this always occurs under the gaze of academic normativity—the norms of academic life that include both locally negotiated practices and the performative demands of auditing and metrics that characterize the neoliberal university. Warren (2017) concludes that the dual process of being worked upon and working upon our selves can produce personally harmful effects, resulting in a process of systemic violence reinforced by the personal and collective complicity of academics.

The Impact of Neoliberalism on Teacher Education

In Canada, higher education constitutes the context within which teacher education takes its place and has its being. Hence, what applies to academics in universities also applies in magnified form to teacher educators. In a mapping of pre-service teacher preparation in the

USA, Australia, Britain, and Canada, Boylan & Woolsey (2015) suggested that teacher education requires an account of the complex ways that beginning teachers negotiate their relationships to social justice. Building on Cochran-Smith (2009), they argue that a determinate view of teacher identity successfully describes relationships to relatively stable social justice positions that, in turn, necessitate the adoption of pedagogies of discomfort and inquiry in teacher education. While there are considerable differences in the structure and duration of teacher education programs across Canada resulting from the diverse curriculum, assessment, governance, and accountability policies and cultural differences between and among the provinces (Van Nuland, 2011), it is also true that many of the teacher education programs across Canada subscribe to Cochran-Smith's (2009) thesis of inquiry framed around social justice (Howe, 2014). Such a framing is not surprising since Canada is often characterized as a multicultural nation encountering recent demographic shifts, inter-regional migration, a growing ethnic diversity, and the emergence in its classrooms of a paradigm of inclusion that is complemented by an expanded understanding of individual and cultural learner differences. This social justice orientation has thus spawned the development by the deans of education of three Accords—the Accord on Initial Teacher Education, the Accord on Educational Research and the Accord on Indigenous Education—that was their attempt to articulate goals, values and principles that serve to guide a national discussion on teacher education. On the surface, then, Canada seems to be continuing its strong, historical commitment to university teacher education programs that meet the learning needs of teachers and students. But the forces of neoliberalism are more subtle and covert in Canada than they are in the USA, Britain, and Australia. Accordingly, I shall analyze how neoliberalism practises the “enclosure of cognitive capital” to produce a hidden but trenchant impact on the commitment of Canadian teacher education programs to a social justice inquiry orientation. Three themes are extrapolated to demonstrate this impact—the conflicted challenge between institutional legitimacy and professional identity that working in a higher education context presents to Canadian teacher educators; some unresolved issues of accessibility and accountability in Canadian teacher education programs; and the ways in which a commitment to social justice with its emphasis on inclusion, diversity, and multiculturalism that Canadian teacher educators name as important are frustrated and sometimes impeded.

Research/Institutional Legitimacy and Professional Identity of Teacher Educators

Conducting teacher education in university settings is not straightforward. Neoliberalist economic rationalist pressure makes university-based teacher education programs susceptible to academic drift as a result of mimetic isomorphism. Mimetic isomorphism creates tensions for university teacher educators who, in seeking to adopt the values of research-intensive academics, sometimes forget their ontological roots in practice. Their challenge is to establish contiguity both with the orientation and traditions of research at the university and with the specific values and practices of the field of teaching. In doing the former, they establish their legitimacy within the university; in doing the latter, they establish their identity in the field. Pedersen and Dobbin (2006) amplify this notion in the following way: ‘[O]rganizations [university teacher educators] create legitimacy by adopting recognizable forms and create identity by touting their uniqueness’ (p. 898). This seemingly conflicted double process; that is, ‘the formation of identity through uniqueness and the construction of legitimation through uniformity’ (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006, p. 901), is a dual process constituting a recognized integral to the constitution of an organization or network that is both authentic and legitimate.

But how do university teacher educators establish their legitimacy in a research-intensive environment that enables them to tout their uniqueness as educators of teachers?

Rusch and Wilbur (2007) describe organizational isomorphism as comprising mimetic, coercive, and normative forces. Mimetic forces are manifest in the ‘forms and norms of recognized organizations in their field’ (p. 303) that are adopted by organizations wanting to be deemed legitimate. Correspondingly, coercive forces are internally and externally applied stresses on an organization that arise from the threat of being deemed illegitimate. Mimetic and coercive forces, together, contribute to normative behaviors through the re-fashioning of cultural norms that govern professional expectations and practice. Morphew and Huisman (2002) argue that the pressures of isomorphism tend to make institutions similar over time, because the less prestigious ones will mimic the prestigious ones. Thus, if teacher educators view their status in the university as less prestigious than that enjoyed by other social science researchers, the pressure to engage in mimetic isomorphism around research is intense. Sometimes, teacher educators take up research under duress (coercive isomorphism) because it is the only way to save their job. When either of these two options occurs, teacher educators take on research as a recognized form and rewarded endeavor to strengthen their university legitimacy. But, in the process, they forget to tout their distinctiveness that comes from their ontological roots in the field of practice. The dual process of legitimacy creation and identity formation requires teacher educators to re-invent any undertaking of research into an action that recognizes their distinctiveness in the field of practice.

Achieving this, however, has proved difficult for many Canadian teacher educators. The change in the policy context brought about by neoliberalism appears to have increased the susceptibility of teacher educators to external pressure points—such as globalization, refugee populations, immigration, demographic changes, economic disparities, and environmental changes—at a time of an increased focus on standardized accountability. Clandinin, Downey, and Huber (2009) frame this as “living in the tensions of shifting landscapes” (p. 142). They cite an example of Jean Clandinin herself suddenly realizing with sadness that—with the changing circumstances in what is valued at Canadian universities, such as increased numbers of graduate students, including a rapidly rising number of international graduate students, and the strenuous push for knowledge transfer, research funding, publications, and the production of intellectual property that is marketable—she has, over the years, acted in a manner tantamount to abandoning the difficult and necessarily troubling work of pre-service teacher preparation. She is not the only teacher educator to fall prey to the fatal attraction of university legitimacy over professional identity: *mea culpa*, I have also succumbed to such enticement!

Teacher Education Accessibility and Accountability

Locating Canadian teacher education in universities also brings with it issues of accessibility and accountability. Several years ago, Beynon and Toohey (1995) found that Chinese and Punjabi-Sikh immigrant groups in Canada, who were particularly represented in the population of British Columbia, were underrepresented in teacher education programs. They concluded that the career choices of these marginalized immigrant groups were influenced most strongly by parental expectations and were also affected by cultural sex role attitudes, English language proficiency, and perceptions of ethnic bias in schools. The last 20 years or so have seen teacher education programs across Canada work assiduously to open up access to students of diversity and colour. In some instances, these attempts were thwarted by ethnic attitudes that favoured a

career in business over teaching but they also foundered on the rock of grade point average (GPA) and its contiguous debate about standards for admission that tended to emphasize appropriate prior volunteer experience with children in addition to GPA. While little tangible progress has been made in terms of changing the predominantly white, middle-class make-up of teacher education student representation, the action undertaken in this regard did provoke a good deal of healthy debate about the selection of teacher education candidates. Twenty years later, the accessibility concern focuses on immigrant groups, particularly women, coming to Canada who had achieved teacher certification in their native countries. Walsh and Wang (2011) describe the difficulties that a group of internationally educated female teachers have in obtaining teacher certification in the Maritimes. They characterize their experiences in the context of neoliberalism as being positioned in the labor force, while considering themselves members of the teaching profession. As such, Walsh and Wang argue that the material effects of differences in gender, race, ethnicity and regional location have become hurdles for their teaching aspirations. Schmidt (2015), in studying a similar group in Manitoba, reinforces this finding. She characterizes the group as demonstrating tremendous endurance, fortitude, and resilience in the process of navigating their new professional landscapes but argues that neoliberalism and the myth of meritocracy obscure the pervasive systemic barriers characterizing their professional experience. Hence, despite a stated need for greater diversification of the teaching force in intercultural settings in Canada, the conditions of neoliberalism appear to have effectively limited any attempt to broaden the possibilities of access to teacher education for visible minority groups.

In terms of accountability, the neoliberalist press for constant auditing procedures keeps teacher educators so busy and off-kilter by reorganizing thought and activity “toward the fulfillment of the schemas of objectives set by the accountability regime” (De Lissovoy, 2013, p. 430) that they often abjure ways in which they are professionally bound to be responsible. The context of schools has changed considerably in the 21st century. Diverse linguistic, social, cultural, family, religious and institutional myths shape the consciousness of today’s children, youth, and families. There are children and families coming to Canada from all over the world, together with an increasing number of children of Indigenous heritage in both urban and reservation schools. Consequently, both beginning and experienced teachers are struggling to understand the lived experience of children and families so apparently different from their own. Clandinin et.al. (2009) report some revealing data about teachers leaving the profession in Alberta. Typically, 11 percent of teachers leave the profession each year, something that, in itself, is no cause for disquiet. What does concern them, however, is the number of beginning teachers that leave, 20 percent in years one, two, and three, with a huge 46 percent leaving after four years. They question why such a large number of early career teachers leave in their fourth year, suggesting that their teaching lives were likely so contradictory to their imagined teaching lives that leaving was the most acceptable response. A conversation with a local principal forced them to confront the fact that mainstream teacher education programs were so disconnected from schools as to be mostly out of touch because their focus on being a good teacher did not help pre-service teachers to attend to the changing conditions of the 21st century classroom. Poth’s (2012) study confirmed this programmatic discrepancy in that she found that, notwithstanding the fact that teacher education programs play a crucial role in preparing teacher candidates for their future assessment roles and responsibilities, many beginning teachers felt unprepared to assess their students’ classroom performances. Moreover, those who study these phenomena in research-intensive universities do not teach in pre-service teacher education (because of

legitimation issues) but leave the teaching of pre-service courses and programs to sessional instructors and graduate students. Yet another irony in that the neoliberalist push for accountability through audit procedures has, in fact, resulted in a lack of accountability in teacher educators vis-à-vis their professional responsibility to beginning teachers.

Inclusion, Diversity, and Multiculturalism in Teaching and Teacher Education

As pointed out above, there is an acknowledged, even avowed, strong commitment to inclusion, diversity, and multiculturalism in teaching and teacher education in Canada. But to what extent is this commitment sometimes ameliorated, if not undermined, by the neoliberalist policy context? Inclusion appears to be a principle on which there is more philosophical agreement than practical pedagogy. Soleas (2015) studied the inclusive practices that 44 teachers had acquired from their teacher education program and concluded that teacher education programs are not entirely effective at producing teachers who are confident in their abilities to be inclusive practitioners in the classroom. McCrimmon (2015) went further with his critique. Even though the principle of inclusion is widely adopted in Canadian education systems, he found that few Canadian universities require students in teacher preparation programs to complete coursework on the topic of inclusive education and that the few courses that are offered across Canada on this topic do not adequately prepare beginning teachers to work in inclusive classrooms with students with diverse exceptional learning needs. Tied in with teacher education accessibility and the influence of neoliberalist policy conditions, this lack of attention to issues of inclusion appears to continue the marginalization and alienation of underrepresented populations in the Canadian teaching force.

Diversity and multiculturalism appear to have taken on a mythological desideratum in Canadian culture. It is a narrative that drives us as a nation and separates us from the USA. But the conditions of neoliberalism can often disrupt its flow. If diversity and multiculturalism are sources of our strengths, then addressing inequities is one of our greatest challenges. For example, Gulson and Webb (2016), in investigating an Africentric Alternative School in Toronto, argue that policy, race, and racializations cannot be understood outside of, or immune to, neoliberalism. They contend that neoliberalist policy is a form of racial bio-politics, and that race is now produced through neoliberal markets that download diverse forms of racial bio-politics onto populations that are now “free” to produce and maintain their own raciologies. Likewise with feminism; McKenna (2015) maintains that the “freedom to choose,” a prominent feature of the second-wave women’s movement in Canada (1965-1985), has been co-opted by neoliberalism to disrupt and frustrate the creation of a National Childcare Strategy. In terms of feminist pedagogy, Smele, Siew-Sarju, Chou, Breton, and Bernhardt (2017) find that intersectional pedagogical practices in Canada are being “undone” in the context of a neoliberal diversity regime by the apparent embracing of vulnerability, discomfort, and the possibility of conflict in classrooms that do not simply accommodate, celebrate, or include difference. Multiculturalism pedagogy in teacher education also has its challenges. Mujawamariya and Mahrouse (2004) examined Canadian teacher candidates’ perspectives on the multicultural component of the pre-service teacher education program they attended and found specific programmatic and structural shortcomings in the multicultural curricula used in Canadian teacher education programs. The result was that the majority of respondents did not feel adequately prepared for the challenge of teaching in ethno-racially diverse classrooms. This sentiment in itself is not surprising. What it points to, however, is that the rise of consciousness

about the need to prepare beginning teachers appropriately for Canada's multicultural classrooms came at a time when the policy context of teaching and teacher education was becoming stringently circumscribed by neoliberalist ideological thinking. As a consequence, the accommodation of the needs of multicultural and diverse classrooms into teacher education programs, similar to the overarching commitment to social justice, becomes the naming of "an empty space that all sides know is precluded in advance, and yet in the name of which educators and academics can avoid concretely confronting the forces that, in fact, structure the social violence they aim to resist" (De Lissovoy, 2013, p. 432). If we are to pursue the purposes of social justice in teacher education in an era of constraining neoliberalist policy conditions framed around a regime of accountability, then we must consciously resist the imposition of forms of being and doing that emanate from this ideological system, particularly the procrustean wiles suggestive of teacher education as a set of procedural tricks for the classroom.

Conclusion

What happens in teacher education, when neoliberalist economic rationalism collides with professionalization in the policy-making context of Canada. The neoliberalist policy context lionizes economic rationality where individuality is discovered not in community but only in relation to market fulfillment—the state creates individuals who are enterprising and competitive entrepreneurs. Consequently, the sovereignty of the nation state has, across the globe, been compromised by supranational entities such as the European Union (EU), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), etc. These entities exist to provide both socio-economic-political stability and harmonization for global capital. The nation state's redefinition has led to a trend toward standardization and instrumental rationality that is fostering a trend toward de-professionalization in Canadian higher education that, in turn, is impacting Canadian teacher education. This impact manifests itself in the conflicts between institutional legitimacy and professional identity that Canadian teacher educators experience through working in a higher education context; it opens up some unresolved issues of accessibility and accountability in Canadian teacher education programs; and ultimately produces an "empty space" around a fairly widespread commitment to social justice with its emphasis on inclusion, diversity, and multiculturalism, a commitment that Canadian teacher educators continue to name as important but rarely seem capable of enacting. Hence, my thesis: that neoliberalist forces of marketization in Canada are producing audit conditions of accountability that are cultivating a trend toward economic rationalist procedures which rob teacher educators of their intellectual subjectivity, vision, and conviction about their purposes in educating teachers. If this continues, it will eventually undermine the professional status of teaching and ultimately lead to the demise of university teacher education.

What, then, happens to the status and practice of teaching when economic rationalist accountability standards collide with forces of professionalization? My claim is that, if the former always ends up trumping the latter, then a consequence will be that teaching loses its hold on professional status. That is, the qualities that distinguish professions from occupations—education, late entry, autonomy in decision-making, responsibility to clients, self-governance, a concern for the common good, etc.—would all but disappear. It is imperative, therefore, that Canadian teacher educators begin to resist the dominant social and ideological conditions that surround their work; they need to engage in a pedagogy that refuses to be

defined by a notion of teaching as instrumentalist pedagogy and by a version of accountability that distorts human subjectivity. Because, if we do not do this, then there will likely be no place in the future for university teacher education in Canada, which in turn would lead to the demise of Faculties of Education as we know them.

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Notes

1 Presentation made at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association for Teacher Education held at the University of Calgary, May 30, 2016. Some of the ideas used in this paper were developed in the work I did on teacher certification in 2010-2012 with Jon Young of the University of Manitoba.

2 For example, Michael Barber of the London Institute of Education in the UK who became the Chief Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education on School Standards during the first term of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and during Blair's second term, from 2001 to 2005, served as the Chief Adviser on

Delivery, reporting directly to Prime Minister himself. As head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU), he was responsible for working with government agencies to ensure successful implementation of the Prime Minister's priority programs, including those in health, education, transport, policing, the criminal justice system, and asylum/immigration. He wrote a book about his experience in the PMDU, *Instruction to Deliver: Fighting to Reform Britain's Public Services* (Methuen 2008), which was described by the economic-leaning Financial Times as "one of the best books about British Government for many years." Peter Wilby (2011, June 14), writing in The Guardian, described him <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/jun/14/michael-barber-education-guru>> as "New Labour's mad professor and master of the flow chart, the man responsible for the literacy and numeracy strategies" of the first term and, later, when he worked for Blair as head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, for "top-down targets across the public sector." Barber moved in 2005 to the world-renowned management consultancy McKinsey, and its unofficial motto could be his own: "Everything can be measured, and what is measured can be managed". The columnist Simon Jenkins called him "a control freak's control freak."

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