Neoliberal Elements in Canadian Teacher Education: Challenges and Possibilities

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This article offers a critical reflection of the changes experienced in teacher education across Canada in light of the neoliberal impact on educational spaces. It also seeks to disrupt the neoliberal narrative and problematize a rationality that has permeated teacher education programs. The article maintains that the neoliberal agenda is incompatible with critical educational practices. As a mode of critical resistance to educational instrumentalism, the paper offers recommendations as part of its critique on the deleterious impact of neoliberalism.

Cet article offre une réflexion critique des changements découlant de l'impact néolibéral sur les milieux éducatifs qui touchent la formation des enseignants partout au Canada. L'article veut également perturber la théorie néolibérale et problématiser une rationalité qui s'est infiltrée dans les programmes de formation des enseignants. L'article affirme que le programme néolibéral est incompatible avec des pratiques éducatives cruciales. Comme élément de sa critique de l'impact néfaste du néolibéralisme, l'article propose des recommandations en guise de moyens de résistance critique à l'instrumentalisme en éducation.

The following paper is based on a critical reflection stemming from the observations from the first author's teaching experiences in teacher education programs in three different Canadian provinces since 1982. It is also based on some salient points that have arisen from a national study led by the first author on the impact of neoliberal policies on education among practicing educators in Canada who claim to have engaged in social justice work.[1] The current paper identifies some of the major implications of neoliberalism on teacher education while also seeking to disrupt the neoliberal narrative and problematize a rationality that has permeated teacher education programs. It also argues that the neoliberal agenda is incompatible with critical educational practices. As a mode of critical resistance to educational instrumentalism, the recommendations of this paper work as a mitigating force against the deleterious impact of neoliberalism.

The principal aim of neoliberalism is to permeate social, cultural, and political spaces through the implementation of the free market economic system (Foucault, 2008). According to Baez (2007), "neoliberalism re-defines the social as an economic domain, governed by the 'rational choices' of entrepreneurial individuals who see everything they do in terms of maximizing their 'human capital'" (p. 7). This is particularly problematic because, as Brown (2005) maintained, in the neoliberal discourse, education as a social good has been redefined as a means for "extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action" (p. 40). One of the central issues addressed and problematized in relation to the prevalent discourse

in teacher education is how the neoliberal focus on individualism is rendered as synonymous with freedom, autonomy, and agency. In response to the problem of individualism, the authors have highlighted some of the hegemonic impacts of neoliberal orthodoxy in teacher education.

When the first author first started teaching at McGill University in 1982, neoliberalism in education was still in its initial stages. However, by the mid-1990s and with nearly 10 years of teaching experience in Nova Scotia, the impact of neoliberalism became all the more apparent. This became particularly evident with mandated revisions and the closure of education programs in the eastern Canadian province of Nova Scotia.[2] The impact of neoliberal policies in educational spaces reached its zenith in the province of Ontario as the first author commenced teaching at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), in 1999. The neoliberal-leaning policies became a force to be reckoned with toward the end of the Conservative Government led by Mike Harris. In many regards, the changes brought about by the eight-year rule of the Conservatives in Ontario shifted the direction of educational policy and practice toward a more neoliberal agenda. What came to be known as the "Common Sense Revolution" brought about a momentous step toward economic and political reform in Ontario (Keil, 2002). The emphasis on "common sense" in this context creates the illusion that there is no alternative, which can also "deface any viable vision of a good society" (Giroux, 2014, p. 186). Amsler (2015) emphasized the need to unlearn notions such as "hegemonic common sense" (p. 144). Gramsci's (1971) view that "Every social stratum has its own 'common sense' and its own 'good sense,' which are basically the most widespread conceptions of life and of man" (p. 326) lay the groundwork for understanding the notion of hegemony in educational domains. After the Conservatives left office in Ontario, the neoliberal policies enacted during the Liberal regime under Dalton McGuinty did not undergo dramatic changes despite some modifications in policy directions at the time (Pinto, 2015). The neoliberal message infused in educational policies was comprised of efficiency, accountability, and standardization.

Since the Second World War, the Canadian public policy landscape has been dominated by the two major paradigms of Liberalist-Keynesian economic theory and neoliberalism (Bradford, 2000). The neoliberal focus on individualism and economic efficiency became prevalent as a new era was ushered in that witnessed deeply interventionist agendas around social issues like immigration, policing, and workfare reform (Peck & Tickell, 2002). The growing fascination with the neoliberal paradigm which focused on marketization and performativity (Lyotard, 1984) found its way into the Canadian public education scene. In a comparative analysis of inter-provincial development of the professionalization of teacher education in Canada, Perlaza and Tardif (2016) maintained that the pursuit of neoliberal policies has impacted the governance of teacher education. Throughout the Conservative era, the Ontario education system underwent drastic changes in the five years leading to the new millennium. According to Basu (2004), the majority of the changes that transformed Ontario's public education were based on a report entitled *For the Love of Learning* prepared by the Royal Commission on Learning. The report recommended new directions in the four core areas of community alliances, early childhood education, information technology, and teacher professionalism and development. According to Parker (2017), such policies merely rebranded educational concepts to become more in line with the neoliberal narrative. As such, there was a push for accountability using quantifiable data with the aim of relaying greater power to authorities including school principals and the Ministry of Education, as well as a more predominant role for standardized testing in order to hold teachers accountable for student achievement.

In the aftermath of the report, different techniques were employed to implement the

neoliberal agenda including amalgamating school boards across the province of Ontario into a mega-board in the name of shrinking administrative costs. This, Peck and Tickell (2002) asserted, became an effective way to ensure "local institutions are increasingly being given responsibility without power" (p. 40). The strained relation between teachers and the provincial government became one of the side effects of these measures which led to strikes over the *Education Quality Improvement Act*, also known as Bill 160. The Bill successfully disenfranchised locally elected trustees, slashed educational funds, and proposed cutting preparation time for teachers, as well as increasing student instructional time among other things (Wilson, 2001). The core message that was disseminated centered on the policy of fiscal restraint and the demand to meet the needs of the knowledge-based economy while also diminishing the power of teachers. For instance, student instructional time was increased by lessening teacher preparation time and professional advancement days (Basu, 2004). At the same time, the Ministry mandated an Ontario Teacher Qualifying test to all teacher education graduates as a way to secure standardization and "excellence."[3]

At the time, the right-leaning government of Ontario advocated an educational model that prioritized contribution to the economy and in effect led to the "blurring of the boundary between the public and the private sectors" (Fisher, 2014, p. 86). The move set the stage for the reconstructing of vocational education in neoliberal terms. The desire to privatize and vocationalize educational spheres using the structures assumed by the neoliberal models of development highlighted the gaps of an educational model that gives precedence to market values instead of citizenship education. Throughout the eight years the Conservatives were in power in Ontario, the discourse of social justice that was among the most progressive in Canada before the Conservative term was replaced with the equality of opportunity discourse (Joshee, 2007). Even though a discourse of "teacher development" permeated teacher education literature, the majority of graduating teachers in Canada believed that these programs lacked the ability and resources to prepare them to cope with diversity and cultural differences (Carson, 2005).

In addition, the policies adopted during the reign of the Conservatives advocated the erasure of any reference to anti-racist education (Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery, 2004). One of the central problems with these Conservative discourses lies in the fact that they did not challenge existing structures and leaned toward individual fixes as opposed to systemic change (Agocs, 2004). The social justice discourse was further eroded by the culture of excessive individualism and standardization or a one-size-fits-all mentality. The neoliberal discourse promoted improvement of outcomes, increased accountability, and elevated educational standards through standardized testing. The aggressive changes that were required to improve accountability took place under strict surveillance and an "audit culture" that was mostly driven by economic imperatives (Basu, 2004). In this context, neoliberalism became the engine driving the economic agenda in education where issues such as equity of outcomes and equality of conditions became interchangeable. In so doing, there was a failure to recognize systemic inequalities and the need for the state to intervene on behalf of disenfranchised individuals (Joshee, 2007). Consequently, "the underlying logic of this discourse does not challenge existing structures or programs and assumes all members of the society want the same things" (Joshee in Hopson, Camp Yeakey, & Musa Boakari, 2008, p. 38).

Teacher Education and the Neoliberal Influence

Teacher education in Ontario continues to find itself under assault in the context of neoliberal reform under the current government led by Premier Kathleen Wynne. The intensification of neoliberal policies has also translated into the need to acknowledge the very political nature of teacher education. Cochran-Smith (2005) argued that the examination of teacher education programs through social and ideological lenses lends itself to "identifying the larger social structures and purposes within which it is embedded, as well as unpacking the cultural ideas, ideals, values, and beliefs to which it is attached .... Thus teaching and teacher education are inherently and unavoidably political" (p. 3). In line with these views, Sleeter (2008) emphasized that

> While internal criticisms can serve to strengthen teacher education, external assaults that have their origins in global economic and political restructuring aim not only to deprofessionalize teaching by devaluing professional preparation of teachers, but also to undermine equity and democracy by restructuring education around corporate needs. (p. 1947)

According to Sleeter (2008), teacher education for equity and democracy rests on several pillars including "preparation for everyday realities and complexities of schools and classrooms; content knowledge and professional theoretical knowledge that universities can provide; and dialog with communities in which schools are situated" (p. 1948).

As the neoliberal impact on teacher education in the Canadian context is examined, a number of recurring themes have been identified in relation to teacher education. These themes include: a) the misinterpretation of the relationship between theory and practice in the teaching profession, b) the bias against philosophy of education and foundations disciplines as well as a bias in favour of psychology, and c) a simplistic and misguided interpretation of praxis. Alternative pedagogies and practices that have been proposed as reprieves to the neoliberal agenda generally fail to address issues of equity and social justice in teacher education. To counter this trend, we propose a praxis built on the notion of "utopian pedagogy" and an "ethics of subversion."

The Theory-Practice Divide

The school effectiveness (SE) and school improvement (SI) movements have advanced the neoliberal agenda, albeit implicitly or inadvertently (Down & Smyth, 2012; Menashy, 2011; Wrigley, 2003). In conjunction with the premises and assumptions of the SE and SI movements, a naïve and dangerous view about the relationship between theory and practice has been reproduced. This view is based on a one-to-one, linear, and colonialist notion of the relationship between theory and practice. The SE and SI movements have worked or operated with a conceptualization of effectiveness and improvement as if these concepts exist in and of themselves. The movements have attempted to gather facts and information in an effort to identify schools that are effective and have improved. However, the general ethos of these movements is based on the assumption that effectiveness and improvement can be identified in and of themselves. Hence, they are constructed and presented as if they are neutral and the issue of effectiveness and improvement can be resolved simply by dealing with facts. In this regard, the SE and SI movements have assisted, even if unknowingly, in promoting the

neutrality mythology intrinsic to neoliberalism and its liberal positivist roots (Hyslop-Margison & Naseem, 2010). Wrigley (2013) criticized SE and SI as paradigms and explores implications of their hegemony as well as the fact that they are grounded in neoliberal ideology and authoritarian school policies. One manifestation of this can be seen in school management where, according to Gunter (2001), teachers are empowered as part of a strongly supervised macro-system where they are trained to "want exactly what the government decides they should want" (p. 144).

This perspective exists in the context of the culture of effectiveness combined with neoliberalism that has given rise to the belief that we can identify "best practices" that are neutral and that can be applied to all situations irrespective of contextual differences. Such a mentality reproduces a one-to-one relation between theory and practice, instituting the dominance of theory over practice and of policy makers over practitioners. Moreover, it reproduces the essentially absolutist mentality of one-size-fits-all which asserts that carrying out certain activities in various contexts will ensure effective schools that can always improve. Issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality are not central to the decisions and considerations of what is considered effective and efficient. What matters ultimately are standardized test scores, surveillance, and continuous assessment. It is such views of education that help engineer entire populations and are reconstructed to manufacture the subjective conditions for capitalism (Foucault, 2008). By constantly observing and assessing learners, education promotes the reproduction of the status quo more than the development of critical and engaged citizens. Hence, teachers are expected to be responsible for the welfare of learners as long as there is alignment with the increasingly narrow and economic terms dictated by neoliberal policies. Teachers are also expected to establish a sense of control and adhere to standardized educational practices. In the meantime, teachers struggle to find a balance while being bombarded with incompatible pedagogical demands and the obligation to take into consideration accountability mandates. Consequently, there is a need to direct teachers' dispositions toward critical pedagogical praxis and reawaken their "dedication to building character, community, humanitarianism, and democracy in young people; to help them think and act above and beyond the seductions and demands of the knowledge economy" (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 60).

An important issue that needs to be addressed in light of the theory-practice divide is that despite the fact that faculties of education cling to slogans such as "student-centered learning" and "social justice education," the inclination of these learning institutions is toward traditional conceptions of theory. It is, essentially, misconceptions regarding the relationship between theory and practice that contribute to a pervasive form of reductionism that aligns well with neoliberal values. In this sense, the general precepts developed through theoretical and empirical inquiry are deemed as valid and reliable and can be universally applied to a myriad of different contexts in hopes of attaining specific results. In the context of education, the traditional conception of theory seeks to develop and promote ready-made formulas for teaching and learning that can be applied by practitioners without regard for the nuances of each particular classroom. What ensues is a one-directional, top-down hierarchy between theory and practice where ultimately, "Theory influences practice, but the realities of classroom practice have no effect on theory" (Portelli & Konecny, 2013a, p. 99).

In an examination of the mindsets and biases of preservice teachers, Murdock and Hamel (2016) pointed to the disconnect between theory and practice. In dealing with issues of diversity, preservice teachers exhibited resistance to teaching early grades of elementary school students

about bias and discrimination, raising questions about that "the appropriateness of including issues of bias and discrimination in early childhood curriculum, who should teach issues of bias and discrimination, and the ways in which diverse perspectives should be taught" (Murdock & Hamel, 2016, p.100). In addressing the dialectical interplay between theory and practice, Hart (2016) proposed that teacher education programs should focus on the application of deconstruction and critical theory of texts which will encourage educators and learners to challenge the impoverished views informing various social norms and has the potential to advance an anti-oppressive pedagogy. In a study conducted by Darling-Hammond, Austin, Orcutt, and Rosso (2001), the participants raised issue with the possibility of moving beyond the dualism of theory and practice asking, "How do we bridge the contested territory between theory and practice, knowing very well that both perspectives are needed but neither can suffice?" (p. 15).

The factors highlighted thus far here have a tremendous impact on teacher education in the sense that the instrumentalization of teacher education has increased. As Apple (2001) put it: "Market-based approaches to teacher education are growing internationally. There are concomitant moves to create uniformity and a system of more centralized authority over what counts as important teacher skills and knowledge (p. 182).

The Case of Bias against Foundations Disciplines

What has emerged in the last 20 years in educational scenes including teacher education programs is the neoliberal focus on self-interest, competition, and a fixation on output, even if certain outputs are irrelevant or counter to the democratic project. The language embodied by neoliberalism imposes a construct where expressions like "race to the top" become very popular and yet oppressive in nature in the sense that students become completely alienated from the very purpose of education, teaching, and genuine inquiry (Yakubowski, 2015). Ultimately, the neoliberal culture has led to the de-professionalization of teachers in teacher education programs. Neoliberalism has increased and strengthened the bias against the foundations areas of education: philosophy, sociology, history, and anthropology among others. A perspective of education informed by neoliberal policies and practices, rooted in narrow positivist perspectives, belittles the contribution of the foundations disciplines in teacher education. This anti-foundations culture has been coupled with the anti-foundationalist perspective. Ironically, the positivist and anti-foundationalist perspectives, separately but in tandem, have had a negative effect on the teachings of the foundations areas in teacher education programs. In turn, such changes led to a) the removal of the foundations required courses in teacher education, and b) the introduction of equity and social justice courses, which came to replace the foundations courses.

The dwindling presence of philosophy in the foundations courses of a growing number of teacher education programs has translated into a stronger presence of psychological and academic aspects of teaching and learning. The focus in these scenarios shifts from encouraging candidate teachers to engage with education in different theoretical or philosophical manners to focusing primarily on curriculum content and methods courses. Portelli and Konecny (2013a) referred to three reasons that have contributed to the decline of the place of philosophy in teacher education: a) the misconstruction and misconception of what theory is and what relation it has to actual classroom practice, b) the general impact of neoliberalism on Canadian education, and c) the way philosophy has been conceived of and practiced by Faculties of

Education and experienced by teacher candidates.

The neoliberal drive to impose the logic of the market has impelled educators to seek practical teaching methods and demand "best practices that work." This is while Biesta (2010) argued that the notion of evidence-based best practices needs to be revisited and account for

> the limits of knowledge, the nature of social interaction, the ways in which things can work, the processes of power that are involved in this and, most importantly, the values and normative orientations that constitute social practices such as education. (p. 503)

It is thus inevitable for the philosophical/foundational ethos to be denied in such decontextualized and neutral contexts even though it is the same philosophical considerations that are required to recognize the "best practices" sought by practitioners and educators. Acknowledging that the "practical" is ultimately determined by the "philosophical" is imperative in countering the decline of philosophy in the foundational courses of many teacher-education programs. According to Portelli and Konecny (2013a),

> Teacher candidates who initially enter into philosophical inquiry through foundations courses tend to hold the view that philosophy is too abstract or irrelevant to the practice of teaching. The lived experiences of teachers lead many to criticize philosophy for being too complicated or for not providing useful answers to the everyday dilemmas they often face in the classroom. (p. 100)

The erroneous belief that philosophy is irrelevant to practice as a result of neoliberal reductionism has opened up spaces where disciplines such as psychology have gained ground in teacher education programs because of the ability to "get results" by crafting detailed and concrete frameworks for teaching, learning, cognition, and human behavior. The message that tends to get lost is that a distinction must be made between "philosophy as a subject to be studied versus philosophy as an activity to be enacted and practiced in critical dialogue with oneself and others" in order to implement the critical-democratic philosophical stance (Portelli & Konecny, 2013a, p. 102). Philosophy "as a subject to be studied" has been interpreted as students studying what philosophers have said without engaging in critical, open, and philosophical inquiry about the issues at hand. Philosophy as an activity requires that the students engage in the actual doing of philosophy, discussing, considering alternative perspectives, and asking open questions. Although "studying philosophy as a subject" does not necessarily preclude the actual doing of philosophy, traditionally this has not been the case.

Another important point to consider is related to the impact of the critical pedagogy movement in education. McLaren (2000) expressed concern that critical pedagogy

> no longer enjoys its [earlier] status as a herald for democracy, as a clarion call for revolutionary praxis .... The conceptual net known as critical pedagogy has been cast so wide and at times so cavalierly that it has come to be associated with anything dragged up out of the troubled and infested waters of educational practice, from classroom furniture organized in a 'dialogue friendly' circle to 'feel-good' curricula designed to increase students' self-image. (p. 96-97)

Unfortunately, and this is very much as a result of neoliberal tendencies, the notions of equity and social justice became interpreted and enacted in most teacher education programs in a rather superficial manner without the necessary historical, philosophical, and sociological underpinnings. As a result, the psychologizing element in teacher education has become

increasingly more prominent. Such a reality eventually contributed to the reproduction and solidification of the erroneous view that education and teachers can and ought to be politically neutral. This also contributed to the perception that social justice education is politically motivated and unethical because its endgame is to indoctrinate students (Kosnik, Beck, & Goodwin, 2016; Sleeter, 2008). The assumption here is that liberal/neoliberal values are impartial while any other perspective is ideologically motivated—the very expression of the scientism fallacy (Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2005).

A Simplistic and Misguided Interpretation of Praxis

To enact a critical democratic stance in teacher education and move away from neoliberalism, there have been calls for the adoption of the notion of "praxis." However, the notion of praxis prevalent and popularized in teacher education has been misunderstood (Down & Smyth, 2012; Rudd & Goodson, 2017). Very often "praxis" has been understood solely to mean the interplay between theory and practice. This understanding, however, stands without inquiring and delving into the political dynamics at play between theory and practice and who each represent. The interplay between theory and practice can take different forms: dominance of theory over practice (i.e. the traditional conception of theory dictating to practice irrespective of context); dominance of practice over theory (where theory becomes almost irrelevant and what matters is "what works" in whatever way it is interpreted); or a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice (where each is seen to be mutually dependent on the other notwithstanding the tensions that exist between what we believe and what we do). It is precisely the latter perspective that remains true to the spirit of "praxis" where the role of theory is not to dictate but to create a critical awareness and consciousness of the political relationships (some oppressive and some empowering) that inevitably exist in practice. Such a notion of praxis is consistent with Freire's understanding of this concept. Yet the market paradigm ushered in by neoliberalism in teacher education programs has translated into a disconnect between theory and practice where transformation and critical thinking are unpolished and fragmented.

In his most celebrated work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970/2000) advances the notion of praxis as a process involving transformative action and reflection. Consequently, praxis is regarded as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 36). For Freire, praxis is about renegotiating the political dynamics and power relations that exist in different scenarios. Thus, "true praxis must also involve altering the political condition—a condition marked by an uneven distribution of power, privilege, and authority—between theory and practice" (Portelli & Konecny, 2013a, p. 102). Praxis can also problematize the complexities related to traditional conception that theory has precedence and authority over practice. Praxis necessitates that the tensions between theory and practice, and the challenges that arise from oppressive political relations, are identified, acknowledged, and taken into account rather than ignored in order not to rock the boat of the soft liberal comfort in teacher education.

Alternatives to Neoliberalism: A Cautionary Note

The dangers of neoliberalism for teacher education have been pointed out by several scholars from various ideological backgrounds. The most prominent critiques have arisen from two groups: liberals, and critical pedagogues. The position taken by Dianne Ravitch (2010) and Webb, Briscoe, and Mussman (2009) are classic examples of the liberal position. In one of her

articles, Ravtich (2010) reflected on the current challenges that teacher education faces and claimed that "the reasons we have public education is to level the playing field between 'haves' and 'have-nots.' Behind public education lies a fundamental principle that we usually refer to as equality of opportunity" (p. 270). Nowhere does Ravitch question the notion of equality of opportunity as she does not take equity and the varying histories and contexts into account. What Ravitch fails to realize is that what is needed is much more than "equality of opportunity" to "level the playing field." Ravitch herself denoted: "accountability has become an end in itself. … [It] destroys not only the joy of learning but learning itself" (2010, p. 272). In this respect, "the basic reproductionist argument was that schools were not exceptional institutions promoting equality of opportunity; instead they reinforced the inequalities of social structure and cultural order in a given country" (Collins, 2009, p. 34). The equality of opportunity rooted in market values that places the onus on individuals to maximize their success disregards socioeconomic, ethnic, and linguistic divides. As such, the goal should be to make the system more equitable rather than equal; according to Savage (2013), equity as fair and impartial access can vary depending on context instead of being an absolute concept like equality. As a result of the neoliberal focus on narrow forms of accountability, Ravitch argued, we are risking students not becoming educated people. The crux of the matter, however, is that none of her recommendations refer to or even indirectly indicate that to be educated one needs to be aware and conscious of substantive issues and ways of dealing with equity and social justice problems and realities.

In a similar vein, Webb, Briscoe, and Mussman (2009) bemoaned the impact of neoliberalism including the eroding of democratic education. The questions that arise as a result are: "How are teacher education programs preparing educators to teach in light of the growing disparities in democratic education? How are teacher education programs preparing students to teach within powerful economic frameworks regulating teachers' work?" (p. 12). Webb et al.'s (2009) foremost suggestion was "to develop collaborative skills as they develop an understanding of their own position with the neoliberal society and their future roles as educators with such a society" (p. 12). In our view, this is a very weak suggestion given that there is no mention of how to deal with oppressive conditions of abuse of power in relation to race, class, gender, and sexuality among other inequities. Ultimately, it can be claimed that the politics of praxis is either misinterpreted or not properly understood by such liberal stances.

Recommendations: Utopian Pedagogy and Ethics of Subversion

In search of alternatives to the neoliberal paradigm, we propose "utopian pedagogy" and "ethics of subversion" as possible ways forward. This is part of an effort to make substantive changes in the mainstream understanding of teacher education that is still, for the most part, based on neoliberal and liberal conceptions of the world and education.[4] In opposition to dominant views of instrumental and test-driven modes of education, this paper argues for a Freirean-inspired (2000) utopian vision as a practice of freedom, rooted in a broader project that seeks to illuminate and guide learners toward a humanized future. According to Webb (2012), Freire viewed utopian pedagogy as "a process of becoming driven by critical curiosity and radical hope toward a vision of a new way of being" (p. 605). Freire defined utopian pedagogy as a process of denunciation and annunciation that allows for a discourse of both critique and possibility in "a utopian vision of man [sic] and the world" (1972, p. 40). Coté, Day, and de Peuter (2007) proposed the practice of *utopian pedagogy* as an "ethos of experimentation that is oriented

toward carving spaces for resistance and reconstruction" (p. 317) and offered non-hegemonic modes of intellectual and political activity:

> It is these practices which seek to propagate an awareness of the existence and possibilities of the radical outside that we see as oriented to a utopian pedagogy, a pedagogy that is itself, of course, contested and without guarantees. Creating alternative spaces of education and co-operation inevitably involves dealing with the same structured behaviours that are in evidence everywhere else. (p. 332)

Utopian pedagogy is a form of resistance that seeks to confront a world of inequality, deficiency, and injustice and works to unearth utopian "traces" that can lead to an open-ended process of what might be and what is not yet (Greene, 2003). The struggles against neoliberal hegemony have the potential to awaken the utopian imagination.

In the spirit of resistance, Coté et al. (2007) viewed utopia "not as a place we might reach but as an ongoing process of becoming" (p. 328). A Canadian example of utopian pedagogy provided by Coté et al. (2007) involves a Vancouver-based project entitled Critical U. The project comprises a community-based school with no tuition-fees that operates independently of the provincial education system. The school worked to build a dialogic learning space by challenging the neoliberal restriction of educational domains and offering "multi-week courses on topics from globalization to community gardening to media literacy" (Coté et al., 2007, p. 331). In collaboration with a number of East Vancouver non-profit organizations, members of Simon Fraser University's Institute for Humanities developed the unique community education initiative, "Critical U." The twelve-week pilot program in community education "brought various sociological, political-economic and cultural perspectives to bear upon such topics as democracy, capitalism, globalization, gentrification, mass media and consumerism" (Coté, Day, & de Peuter, 2009, p. 29). Since previous post-secondary education was not a requirement for the program, everyone was free to participate in the community-based dialogic learning space.

Working within the Freirean tradition of critical pedagogical praxis, Giroux (2007) also adopts a utopian perspective to explore the relationship between education and critical citizenship and calls for the construction of "realist utopias." A utopian pedagogy embodies a counter-hegemonic discourse that in Deleuzian terms finds a way through the cracks to resist the models imposed by domineering power structures (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), allows for reflection, dialogue, and growth, and develops a language of critique and possibility. The neoliberal hegemony prevalent in the Canadian educational landscape is oppressive insofar as it negates and stifles any effort to enact democratic practices within classrooms while reproducing systemic inequities, dehumanization, and instrumentalization of teachers (Portelli & Konecny, 2013b). In response to the inequalities brought on by the neoliberal restructuring of educational spaces, Portelli and Konecny (2013b) made a case for an educational ethic of subversion where students and teachers alike are able to be free, responsible, and complete human beings who are political and intellectual and engage in genuine critical inquiry in a participatory and democratic manner. Accordingly,

> School systems organized according to the results-based logic of neoliberalism instrumentalize teachers, dehumanize students, and make the classroom into a space of performance and efficiency, thereby denying more robust educational experiences as well as the communal and cultural aspects of schooling—let alone permitting any genuine engagement with social problems, political issues, or cultural critique. (Portelli & Konecny, 2013b, p. 92)

In tracing the historical roots of the term subversion, Portelli and Konecny (2013b) point out that etymologically the word subversion is rooted in the Latin words *sub* (under) and *vertere* (to turn around/over). Thus, the word "*subversion means 'to turn or change from the bottom or foundation' [and it] is not necessarily vicious.*" (Portelli & Konecny, 2013b, p. 94, italics in original). In this sense, subversion allows for change to occur from below, to turn around or redirect from underneath. Although the word subversion tends to carry negative and even aggressive connotations, exploring its roots creates a space where,

> through subversive acts, something harmful or negative is undone. When it comes to relations of social power, oppressive government institutions or policies, or systemic structures that disenfranchise particular groups of people, effective subversion is an undertaking that can have especially positive results. (Portelli & Konecny, 2013b, p. 94)

In fact, one of the central distinctions of subversion that separates it from other forms of resistance is that it takes place underground through subtle actions without explicitly naming its intentions within the public sphere. In its most fundamental form, subversion is a subtle mechanism of resisting exploitive power structures.

Through acts of subversion, individuals resist unjust and inequitable practices as a way to rupture socio-culturally and politically normalized "commonsense" assumptions. Through engagement in subtle goal-oriented actions rooted in a survival discourse, subversion ensures the least amount of harm to oneself and others which can help alter the daily realities and practices of one's life toward a more justice-oriented society. Portelli and Konecny (2013b) made the case for an educational ethic of subversion by engaging in genuine critical inquiry that consciously challenges neoliberal practices in educational settings. In view of that, "Until all those involved in educational policy realize the democratic fact of possibilities, rather than standardization, we have no option but to continue to rely on subversion as a means of creating equity and social justice in education" (Portelli & Konecny, 2013b, p. 95). In dealing with issues related to power relations in the social, political, and educational realms, effective subversion can lead to substantially positive outcomes. Thus, through participation in subversive acts in the face of abusive forms of power, one is ethically standing up for justice and equity rather than for the economic benefit of the select few who are already in positions of power. Subversion as a form of subtle, calculated risk is a mechanism that allows for the emergence of new possibilities that can disrupt the hegemonic discourse in educational spheres, particularly in teacher education programs. Subversion as a subtle mechanism of challenging abusive forms of power allows individuals to resist inequitable and unjust practices. As such, subversive acts have the potential to disrupt "commonsense assumptions" from below and redirect from underneath without having to resort to aggressive or destructive actions. In essence, effective subversion affords disenfranchised individuals and communities the opportunity to have their voices heard, particularly in relation to oppressive power structures or policies.

The question of whether teacher education can be rescued from neoliberal policies impacting professional standards does not have a simple answer. What we tried to do in this paper is to offer alternatives that seek to disrupt the notion that professionalism has become synonymous with teachers as compliant agents of neoliberal policies. It is, therefore, essential for educators and policymakers to provide input as to how to shape and reshape the teaching profession. In advancing a pedagogy of resistance and possibility, this article has expanded on the utopian

aspect of critical and democratic education and emphasized the importance of practicing subversion as a way of pushing back against neoliberalism. Instead of driving future teachers toward becoming individuals who are "endlessly adaptable" to different levels of change, insecurity, and instability (Goddard, 2010), in this article we call for a move away from the fatalist discourse of neoliberalism and offer spaces where multi-storied landscapes of becoming are possible.

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Notes

1 Educational Equity and Inclusion in Neoliberal Times (2009-2014)—supported by SSHRC.
2 For more on this, please see Portelli, J. P. (1994). A philosophical perspective on the Shapiro Report. Philosophical Inquiry in Education, 8(1), 29-36.
3 Stakeholders' Perspectives on induction for New Teachers: Critical Analysis of Teacher Testing and Mentorship (2005-2009)—supported by SSHRC
4 In the liberal conception of the world, democratic communities are the result of voluntary and mutually benefiting agreements between individuals who exist prior to any given social system. Liberal democratic theory places an ultimate value on social arrangements that are formed and justified by the benefits of group membership. For a more detailed analysis, see: Portelli, J. P., & Konecny, C. P. (2013). Neoliberalism, subversion, and democracy in education. Encounters on Education, 14, 87-97.

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