University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Teacher identity work in neoliberal schooling spaces

Jenelle Reeves
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, jreeves2@unl.edu

Teacher identity work in neoliberal schooling spaces

Jenelle Reeves

Department of Teaching, Learning, & Teacher Education, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 118 Henzlik Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0355, USA; *E-mail address:* jreeves2@unl.edu

Summary

Negotiation of teaching identities in neoliberal schooling spaces is examined. Dissonance between a teacher's values (e.g. care for students) and neoliberalism's tenets is documented. A model of teacher identity work is applied to data, illuminating teacher identity work processes. Opening identity work spaces of potentiality is recommended.

1. Introduction

Language teachers do much of their identity work, constructing and (re)negotiating their teaching identities, in the social, political, and ethical contexts of schools, which are ideologically heteroglossic sites where multiple, differentially-powered voices conflict and converge

around what makes for 'good' teaching and teachers. Lately, neoliberal ideologies have pervaded discussions of schools, curriculum, and teaching in North America, Europe, and beyond (Ball, 2003; Buchanan, 2015; Clarke, 2009, 2013; Fisher-Ari, Kavanagh, & Martin, 2017; McKnight, 2016). We see this in a prevalent discourse of marketization in education in which teachers are configured as "highly individualized, responsibilized subjects" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 248) who must prove their worth primarily (or even solely) through their students' standardized test scores. As agentive actors situated within schooling climates where job success is increasingly defined as production of high test scores, how are teachers negotiating their teaching identities in these spaces? One teacher's identity work within a schooling context marked by neoliberalism, as reported here, provides insights into the interplay between neoliberal contexts and teachers' identities.

2. Neoliberal schooling contexts

Neoliberalism is "the idea that everything should be run as a business–that market metaphors, metrics, and practices should permeate all fields of human life" (Tarnoff, 2016), including–or especially–schooling. It is, in short, viewing education through a market lens.

> The manifestations of neoliberalism in education include increasing central control of what is taught in the form of national or state curricula; the detailed specification of teachers' work through professional teacher competencies and standards, coupled with the introduction of performance management systems and other audit mechanisms to monitor and control teachers and teaching; and the introduction of centralized high-stakes testing regimes to continually evaluate the output of teaching by rendering it visible, calculable and comparable. (Clarke, 2013, p. 230, p. 230)

Schooling policy in the United States and other nations around the world in the early decades of the 2000's has been run through with neoliberal ideology, including two seemingly contradictory impulses: market-based free choice, in which individual consumers (parents, students) are empowered to choose their schools, and a master

narrative on curriculum and teaching, in which knowledge and how it is to be delivered and measured is prescribed. Neoliberalism, paradoxically, advocates for more free-market power and individual choice (e.g. school choice) and, at the same time, for increased centralized oversight and quality control (e.g. standardized testing regimes). Curriculum and teaching receive centralized oversight, and schools and teachers are expected to subject themselves to the master narratives of good and effective teaching, measured primarily by standardized exam scores, in order to provide consumers (the public) with information upon which to base their schooling choices (Clarke, 2012; Clarke & Phelan, 2015; Parkison, 2013; Stoten, 2013).

Student achievement on standardized tests has become the primary (or even only) measure of good teaching in the public sphere. As Buchanan (2015) notes, "The last decade in US education policy and practice has emphasized increased accountability for teachers and schools; the mechanism for that accountability has been student performance on standardized test scores" (p. 702). Few would argue that good teachers are not concerned with student performance, but it is the narrowing of the definition of good teaching to only student test scores that causes concern. Additionally, this narrowing is at the heart of neoliberal discourses on teaching. Student learning and, by extension, teachers' teaching within a neoliberal framing of education, can purportedly be measured through criterion-referenced exams, and comparison of testing results can tell us which schools and teachers are succeeding, and which are not.

Continual inspection and appraisal of teacher performativity (Ball, 2003; Clarke, 2009; 2012) within neoliberal settings has been observed to serve as a de-stabilizing, de-professionalizing force for teacher identities as teachers are "re-worked as producers/providers, educational entrepreneurs" (Ball, 2003, p. 218). In neoliberal systems of schooling, teachers' professional judgment, principled beliefs, and philosophies of teaching become secondary or even irrelevant to the primacy of performance and compliance with the accountability regime.

> [Standardized curricula] also designed to be 'teacher-proof' in a misguided belief that this will ensure that learning is uniform for all students and that central curriculum writers know better than teachers what it is that students should

learn. Yet, in so doing, they remove teachers' professional autonomy and undermine their exercise of judgement through this act of prescription. Teaching is thus reduced to a technical rather than an ethical, critical or creative act. (Clarke & Phelan, 2015, p. 267, p. 267)

If, as Ball (2003) notes, the pervasiveness of an ideology of neoliberalism changes not just what teachers do, but 'who they are' (p. 215), then more investigation of teacher identity within such contexts is certainly called for.

2.1. Curriculum standardization

Curriculum standardization often accompanies a neoliberal approach to education (Buchanan, 2015; Fisher-Ari et al., 2017; Meshulam & Apple, 2014; Stoten, 2013; Weaven & Clark, 2015). When curricula are standardized, when all classrooms use the same texts and instructional approaches, opportunity and achievement are flattened out, resulting, ostensibly, in all students being given an equal chance. Performance differences within a standardized curriculum, therefore, lie within the individual teacher or learner and not the curriculum or educational system. Any variations in teaching contexts or salient differences in students (e.g. lack of proficiency in the language of the standardized curricula) are rendered invisible and seemingly unimportant. Policy makers and the general public can compare schools' achievement via test scores, which are commonly published in local papers across the U.S., and they may assume the results indicate poor teaching or poor learning at low-performing schools. Standardization, therefore, may appear to allow for a fair sorting of learners by their abilities and teachers by the quality of their teaching.

Standardization, however, may offer little more than a veneer of equality. When student individuality and variability are not taken into account in curricular choices, instruction is ill-fitted to some students leading to student under-performance, as observed in a recent study by Fisher-Ari, Kavanagh, and Martin's (2017). The researchers found that student poor performance stoked teachers' deficit views of students — placing the blame for poor performance not with the ill-fit of the curriculum but within the students, whom they came to view as unmotivated, lazy, or simply unintelligent. Rather than ameliorating

inequality, then, curriculum standardization may exacerbate it.

Teachers' experiences of the standardization of curriculum are similarly troubling. Standardization has been observed to deprofessionalize teachers by restricting teachers' use of their own discernment before and during instruction (Buchanan, 2015; Stoten, 2013). Within a neoliberal view, teaching is framed as a technicist job in which the teacher's role is transmitter rather than thinking, knowledgeable actor and decision-maker (Sawyer, 2004). Yet, little research has explored how schooling contexts infused with a neoliberal ideology actually shape and constrain teacher identity negotiation.

3. Teacher identity

Teacher identity is "dynamic, multifaceted, negotiated and coconstructed," (Edwards & Burns, 2016, p. 735) and it is negotiated at the nexus of "the social and the individual, of discourse and practice, of reification and participation, of similarity and difference, of agency and structure, of fixity and transgression, of the singular and the multiple, and of the synoptic and the dynamic" (Clarke, 2009, p. 189). Complex in nature, teacher identity has proven a rich site for exploring teachers' teaching lives as it involves the complex, shifting interplay between differentially powered forces, both internal and external to the individual teacher. Neoliberal educational settings, exerting powerful external forces on curriculum and assessment, may bring the dualities of external pressures and teachers' values and beliefs into conflict. If, as Ball (2003) asserted, neoliberalism changes not only what teachers do but who they are, how does teacher identity weather, adapt to, or resist neoliberal ideologies of their school settings?

3.1. A model of teacher identity work

Clarke (2009), exploring how teachers might develop and employ their agency in light of the 'paradoxical aspects' (p. 185) of identity that often constrain agency, proposed a model of identity formation utilizing Foucault's axes of ethical self-formation. Noting the duality of the "pervasiveness of power relations constituting us as subjects, along with the corollary pervasive existence of freedom" (p. 190), Clarke turned to Foucault's later work focused on the formation and

care of the self, and found in Foucault's work a similar focus on individuals' navigation between freedoms and constraints. Foucault explored ethical self-formation as the practice of freedom (including the freedom to resistance constraints on one's self) that also requires consideration of the other (Infinito, 2003). The elements of Foucauldian self-formation, as Clarke points out, map onto much recent work on teacher identity and offers a model for how the dualities of freedoms and constraints, the internal and external, and the self and the other might be accounted for during identity construction and negotiation, which Clarke calls "identity work" (p.191). Borrowing from Foucault's four axes of ethical self-formation, Clarke's identity work model consists of the following four elements: 1) the substance of teacher identity; 2) the authority sources of teacher identity; 3) the self-practices of teacher identity; and 4) the *telos* (ultimate objective) of teacher identity (Fig. 1). Each is discussed in turn below.
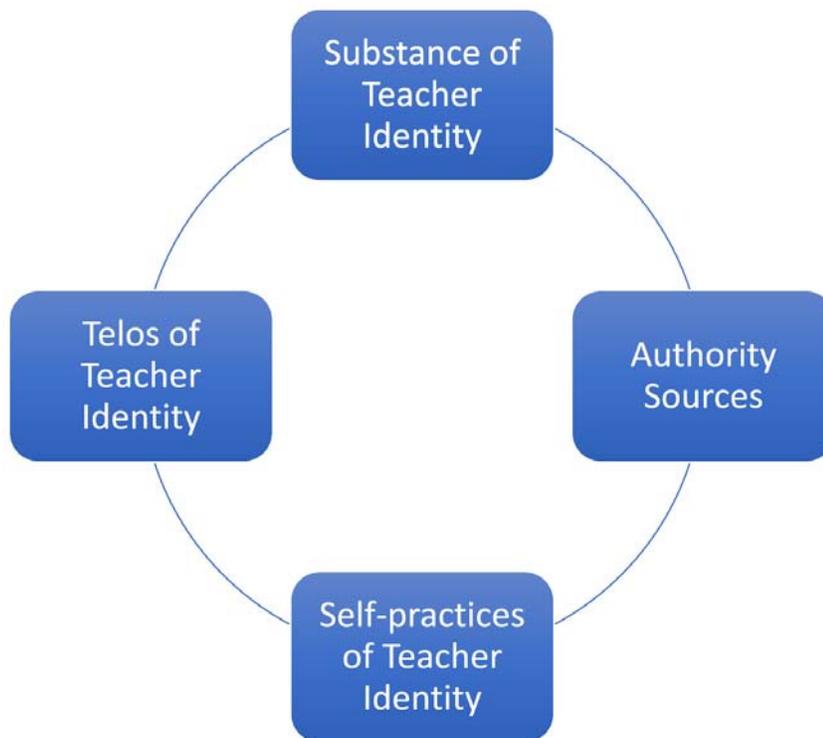

Figure 1. The ongoing process of teacher identity work. Teacher identity work is a non-linear process or identity loop consisting of four elements. Adapted from Clarke, M. (2009, p. 191).

3.1.1. Substance of teacher identity

The substance of teacher identity is to be found in internal dialogue with self and an individual's other identities. "[W]hat part of myself pertains to teaching and what forms of subjectivity constitute — or what forms do I use to constitute — my teaching self?" (Clarke, 2009, p.190). Individual teachers, for example, may wall off their teacher identity as a mainly intellectual or logical enterprise, with little connection to emotions. Others may construct teaching identities that rely on less rationality and more on emotion. As an example, teachers may find that their parental identities, imbued with care for their children, overlap with their teacher identities and care for their students.

3.1.2. Authority sources

Authority sources of teacher identity, the second axis, are the external sources that a teacher finds compelling and relies on for validation of who a good teacher is (Clarke, 2009). Such sources might include particular learning theories, religious or ethical values, or political ideologies. Teachers may, for example, find kinship in the political discourse of accountability and recognize student achievement on standardized exams as valid evidence of good/poor teaching. Finding affinity with a different authority source, teachers may 'value discourses of teaching as service and sacrifice, reflected in exhortations to always consider students and their needs first' (Clarke, 2009, p. 191). Differences between the authority sources that a teacher values and the authority sources that others in their context value may spark teacher identity renegotiation or even an identity crisis (Ball, 2003).

3.1.3. Self-practices of teacher identity

The third axis concerns the activities and actions of teachers, or "self-practices" (Clarke, 2009, p. 191) that serve to enact their teaching identities. These are the behaviors and activities that 'good' teachers exhibit, and may include not only instructional moves and routines but also the types of professional development and out-of-class activities teachers engage in as a way to signal their teacher identity. Within this axis teachers are acting in what they consider to be *teacherly* ways (Clarke, 2009).

3.1.4. Telos of teacher identity

Finally, the fourth axis is concerned with telos, a teacher's ultimate goal for teaching and the utmost purpose of their teaching identity. 'This might take the form of the oft-cited notion of 'making a difference' to the lives of individual students or it could be more a matter of economic survival' (Clarke, 2009, p.191). Teacher identity, in practice and discourse, would, therefore, largely be oriented toward (and stemming from) telos.

The four components of teacher identity in this model are not tightly boundaried and, Clarke (2009) proposes, they coexist in something of an identity loop, where each component informs (and is informed by) the other teacher identity components. Utilizing this model, teacher identity is ongoing and can be said to comprise conceptualizations of what a teacher is (and is not), what a teacher does (and does not do), and who a teacher is (and is not) in relation to self and others. Both internal sources (individual values, investments and commitments) and external sources (teaching experts and authorities) contribute to teacher identity. The model further intimates a large degree of dynamism in teacher identity. As all component parts are open to revision from internal or external sources, there is no final identity destination, and the primacy of any single component or conceptualization remains changeable (Miller, Morgan, & Medina, 2017).

3.2. A values schizophrenia

As Clarke's teacher identity model suggests, conflict is a central feature of teachers' identity work, and teachers are likely to feel pulled in competing directions. In fact, Ball (2003) predicts a schizophrenic splitting of teacher identity when teachers' personal values in teaching (e.g. ethical care for students) are at odds with institutionally-defined schooling purposes (e.g. performance on accountability measures), an observation echoed by Clarke (2012; 2013) and Stoten (2013). In this *values schizophrenia* (Ball, 2003, p. 221), a teacher's identity is torn between performing (or teaching) authentically, where one uses one's own judgment and care in working with students, and, alternately, performing a *fabrication* where one teaches toward an external version of effective teaching that conflicts with one's own internal version. Performing this fabricated teaching requires teachers to act out an inauthentic version of their teaching self in order to be viewed

within the institutional context as a 'good' teacher. Ball quotes Cloe, a teacher in Jeffrey and Woods' (1998) study:

> You are only seen as effective as a teacher by what you manage to put into children's brains so they can regurgitate in an examination situation. Now that's not very satisfying to one's life… I think that's why I haven't found my self because I do in fact care… I don't feel that I'm working with the children, I'm working at the children and it's not a very pleasant experience… (Ball, 2003, p. 222)

Cloe's identity work as a teacher has her struggling with opposing forces: the substance of her teaching identity, the authority sources she finds compelling and her telos for teaching are at odds with the institutional expectation that she fill students' heads with information for the exam, which would require her to work *at* — not *with* — the children.

The values schizophrenia observed in teachers' identity work may, in Ball's (2003) terminology, leave teachers feeling *terrorized*, by their inability to act agentively within their work contexts, leaving them to feel inauthentic and ineffective. "This structural and individual schizophrenia of values and purposes, and the potential for inauthenticity and meaninglessness is increasingly an everyday experience for all" (Ball. 223).

From the perspective of Clarke's Foucauldian model of teacher identity work, the authority sources that teachers find compelling and would prefer to utilize in their own teaching identity may conflict with authority sources that dominate within the school context in which teachers work. Cloe viewed teaching (the self-practices of teaching, per Clarke's (2009) model) as more than pouring facts into students who should then regurgitate them on standardized exams. This also points to a conflict between Cloe's telos and the telos prescribed by her teaching context. Similarly, Cloe's substance for teaching, the parts of her that make up her teacher identity, included her compassion and love for children, which she found to be an ill-fit for the requirements of her teaching assignment. The four axes of identity work, described in Clarke's model, highlight the tensions between internal and external forces that produced Cloe's values schizophrenia.

3.3. Ethical underpinnings of teacher identity

The values schizophrenia experienced by teachers like Cloe highlights the ways in which teachers' identity work is an ethical phenomenon (Clarke, 2009; Infinito, 2003; Miller et al., 2017). Teachers make decisions within contexts that often offer competing views on what is good and ethical vis-_a-vis teaching, and teachers' own values may, as noted above, conflict with the values promoted within their teaching ecologies, causing an ethical dilemma or values schizophrenia (Ball, 2003). Within this struggle, the very definition of 'good teaching' is up for grabs, and teachers' values and ethical decision-making skills may be challenged.

> The pervasiveness of power relations constituting us as subjects, along with the corollary pervasive existence of freedom that this implies, means that we have to make choices; and once we recognize that these actually are *choices*, albeit constrained ones, we are in the realm of ethics. (Clarke, 2009, p. 190, p. 190)

The choices that teachers make may not feel like choices. Teachers may feel their agency is constrained (e.g. when textbooks are assigned to teachers instead of chosen by teachers), and there is much reportage on the reality of constraints on teacher autonomy in schools today (Buchanan, 2015; McKnight, 2016; Parkison, 2013). Nevertheless, within the everyday (constrained) choices teachers make, glimpses into the ethical underpinnings of identities-inaction can still be discerned (Clarke, 2013). JC, the focal teacher in Miller, Morgan, and Medina's (2017) study, for example, struggled to teach according to his own values, rather the accountability-driven teaching valued in his school context.

> If we are to teach, we have to take the reality of where our kids are at and work from there on and try to teach them and forget — as much as it is hard to do — forget tests and scores and kind of make a commitment to teaching, educating, and improving the kids. (p. 97)

Teaching, as JC's comment intimates, is the deployment of ethical, professional agency (Clarke & Phelan, 2015; Miller, Morgan, & Medina, 2017) or the making of choices rooted in individual teachers' values and practical knowledge, even when constrained to some degree by the realities of their teaching contexts. In sum, teacher identity work is not merely a bounded psychological phenomenon; it is the negotiated expression of teachers' values, their investments, and their beliefs enacted within layers of context that work to validate, reshape, stunt, or nullify those values, investments and beliefs. Recent research has provided us glimpses into teachers' identity work in market-oriented educational settings, and the current study aims to provide a thorough detailing of how one teacher negotiated her identity within the neoliberal ideologies that marked her school setting.

4. The study

Athens High School is the community high school for a small town of approximately 6000 people on the edge of the Great Plains in the United States. The school, like the town of Athens itself, experienced dramatic demographic changes in the late 1990's through the 2010's. In 1990, less than five percent of students were Latino (and the number of students classified as English learners was not even a statistic gathered at that time). In the early 2010's, the district became "majority minority" for the first time in its history with 49.8% Latino students and 45.3% White, non-Latino students, and more than 20% of students were classified as English learners. In the final year of this study (2008–2009), the Athens school district was 40% Latino and 16.1% of students were identified as English learners (ELs).

Athens High School, like most secondary public schools in the U.S. was also experiencing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era of accountability during 2007–2009 years of this study. Situated in a state that reported the school achievement on standardized test scores in the local papers, Athens High School was ranked among its peer institution according to test scores on the state's department of education website. Athens' scores in the years several years preceding the study (2005–2007) were fairly strong, earning the district the rankings "very good/exemplary" (2005–2006), "conditional exemplary

(2006–2007), and "exemplary" (2007–2008). The outcomes for secondary English learners (ELs), however, were not aligned with the district as a whole. These outcomes and rankings masked the low performance of the district's emerging Spanish-speaking EL population, which unsurprisingly scored poorly on all of the state-wide English-medium standardized exams. This poor performance marked not only the English learners as under-achieving but also Athens schools and their teachers as poor performers.

The original study from which this case originates investigated the development of four teachers' expertise in teaching. The original study took a grounded theory approach to identify and flesh out what 'teacher expertise' meant for teachers of English learners within Athens' secondary schools. The researcher presumed little about what teaching expertise meant in this setting, and data were gathered and analyzed inductively with an eye toward generating theories that explained what good, effective, 'expert' teaching might be in Athens' middle and high school.

All four participants in the original study were women; two teaching in Athens' middle school and two in the high school. All were assigned to English as a second language (ESL) classrooms that enrolled English learners exclusively, and these four teachers comprised the ESL teaching staff at Athens' secondary schools. Sarah, the focal participant featured in this report, was a high school teacher in her sixth year of teaching at the inception of the study.

Data collection included multiple interviews, both short, informal interviews during observation days and long, formal interviews lasting 30–60 min (with three to five long interviews per participant). Interview questions were focused mainly on the teachers' thinking regarding curriculum and instructional choices and probing of their decision-making. Classroom observations were also a part of the data collection regime. Extended observations (half day to full day) occurred over the course of the study (2007–2009). All data were analyzed iteratively; themes were identified and data was read, reread, and categorized according to those themes. Due to space limitations and the need to present a well-detailed profile of teacher identity negotiation, data and findings presented here are those pertaining to only one participant: Sarah. Findings on other aspects of the original research study can be found at (Author).

Study data were re-analyzed through the lens of teacher identity work in 2016. In this re-analysis, interview data and classroom transcripts were searched for statements of teacher identity, those statements by Sarah in which she positioned herself as a particular kind of teacher (e.g. "I just feel like I've been lacking the skills to get that to my kids in an efficient manner to help that move up the ranks as fast as possible" (Sarah, personal communication, February 28, 2008)) or discussed good, effective teaching (e.g. "I'm like, wow, you know, if that kind of progress can be made in that amount of time, we'd be doing a disservice to our kids if we didn't offer more of it [scripted curriculum program]" (Sarah, personal communication, November 11, 2008)). Patterns and "regularities" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 10) in Sarah's self-positioning identity statements, as well as her enacted identity through instructional moves and her in-class teacher talk, were noted, and from these patterns, a teacher identity profile of Sarah was created.

4.1. Sarah

Sarah, despite being a six-year veteran of teaching English as an additional language, identified herself as a novice teacher. Having prepared to teach secondary math during teacher training in her bachelor's degree program, Sarah did not anticipate that her first job out of college would be as a teacher of bilingual English learners. She had added the ESL endorsement courses to her teacher education program as an afterthought, as a way to increase her marketability. When her application for a high school math teaching position at Athens was turned down, Sarah was disappointed. However, shortly on the heels of that rejection came an offer from the same administration for a position as EL teacher. With some trepidation, Sarah accepted.

4.2. A perpetual novice

The ESL endorsement in Sarah's state was supplemental, also known as an *add-on* endorsement, and this meant that the coursework and practicum experiences required of Sarah were few. ESL endorsement programs in the state required only 12 credit hours (typically 4 courses) in the theory and pedagogy of teaching ELs along with a 45

contact-hour practicum experience. With only these few short practicum hours under her belt and theory and pedagogy courses she could barely recall, Sarah felt underprepared for her new position, particularly when it came to making curriculum choices. She joined another first year teacher to make an EL teacher faculty of two at Athens High School.

> They [The administration of Athens High School] kind of said, well, you can do whatever you want with it [curriculum], which is great to have the freedom, but you give that to two first year teachers who have no experience and no mentor, and so it's like, 'okay' (skeptical laugh)." (Sarah, personal communication, February 28, 2008)

Despite her feelings of inadequacy, Sarah described loving her job teaching English learners in her first years of teaching. She and her colleague cobbled together curriculum for beginning and intermediate proficiency ELs, and she noted that her classroom always felt chaotic to her. Yet the chaos was familiar.

> Definitely, I can see that when I was a first-year teacher, there was a lot of innovating. (Laugh) I didn't have any materials. I had six different preps. I had a book for one class, and I was totally scrambling. It was just survival. As I've gained some experience I've discovered the power of routines, and I'm not there yet, not at all. Because, I grew up having no routines. That's how my family worked because of the nature of my parents' jobs, and we didn't have a lot of schedules, so it really was kind of counterintuitive to my nature to stick to one thing because I thought, that is so boring, that is **so** boring. (Sarah, personal communication, February 28, 2008)

Sarah's father was a director at a funeral home, and the unpredictable nature of his work set the tone for family life.

> My dad, he was a [Christian] preacher until I turned five or six and then he became a funeral director, and so, at a funeral home there is no schedule. You'd get the call at three in the morning; we'd be out to supper, there's a call, and we'd

> finish supper, and we'd have to go. But, you know, it didn't
> bother me. My mom was basically a stay at home mom but
> she did the bookkeeping for the funeral home, and she had
> lots of other little projects. But, she never had a set schedule,
> she's an off-the-hip personality, and I'm a carbon copy of my
> mom. (Sarah, personal communication, February 28, 2008)

The chaos of her classroom in her first years of teaching, then, was in
keeping with Sarah's unstructured childhood.

Sarah's view on her own teaching in the early years of her career
as chaotic and disorganized, however, left her feeling like a perpetual
novice. Sarah frequently indexed her predilection for disorganization
and subsequent feelings of being a novice throughout the course of
the research study. Further instantiating her view of herself as a per-
petual novice, Sarah felt particularly under-prepared to teach basic
literacy skills to her teenaged English learners.

> I wish I would have had more how to teach reading, how
> to teach writing, how to teach vocabulary effectively. I still
> don't feel like I'm quite there … so the curriculum has just
> never been established especially as far as the reading. I have
> no background in it, so no input in there — I couldn't give in-
> put. (Sarah, personal communication, February 28, 2008)

Under-prepared through her teacher education program to teach read-
ing to secondary students, Sarah's feelings of being a novice teacher
lasted well into her sixth year of teaching.

4.3. The dilemma of under-performance

Sarah's feelings of inadequacy were heightened by the poor test scores
her English-learning students achieved on state-wide (English- me-
dium) content exams and the state's English proficiency exam for Eng-
lish learners, the ELDA (English Language Development Assessment).

> [I]n our own district, our reading levels, the ELDA scores on
> our kids, reading is the lowest and writing is not too far be-
> hind. And so we're trying to, as an ELL [English language
> learner] team, figure out how we can raise those scores a

> lot faster knowing that it's going to create opportunities for them to go to mainstream classes sooner as well as succeed in those classes a lot faster (Sarah, personal communication, February 28, 2008)

Sarah felt a great deal of pressure to raise her students' test scores on the battery of state-wide standardized tests. Athens school district administration noted the low scores of the district's ELs and requested that teachers make ELs a district priority. Both administration and Sarah herself held Sarah accountable for her students' poor performance.

Examining the problem of her students' too-slow English acquisition, Sarah understood the solution to require a two-step process. ELs needed to acquire English more quickly (and do well on the ELDA exam), and then they needed to succeed in English-medium content courses (and do well on the state-wide content area standardized exams). English learners who arrived in Athens during their high school years had a limited amount of time to complete their academic programs. In the state in which Athens is located, learners can attend public high school only until they are 21 years of age, and, the classes that ELs took with Sarah were not advancing students' progress toward their diploma. Only once ELs achieved a minimum level of English proficiency were they allowed to take content courses that met their diploma requirements. Therefore, the longer students remained in Sarah's ESL classes, the more distant their chances of graduating before they 'aged out' of high school.

> In high school, that's just a limited amount of time. We have to maximize that time and make it as efficient as possible and sometimes I just feel like I've been lacking the skills to get that to my kids in an efficient manner to help that move up the ranks as fast as possible. (Sarah, personal communication, February 28, 2008)

As much as Sarah enjoyed teaching her students, it was her job to get them out of her classes quickly. Her care for her students was defined in no small part by her desire to quickly push her students out of her classes and into credit-bearing content classes where they would learn the content they needed to do well on the standardized exams.

4.4. A curriculum choice

Sarah was a teacher who cared deeply for her students and who understood the rules of the game of school. Those rules prescribed academic success as achievable only through English and as measured on the state's regime of standardized tests. Under great personal and institutional pressure in 2007, Sarah, along with her new colleague and first year teacher, Stephanie, made a curricular decision to adopt a scripted reading program for all ESL reading courses in the 2007–2008 school year. Sarah and Stephanie added the matching scripted writing program for all English learners in fall 2008.

In making the decision to adopt the curricula, Sarah found the information on student achievement that she was given by the publisher of the scripted instruction programs particularly persuasive. The publisher's consultant provided a testimonial for the program, which the consultant called *direct instruction* rather than scripted instruction. Sarah recounted the incredible gains made by students in the consultant's story.

> [T]here was a school out in California that tested some newcomers who were a 7.5 [grade] reading level after three or three and a half years. Again, three periods a day of direct instruction … And before there were kids that were not meeting the high school exit exam, and I don't know the exact percentages, but I mean, they just went from miserable failure to about 95% of kids [passing] …. So when I look at that I'm like, wow, you know, if that kind of progress can be made in that amount of time, we'd be doing a disservice to our kids if we didn't offer more of it. (Sarah, personal communication, November 11, 2008)

The scripted programs promised better, faster English acquisition for Sarah's students. The care and commitment that Sarah felt for her students, in the face of her own perceived inadequacy, compelled her to adopt the curriculum. Using what could be viewed as a marketplace metaphor, she claimed that to do otherwise would be a 'disservice' to her students, framing students as clients and teachers as service providers. "I think overall our kids will benefit from it, especially if we can keep them moving as quickly as possible. I think the results will

trickle over into other classes with more confidence in their reading abilities" (Sarah, personal communication, November 11, 2008).

The curriculum Sarah adopted was highly scripted, which meant that teacher talk during instruction was prescribed via a written script, and a regime of uniform choral response from all students was required. When student response was called for in the script, Sarah snapped her fingers to indicate that students were to provide the correct answer out loud and in unison. Any incorrect response required (scripted) re-teaching and repeated attempts at choral response until the error was corrected.

Several months after adoption of the curriculum, Sarah remained generally optimistic about its effectiveness but a few minor discontents began to surface.

> There's days that it gets repetitive, where you're just tired it's harder to pay attention, but at the same time, when I'm trying to create my own things, you know, if I've got 5 preps in the day, something, the ball gets dropped somewhere ... so, in that regard I think overall it's more productive. They're engaged on a consistent basis because they know the expectations, they know what to do, they know how to do it. (Sarah, personal communication, February 3, 2009)

Sarah observed that the one-size-fits all content, with stories of talking, cartoon cows and joking retirees as Happy Acres retirement home, was not well-fitted to her teenaged learners' interests. The students found the routines "repetitive" and dull, prompting Sarah to go off-script with increasing frequency by, for example, abandoning the prescribed teacher finger snaps to signal student response or mandatory redo's when students did not respond perfectly, correctly in unison (Author, YEAR). Sarah also talked of interrupting the program by spending a couple of weeks reading a novel as a class, though this did not happen during the two years of the study.

These small moments of discontent increased incrementally and culminated in one notable incident at the end of the research study, in the third semester of using the new curricula, when Sarah ran afoul of the scripted program's error correction regiment. In early 2009, Sarah was reprimanded by the program's visiting consultant when Sarah, proud of the writing that her shy, newcomer student had attempted,

praised the girl's work. Sarah had neglected to point out the errors, including a run-on sentence, and the consultant reminded her that the program required such correction. Immediate and direct correction of learner error was a requirement of the behavioristic curriculum program, but Sarah balked. "How in the world am I going to explain 'run on' to a kid who's been here 4 months, you know?" (Sarah, personal communication, February 3, 2009). But more than finding a way to explain the error, Sarah was worried about the learner's confidence and felt she needed praise more than correction.

> And so I kept it [correction] as simple as possible … And it's interesting, our consultant, she does a great job, but she also has no ELL experience. And so sometimes just trying to balance what she's saying with, okay, now how does that work with ELLs or how can I present it or how can I **get** to that point to make it work for ELLs. So that's been interesting to try to say, okay is that realistic, is it feasible, is it worth the extra time or how much extra time is it going to take to get there? (Sarah, personal communication, February 3, 2009)

Sarah compromised; she corrected the errors by helping the learner create two sentences from the single run-on, but she did so with gentleness and encouragement in order to soften the correction. The incident troubled Sarah, and she spoke of it regretfully. As the study ended, Sarah continued with scripted curricula in both reading and writing for her English learners, but she did so much less enthusiasm than her first semester of the program. Sarah had come to recognize a discontinuity between her enactment of care for her student and the program's mandates.

5. Discussion

Throughout the study, Sarah's teaching identity was negotiated across internal and external values, between competing beliefs about good teaching and effective teachers. A neoliberal view of good teaching, one that was advanced at Athens High School, helped to create and sustain Sarah's feeling of being the perpetual novice as a teacher of English learners. Seeing herself as a novice yet deeply committed

to students' success, Sarah sought to change her teaching to better align with her school's neoliberal definition of good teaching. Adopting the scripted instruction program, which promised better test results quickly, Sarah did become a more confident, more organized teacher. Yet, despite Sarah's initial affinity with her new standardized curricula, small inconsistencies began to emerge between Sarah's long-held ethics of care for her student and the restrictions that scripted regime placed on her teaching practice, suggesting a values schizophrenia (Ball, 2003).

5.1. Sarah's teacher identity work

Examining Sarah's teacher identity work through Clarke's (2009) model provides useful insight into how Sarah's values and the neoliberal ideology of her context and curriculum interacted in the continual (re)negotiation of her teaching identity. Sarah's identity work is discussed through each of the four elements of Clarke's model.

5.2. Sarah's substance of teaching

The substance of Sarah's teaching was informed by her personal identity as both a maternal person and one comfortable with chaos. She identified herself as "a carbon copy of my mom" whom Sarah described as a person who was deeply loving, "never had a set schedule," and had an "off-the-hip personality." The lack of routines that marked Sarah's childhood was familiar and comfortable to Sarah as an adult. It was "kind of counter-intuitive to my nature to stick to one thing because I thought, that is so boring, that is **so** boring." It was only in critique of Sarah' teaching (her own and her school's) that Sarah began to question her comfort with chaos as a teacher. "As I've gained some experience I've discovered the power of routines." In light of the accountability demands of her schooling context — and her failure to meet those — Sarah's teacher identity shifted away from her personal identity, spontaneous and unconcerned with organization, to incorporate more structure and linearity in her teaching approach.

　　The substance of Sarah's teacher identity also found origin in her ethics of care for her students. Although Sarah's teaching practices changed over the course of her teaching career, her commitment to and advocacy for her students did not. Sarah was deeply concerned

that her students be given a fair chance at academic success, and her teacher identity was driven by her belief that she was their academic caretaker. Because Sarah cared for her students, she was pained to realize that her early-years teaching was not resulting in students' academic success quickly enough, which the accountability structures of her school and state made clear. "I just feel like I've been lacking the skills to get that to my kids." And, it was Sarah's commitment and care for her students that drove her to seek out the scripted program, "if that kind of progress can be made in that amount of time [with the scripted curriculum], we'd be doing a disservice to our kids if we didn't offer more of it."

5.3. Sarah's authority sources

Feeling the perpetual novice, Sarah easily accepted the authority source of neoliberalism advanced within her teaching context. Her school and state agreed that good teaching was measured by high test scores, and Sarah oriented herself toward this view of good teaching. Sarah was willing to change her teaching practices in whatever way was necessary to realize her students' academic success.

   As noted above, Sarah's ethics of care for her students is categorized as part of her substance of teaching, but her disposition to care for her students could also have found its origins in authority sources, such as the maternal example of her mother or the Christian mores of her upbringing. Some aspects of teacher identity, like this one, seem to defy easy categorization, and this presents a challenge for Clarke's model to better account for such complexity.

5.4. Sarah's teaching practices

As Sarah adopted her school's neoliberal definition of good teaching, her teaching practices shifted. Ceding that she was not a particularly effective teacher in her early years, a judgment brought into sharp relief by her students' poor performance on English-medium, standardized exams, Sarah sought help to build up her teaching skills. Using the scripted curriculum, Sara became an organized, more effective teacher. "[Students are] engaged on a consistent basis because they know the expectations, they know what to do, they know how to do it." Sarah took this as evidence that her new teaching practices were

effective. Eventually, however, the practices prescribed by the program conflicted with the caregiving teaching practices Sarah wanted to provide, and a fissure was revealed between the neoliberal teaching practices of the scripted curriculum program and Sarah's preferred practice of care for her students.

5.5. Sarah's telos

Sarah's telos, or ultimate goal, for her teacher identity was to be a facilitator of her students' academic achievement and advocate who ensured her students got a fair chance at a promising future. This goal seemed to align with her school's goal of high performance on standardized exams, at least initially. Yet, a schism eventually grew between Sarah's telos and that advanced by the new curriculum. Despite her belief that the new curriculum could help realize students' academic achievement, Sarah came to recognize that her version of care for her students conflicted with some of the program dictates. Sarah's discomfort with the 'fabrication' (Ball, 2003) of compliance to the curriculum's rules in the face of her own judgment echoes Ball's description of a values schizophrenia, in which "commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance" (p. 221). Sarah's telos, then, was more accurately described as student academic achievement *in a caring environment,* not student academic achievement *at any cost,* and this highlighted a key difference between Sarah's goal for her teaching and that of the neoliberal curriculum she had chosen.

5.6. Interaction between Sarah's identity elements

Through the use of Clarke's teacher identity model, we can see the ways that neoliberal ideologies merged into and helped shape Sarah's teacher identity, and we can also see how Sarah's own values converged with and diverged from the neoliberal teaching values of her teaching context. Of particular import to Sarah's identity work was her lack of confidence in her teacher ability early in her career, her easy acceptance of her school's implied criticism of her early teaching, and her subsequent willingness to change her teaching practices. These speak to the personal identity she brought into her profession and used to form her teaching identity (her substance for teaching).

Sarah's teaching practices, and authority sources for teaching were marked by their malleability and Sarah's willingness to alter them, aligning with her humble and respectful nature. The certainty of purpose and bullish promises of teaching effectiveness heralded by the scripted curriculum program were welcomed by Sarah, who did not, at the time of adoption, recognize conflicts between her personal values and those of the program.

Student academic achievement was a telos shared by Sarah and the neoliberal curriculum program. However, there was a critically important difference between Sarah's telos for teaching and the curriculum's telos, and this difference highlights the nature of Sarah's teacher identity work. Sarah's telos, unlike her teaching practices, was not malleable, and when she noticed the difference between her telos and that of the curriculum, she was brought up short, identity-wise, and recognized that she was not fully comfortable being the good teacher as prescribed by the curriculum.

Sarah's core value within her teacher identity was care for students, and she acted agentively to express that core value by choosing a curriculum that she thought aligned with her care. Sarah came to recognize the misalignment between her care for students and the teaching practices of the curriculum. This recognition threw Sarah into an ethical dilemma: act according to her own value of care or follow the program as prescribed. Sarah tried to strike a compromise by correcting her student's errors in a gentle, encouraging way, but her compromise needled at her conscience long after it was made. Sarah's professional agency, which included her ethics of care for her students, was stymied by her own previous curricular choices and her prior acceptance of the neoliberal view of 'good' teaching that pervaded her schooling context.

6. Implications

Neoliberal discourses in education advance the notion that good teaching is a simple matter of standardized, research-based instruction, which can be verified with students' standardized exam scores. They suggest that "a single unbroken line exists between research issues, questions, data, evidence and implications, when the relationships among these entities are more akin to a tangled web of partial

connections" (Clarke & Phelan, 2015, p. 266). The linearity of a neo-liberal model of instruction and assessment is alluring because of its simplicity, and teachers, particularly those feeling the 'perpetual novice,' may find neoliberalism compelling. Certainly, the general public has found neoliberalism compelling, and schooling contexts marked by standardization and accountability are a reality for most teachers in North American, Europe, and beyond. Teachers far and wide, then, are negotiating teacher identities in neoliberal spaces that narrow education to a market-focused endeavor, leaving little room for teachers' professional agency, their own discernment of what 'good' teaching looks like in their classrooms.

If teachers are to push back against the neoliberal framing of teacher identities as technicists, to reclaim teaching as more than what 'you manage to put into children's brains so they can regurgitate in an examination situation' (Ball, 2003, p. 222), they must develop a critical stance toward educational policy and deploy their professional agency strategically. Teacher education, both preservice and in-service, could play a crucial role in building teachers' criticality and professional agency by: 1) helping teachers discern the values upon which their teaching is premised (whether those values are externally imposed, the teachers' own, or some combination of the two) and 2) creating spaces where "alternative possibilities" (Weaven & Clark, 2015, p. 169) can be invited and examined.

Like Sarah, many teachers view uncertainty and imperfect organization as symptomatic of their weaknesses as teacher, a view encouraged by the order and linearity of neoliberal views of education (Clarke & Phelan, 2015; Miller et al., 2017). It was within this discourse of order and organization that Sarah understand her teaching as a 'disservice' to her students, an understanding that undermined her confidence and made standardized curriculum particularly appealing. Yet, teacher uncertainty on curriculum and instructional decisions should not be mistaken for teacher incompetence. Certainly, teachers need a depth and breadth of knowledge in their subject matter and in instructional practice possibilities. However, teaching is complex and rarely perfectly linear, and a desire for clarity may actually "undermine and work against the critically informed yet creative judgement of teachers" (Clarke & Phelan, 2015, p. 266) that is necessary for deploying teachers' ethical, professional agency in reflective ways (Morgan, 2016). While disorder and disorganization are not desirable

outcomes of teacher identity work, authentic teacher identity work will require teachers themselves to recognize teaching's moral and social complexities. And, recognition that teaching is a complex activity requiring teachers' professional, ethical judgment — their agency — ought to be re-asserted in discourses around 'good' teaching.

> The development of teachers' professional agency may be further aided when spaces for reflection and imagination are opened. Miller et al. (2017) suggest that teacher educators and leaders need to seek out ways of expanding the imagined parameters of success — and subsequent self-worth — that teachers such as JC encounter through their practices of ethical self-formation. We need to create and nurture spaces in which language teachers can reflect on how to respond to and engage with the constellation of language practices that they regularly participate in. (p. 101)

Within these spaces—in teacher preparation programs or professional development—all teachers (not just language teachers) could identify, examine, and reimagine authority sources for teaching; they could explore the (mis)alignments between their substance for teaching, teaching practices, and telos. In particular, teachers could explore the ethical dimensions of their teaching, asking what values they hold and how those values could be mirrored in the educational policies of their school contexts. In spaces for imagining alternative possibilities, teachers could develop the habit of reflective, agentive teacher identity work.

The space to imagine new potentialities and the knowledge and confidence to challenge the narrow neoliberal discourse of her school might have helped Sarah be a 'double agent,' like the teacher, Isabel, in Handsfield, Crumpler, and Dean's (2010, p. 428), who "countered the bracketing effects of dominant ideological constructions of literacy and teaching, thus generating alternative possibilities for [her] professional identity" (Handsfield, Crumpler, and Dean's (2010, p. 428). To be a teacher doing identity work in today's educational policy climate, a teacher seeking her own ethical self-formation, will require the stamina and flexibility to live and teach within imperfect, even de-professionalizing contexts where a bit of double agency may serve one well. In this era of deprofessionalizing discourses and policies,

teachers' identity work may be spaces of potentiality for teachers to practice ethical, professional agency and speak back against educational policies that threaten 'good' teaching and define the 'good' teacher in narrow and limiting ways.

References

Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy, 18*(2), 215–228.

Buchanan, R. (2015). Teacher agency and identity in an era of accountability. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 21*(6), 700–719.

Clarke, M. (2009). The ethico-politics of teacher identity. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 41*(2), 185–200.

Clarke, M. (2012). The other side of education: A Lacanian critique of neoliberal education policy. *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives, 1*(1), 46–60.

Clarke, M. (2013). Terror/enjoyment: Performativity, resistance, and the teacher's psyche. *London Review of Education, 11*(3), 229–238.

Clarke, M., & Phelan, A. (2015). The power of negative thinking in and for teacher education. *Power and Education, 7*(3), 257–271.

Davies, B., & Bansel, P. (2007). Neoliberalism and education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 20*(3), 247–259.

Edwards, E., & Burns, A. (2016). Language teacher–researcher identity negotiation: An ecological perspective. *Tesol Quarterly, 50*(3), 735–745.

Fisher-Ari, T., Kavanagh, K. M., & Martin, A. (2017). Sisyphean neoliberal reforms: The intractable mythology of student growth and achievement master narratives within the test and TFA era. *Journal of Education Policy, 32*(3), 255–280.

Handsfield, L. J., Crumpler, T. P., & Dean, T. R. (2010). Tactical negotiations and creative adaptations: The discursive production of literacy curriculum and teacher identities across space-times. *Reading Research Quarterly, 45*(4), 405–431.

Infinito, J. (2003). Ethical self-formation: A look at the later Foucault. *Education Theory, 53*(2), 155–171.

Jeffrey, B., & Woods, P. (1998). *Testing Teachers: the effect of school inspections on primary teachers*. London: Falmer Press.

McKnight, L. (2016). Meet the phallic teacher: Designing curriculum and identity in a neoliberal imaginary. *Australian Educational Researcher, 43*(4), 473–486.

Meshulam, A., & Apple, M. W. (2014). Interrupting the interruption: Neoliberalism and the challenges of an antiracist school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 35*(5), 650–669.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). In *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Miller, E. R., Morgan, B., & Medina, A. L. (2017). Exploring language teacher identity work as ethical self-formation. *The Modern Language Journal, 101*(S1), 91–105.

Morgan, B. (2016). Language teacher identity and the domestication of dissent: An exploratory account. *Tesol Quarterly, 50*(3), 708–734.

Parkison, P. T. (2013). Teacher identity and curriculum: Space for dissent. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue, 15*(1), 13–25.

Sawyer, R. K. (2004). Creative teaching: Collaborative discussion as disciplined improvisation. *Educational Researcher, 33*(2), 12–20.

Stoten, D. W. (2013). Professionalism, identity and the self: The de-moralisation of teachers in English sixth form colleges. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 18*(4), 365–376.

Tarnoff, B. (2016, December 13). *Neoliberalism turned our world into a business. And there are two big winners*. Retrieved on 23 May, 2017 from https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/13/donald-trump-silicon-valley-leaders-neoliberalism-administration

Weaven, M., & Clark, T. (2015). Discretionary spaces: English teachers discuss curriculum agency. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 38*(3), 162–170.