Critical Education

Speaking Back to the Neoliberal Discourse on Teaching
How US Teachers Use Social Media to Redefine Teaching

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Abstract

Through mainstream mass media, neoliberal discourse has come to dominate all social policy realms in the United States. In education, the result has been a commodification of schools and teachers. Social media, however, has allowed individuals to speak back to neoliberal discourses by providing a space to critique media and to present a counter-narrative to what media has presented. Through an analysis of teacher-authored blogs specifically, this paper uses virtual ethnographic and critical discourse methods to analyze how teachers have been able to challenge the dominant frames about the quality of their own profession, challenge the urge to reduce teaching to improved test scores, and to dismiss the privatization of teacher preparation. In so doing, use social media as a tool for resistance and are able to re-frame teacher quality to the public.

Introduction

In a 2010 Washington Post article entitled "How to Fix our Schools," former New York City schools' chancellor Joel Klein, former DC schools superintendent Michelle Rhee, and other neoliberal school reformers delivered a "manifesto" on teaching in which they wrote:

> A 7-year-old girl won't make it to college someday because her teacher has two decades of experience or a master's degree -- she will make it to college if her teacher is effective and engaging and compels her to reach for success. By contrast, a poorly performing teacher can hold back hundreds, maybe thousands, of students over the course of a career. Each day that we ignore this reality is precious time lost for children preparing for the challenges of adulthood.... Let's stop ignoring basic economic principles of supply and demand and focus on how we can establish a performance-driven culture in every American school -- a culture that rewards excellence, elevates the status of teachers and is positioned to help as many students as possible beat the odds (Klein et al., 2010).

The manifesto proposed that great teaching is a vital component to student success. With that, few would disagree, but the way that the manifesto proposes schools get great teachers is ideologically driven. The manifesto argued that education needed to pay attention to "basic principles of supply and demand" and that it needed "a performance-driven culture that rewards excellence." With these phrases, Klein, Rhee, and their partners use market principles, and advance a neoliberal approach, to improving teaching.

The manifesto, in particular, draws from a neoliberal idea that Stephen Ball has called "performativity," a set of ideas, policies, and practices that uphold neoliberalism's notions of individuality and competition through measured performance (Ball, 2012). Performativity manifests in policies including: Measuring student and teacher performance by test score and incentive systems for teachers who produce higher test scores.

The manifesto's authors argued that in all sectors employees are evaluated on their performance (i.e. number of products sold, number of accounts secured), so teaching should be similar. This logic has been conveyed by films like *Waiting for Superman* (2010) in which the great teacher is portrayed as a young person who works all hours to produce the best test score outcomes they can for their students. Kevin Kumashiro wrote, "In *Waiting for Superman*, improvement is equated with teachers being held accountable for raising those test scores," (Kumashiro, 2012, p. 10).

Neoliberalism and the notion of performativity have been pervasive, yet individuals mediate its common sense ideas all of the time (Williams, 1974). One way is through social media, where people filter and speak back to dominant discourses on public policy issues. Social media offers a virtual space where anyone can express his/her views; it enables people a free space to say what they want anonymously about a topic. Moreover, it provides a venue " to constitute and intervene in mainstream culture and ideas," rather than just critique it (Lievrouw, 2011, p. 19).

This article examines the ways in which teachers have used social media to not only critique the neoliberal definition of teaching but how they have used social media to present a counter-narrative of what teaching is. Through blogs, teachers presented counter-narratives of the experience of teaching, rejected neoiberal ideas of teaching, and put forth their own ideas of

what should count as quality teaching. In so doing, they resisted the neoliberal notions of performativity and used social media as a tool for advancing a "commons knowledge" of what teaching is (Lievrouw, 2011). Through an analysis of teacher-authored blogs specifically, this paper uses virtual ethnographic and critical discourse methods to analyze how teachers have been able to challenge the dominant frames about the quality of their own profession and re-frame teacher quality to the public.

Background

Neoliberalism asserts that societies function best when individuals make decisions in competitive markets rather than having governmental organizations make decisions for them...Furthermore, policy should promote economic growth by eliminating restrictions on corporate investment...social institutions, such as schools, also exist to promote economic growth. As a result economic conditions will improve for all, and there will be more equality for everyone. (Lipman & Hursh, 2008)

The neoliberal agenda, as Lipman & Hursh described, is guided by the primacy of the private sector as the model for all public sector functions. Under neoliberalism, education is repositioned as an economic good in which schools are defined as commodities, while parents and students are defined as consumers. Schools can be improved only by eliminating "inefficient bureaucracies" and treating education as a market, driven by performance.

Performance is a key tenet underlying neoliberalism as it allows managers treat public sector employees, like teachers, as private sector ones. They can decide who is worthy of staying in their jobs and who gets rewarded, and, conversely who gets fired from their positions or gets sanctioned. Stephen Ball defined this notion of performance, which he called "performativity" (Ball, 2012, p.30). Performativity

is enacted through measures and targets against which we are expected to position ourselves, but often in ways that also produce uncertainties about how we should organize ourselves within our work….Performativity is a key mechanism of neoliberal management, a form of hands off management that uses comparisons and judgements in place of intervention and direction (p. 31).

Performativity transforms teaching into "a calculable rather than memorable act," (p. 32). Data points are used to ascertain the quality of a teacher. Following the collection of data points, decisions are made, including continued employment or incentive bonuses for teachers. The "force and brute logic of performance are hard to avoid (p.32)." Because it is now widely used throughout the public schools in the United States, school staff, as employees in all sectors, have begun to believe that performativity is the best way to measure quality and success. Schools, districts, state departments of education regularly collect data and evaluate performance as if these were neutral acts and not meant to engage in an elaborate system of surveillance of teachers through a panoptic gaze (Foucault, 1977). Because "it is inside our heads and souls" it works easily and without much challenge (Ball, p.31).

Neoliberals engage in a series of strategies to optimize the conditions under which performativity can take hold. One is to hire a young, high achieving teaching force unfamiliar with unions through programs like Teach for America (TFA). These teachers come out of

prestigious colleges and universities and promise a two year commitment to teaching. They are eager to comply with the system of performativity so that they can be successful by the measures through which their work is defined. According to a recent report, "By 2015, with a $50 million federal grant, TFA program recruits could make up one-quarter of all new teachers in 60 of the nation's highest need [read: urban] school districts. The program also is expanding internationally" (Armario, 2011). Funded by large foundations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Walton Family Foundation, this effort has resulted in closed contracts with districts across the United States to hire TFA teachers. Other strategies that undergird the system of performativity include privately-managed charter schools, merit pay policies, and teacher evaluation systems based on test scores, all of which have been funded by many of the same philanthropists (Ball, 2012).

Some teachers, parents, and students across the country have expressed dissatisfaction with performativity and the policies that it has produced. They have resisted standardized testing, Teach for America, and charter schools (Naison, 2014). Some of their resistance has come through social media. Social media has been a vehicle for increased civic participation (Jenkins, 2006), for debate on public affairs (Jenkins, 2003; Kline and Burstein, 2005), for communities to form, and even to spark activism and social movements (Carty, 2011; Lierouw, 2011). It offers people the chance for "remediation," the process by which people construct new meanings that reflect their own perspectives (Lievrouw, 2011). Through comment sections on newspaper or magazine articles, list servs through which people can debate issues, and blogs, individuals can not only respond to mainstream media but propose their own ideas, their own evidence, and their own research about an issue. Kline and Burstein (2005) write, "This a way to challenge the mainstream media monopoly" and "a force for liberation and democracy" (p. xix).

While there is wide variation in the quality, scope, and reach of social media, the potential is there for social media to provide a space for people to participate and wrestle with new ideas, develop counter-frames to what is presented by neoliberalism and to engage in activism through social media. As Lievrouw (2011) explains there are four different broad categories of activism through social media:

- *Culture jamming*: Appropriating images and using them to spread a message of critique

- *Participatory Journalism*: Using a web-based alternative news outlet that provides alternatives to mainstream news and opinion like web logs (blogs)

- *Mediated mobilization*: Using social media to mobilize masses of people on an issue (i.e. an online petition)

- *Commons Knowledge*: De-centering the expert, allowing anyone to be an expert on an issue. (pp. 23-25)

In all of these ways, social media opens up possibilities to make a change in the, "map of social reality" (Hall, 2004:134) presented to us by media. In so doing, these methods constitute ways of new social movement building (Carty, 2011).

Method

This paper zeroes in on building "commons knowledge" (Lievrouw, 2011) as a method for pursuing social media activism and speaking back to the neoliberal policies that constrain the definitions of teaching and teacher quality. Commons knowledge is important because it allows anyone to speak as an expert and to present an alternate discourse that other forms of activism will ultimately build on to confront the powerful forces that put policies based on performativity into place.

To that end, this article presents the results of a study that used virtual or online ethnography to understand and analyze the counter narratives present in social media through teacher-authored blogs. Virtual or online ethnography is specifically tailored to research in digital media, although it borrows from traditional ethnography and uses the following steps (Androutspoulos, 2008):

1. Systemic observation of selected online spaces.

2. Charting or documenting what is unfolding (i.e. what were the topics raised, what language issued to discuss those topics, were there comments, and what is the nature of the comments?).

3. Repeating the observations, guidance for further sampling.

4. Eliciting themes that emerge over the repeated observation. (p. 6)

Before the selection of blogs could begin, this research began with two questions to guide the initial sampling: (1) How are teachers using social media to up-end notions of performativity? (2) What discourse are teachers using to speak back to neoliberal policies and to create a "commons knowledge" of teaching?

This led to an initial internet search for teacher-authored blogs that talked about teacher quality. Once a few were found, "chain sampling" was used, a technique in which an initial group of cases are identified and then used to identify other cases (Patton, 1990). Links on those sites were then used to find the next set of blogs. Although chain sampling was used, I made certain to find a range of teacher-authored blogs which represented a wide geographic region, grade level, discipline, and experience level of teachers. Through this process, twenty-two teacher-authored blogs were the basis of this study (see Table 1).

Twenty of the 22 blogs were not sponsored by any organization or newspaper, nor did they have any advertising (see Table 1). They were independent blogs that were written by the teachers on their own time. None of the authors were professional writers, journalists, or bloggers. They were all teachers from all over the country and from all disciplines and grade levels. Table 1 shows the blog web addresses as well as how many "likes," "friends," or "shares" they had, indicating the reach of these blogs. The search was confined to an eighteen month period, between January 2011-June 2012, to narrow the scope of the data. I followed the blogs weekly, and took field notes (Emerson et al., 1995) on the blog posts and comments.

Table 1
List and Description of Teacher-Authored Blogs

Name of Blog	Location (URL)	Description	Hits, Likes, Friends[1]
Jose Vilson	http://thejosevilson.com/about-me/	New York City High School Teacher	716 Facebook friends
Reclaiming reform	http://www.reclaimingreform.org/	Upstate New York Teachers (range of grade levels/disciplines)	No information available
Teacher's View	http://plmartinwrite.blogspot.com/	Los Angeles middle school Teacher	No information available
Epiphany in Baltimore	http://epiphanyinbaltimore.blogspot.com/	Baltimore high school teacher	31 Facebook friends
Chaz' school Daze	http://chaz11.blogspot.com/2012/05/well-it-looks-like-i-will-be-back-into.html	New York City middle school teacher	40 Facebook friends
Interact teachers	http://accomplishedcaliforniateachers.wordpress.com/	California teachers; Sponsored by Stuart Foundation/Stanford	43,894 visits since Apr 3, 2011; Nominated for best group blog 2011
The White Rhino	http://www.chicagonow.com/white-rhino/2012/04/good-chicago-public-schools-teachers-need-public-support/	Chicago high school teacher	132 Facebook friends
Modern School	http://modeducation.blogspot.com/	San Francisco high school science teacher	50 followers, 234 Facebook friends

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[1] Data collected from the blogs themselves on the URL listed in each row.

NYC Educator	http://nyceducator.com/	New York City English as a Second Language teachers; One experienced, one newer	Nominated for several awards, best blogs; Two teachers blogging together
South Bronx Teacher	http://www.southbronxschool.com/	South Bronx middle school teacher	No information available
No Sleep Till Summer	https://dmacteaches.wordpress.com/	Teacher of English language learners in New York City	43 followers
Teach for Us	http://garyrubinstein.teachforus.org/	Former Teach for America teacher, currently a high school teacher; Sponsored by Scholastic	3094 Friends/followers; Sponsorship by Scholastic
Urban Educator	http://www.anurbanteacherseducation.com/	Seattle-based social studies teacher	
Ms Katie	http://mskatiesramblings.blogspot.com/	Chicago elementary school teacher	42 members/Facebook friends
Miss Rim	http://missrimbus.blogspot.com/	New York City special education teacher	7 Facebook friends
One Teacher Left Behind	http://oneteacherleftbehind.com/	Los Angeles elementary teacher	No information available
Teach Write	http://teachlearnconstruct.blogspot.com/	Seattle English teacher	14 Facebook friends
I Thought A Think	http://ithoughtathink.blogspot.com/	Seattle elementary teacher	No information available

Learn me Good	http://learnmegood2.blogspot.com/	Dallas elementary teacher	275, 540 visitors since 2006; Nominated for several blog awards; 293 Facebook friends
Assailed teacher	http://theassailedteacher.com/	New York City history teacher	183 Facebook friends
Shrewdness of Apes	http://shrewdnessofapes.blogspot.com/	Oklahoma elementary teacher	No information available
Stories from Arizona schools	http://www.storiesfromschoolaz.org/	Arizona teachers of all disciplines	Best education blog 2010

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and iterative. I began by reviewing collected data from the blogs and developed a coding scheme through an open coding process (Emerson et al., 1995). The coding process was then followed by a series of memos generating another set of codes that were used for further analysis. My analysis approach draws from grounded theory that has an epistemological approach of letting the data define the conclusions drawn in study (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Additionally, I applied methods of Critical Discourse Theory (CDA) which looks not just at language itself but at how power is wielded through language (Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1982; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). According to van Dijk (2009) CDA allows the researcher to understand how, "Discourse is deployed in the enactment of broader social and political acts, especially those that were part of systems of dominance or resistance against dominance" (p. 81). As Fairclough (1995) adds, CDA allows mainstream media discourse to be analyzed for how it operates in, "naturalizing official viewpoints" (p.71). The emphasis of the study is on how social media discourse is used to challenge the dominant discourse and how, "language in use" is used by non-experts to present alternatives to those official viewpoints on teacher quality (Thurlow& Mroczek, 2011).

In particular, I looked for the ways in which they defined teacher quality by describing their work and how they used the language in social media to speak back to definitions of quality defined by much more powerful media outlets. This level of analysis was critical in order to unearth the voices of teachers in relation to the dominant discourse.

Speaking Back to and Re-visioning Neoliberal Policies

Over 22 blogs reviewed reveal several important themes and strands of discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 46) around what teaching means to teachers themselves. Most of the blogs were written by teachers in urban schools where the impact of neoliberal reform policies are the

most extreme (Lipman & Hursh, 2008). While they did not use this word, teachers across the blogs critiqued the notion of "performativity" (Ball, 2012), thereby resisting and beginning to create a "commons knowledge" as an alternative to the neoliberal discourse around teaching.

Bloggers took on particular aspects of performativity like the measurement of teachers through test score data, countering a neoliberal logic which has put forth "discourses which constitute imaginary projections for new relations of structure and scale," (Fairclough in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p.176). The "imaginary" that neoliberals project is driven by the market, and uses notions of performativity to normalize and neutralize what is really a political move to insert the market into public education and to privatize it (Ball, 2012).

Through mainstream media (Anderson, 2007; Goldstein, 2011; Kumashiro, 2012), discourses of performativity have become part of everyday discourse. However, through their blogs, teachers challenge that discourse and power structures. The bloggers reject performativity and the power relations that it asserts. In their blogs, teachers are not only revealing what they believe to be a "social wrong" but aim to assert their power through the form of the blog (Fairclough, 2009). They position themselves as author, as expert, on how teaching is defined. In so doing, they attempt to dismantle the neoliberal logic and to present a "commons knowledge" definition of teacher quality.

Performativity's Flaws

The clearest and most common discourse strand through the blogs were arguments against the test-based measurement and evaluation aspect of performativity. Widely used throughout the country, the value-added model (VAM) of teacher evaluation is based on the percentage by which teachers raise test scores from year to year. Teacher-bloggers aimed directly at VAM and provided the counter-argument. A New York City-based ESL teacher wrote:

> A problem with VAM (value-added models) is not only that it is junk science, but that no form of it has ever been established not to be. Arguments that a new system will contain less junk than this one were impossible to verify, and preposterous in any case since there is no planned pilot period. Even more ridiculous, they anticipate the system will improve, though they have no basis whatsoever for that assumption, and wish to raise 20 percentage points of junk to 25. (NYC Educator, 2/26/12)

The problems with VAM (value-added models) have been echoed in the research (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012), but much of it has been ignored as many districts have adopted neoliberal reforms. Yet, this teacher blogger called out the use of VAM was unscientific and worthless, using language like "junk" throughout the post, rejecting the notion that VAM is somehow scientific, accurate, and definitive. One of the ways neoliberal ideas have come to be adopted is that they have been positioned as science. In that way they are seen as officially-sanctioned and as objective. She used the space to call out the false claims of science and of the inaccurate measures of the so-called objective measures.

Another teacher from Los Angeles suggests that test score measurement does not come close to capturing what she does as a teacher and that performance measures actually erase what is important in her work. She wrote:

> I got a note after I told a former student to stop doing the drugs. It seems to me, by the 'Thank you' in the note, that I made a valuable contribution to her life. But unless, after quitting the drugs, this student developed an obsession with becoming proficient in the California State Standards in English, the value that I added doesn't really matter. (One Teacher Left Behind, 3/6/12)

Borrowing the neoliberal discourse of performativity, she said that there is no "value added" in her work unless the students were test-focused. Her tone, although sarcastic, indicated that she did think she added value ("I made a valuable contribution to her life"), but she was not being rewarded for work she does and only would be if her students became "obsessed with becoming proficient" on a test. In so doing, she rejected the dominant discourse of performativity as having any value for determining her effectiveness as a teacher.

A New York based history teacher took it a bit further and flatly rejected performativity as a concept and dismissed the market principles under which it is founded:

> The scores of my students do not reflect my quality as a teacher. When I used to teach 10th grade Global History, the Regents pass rates of my students were lower. Take me out of 11th grade and put me in front of a 10th grade class and my stats would take a hit. It reminds me of the famous Casey Stengel line after he went from managing the championship-addicted New York Yankees to the hapless Mets, essentially moving him from first place to worst place. He said 'I guess I got dumb in a hurry.' Of course, he was making the point that a manager is not the deciding factor in the success of his team. He was also acknowledging that the media was going to blame him for the Mets' failure regardless of that fact....Look at the very idea of exam scores: numeric, unforgiving and cold. We have been beholden to some corporate ideal of productivity and profitability, some inexorable free market where winners win and losers lose. It is the same free market that has foreclosed on many of your homes and refuses to hire you. We need to have the ability to stand up and say to you, our principals, our elected leaders and our corporate titans that what you want for our school system is wrong. Your obsession with exam scores is just the latest wave of decay. It is already destroying art and music programs since those subjects do not get tested. It is threatening to destroy history as well. (The Assailed Teacher, 12/14/11)

In this blog, the teacher suggested that the encroachment of the market into public education was a move that must be rejected because of its failure in the private sector. He wrote that the "ideal of productivity and profitability," is a failed market construct that caused the 2008 economic crisis and massive foreclosure rates. He indicated that the using the market as a model in education would create a system that is "unforgiving and cold" that has "winners and losers," and suggests that teachers take action, that they "stand up to elected leaders and corporate titans." Through this set of "discourse fragments" (Wodak &Meyer, p. 46) the blogger argued that the paradigm of performativity expressed to us through a logic of "productivity and profitability" is not only a misguided strategy but is inappropriate for public education which is not cold, is not about "winners and losers."

He further argued that public school educators stand up to neoliberals who have conceived of the discourse of performativity in order to reject it, trying to point out that neoliberalism is in direct contrast to what public education should be. This author implied that

public education is welcoming, serves everyone, and does not see winning as its ultimate goal. He saw that teachers and students do not benefit from a neoliberal system, and that market approaches are actually destructive and must be eliminated. Unlike some of the other bloggers, he used his blog space to call others to action or what Lievrouw calls "mediated mobilization," using social media to organize others to act (Lievrouw, 2011). Teachers needed to do more than just write about neoliberalism, and the need to "stand up" and to "name" what is wrong and to reclaim public education.

Marginalized Conditions, Irrelevant factors, and Arbitrary Decisions

Another area in which teacher bloggers have rejected notions of performativity has been around the challenging work conditions public school teachers endure. For decades neoliberal policies have divested from public education, especially in urban areas (Lipman & Hursh, 2008), and now blame teachers for poor student performance. Neoliberal policies, practices, and discourses have ignored physical conditions of schools and classrooms as a factor contributing to teacher or student performance. Mainstream media has shown teachers who raise issues of conditions as making excuses for their own poor performance (i.e., films such as *Waiting for Superman, Won't Back Down*). The blogs surfaced physical conditions of schools as a counter to the neoliberal discourse on schools and teaching and serve as a counter-narrative to what is going on in teaching.

As this post suggests, the physical conditions of the classroom precede any other conditions, and make the notion of performativity absurd:

> 'We have a visitor,' said the department chair, pointing at the ceiling. I looked up and saw a pigeon perched on pipes near the ceiling. Beneath it was an empty table with bird droppings on it. The five students who had previously been at the table were now clumped with five other students at a table on the other side of the room laughing and pointing at the pigeon. I looked at Rosie and knew exactly what had happened. The department chair offered a sincere apology, wished me good luck, and walked back out into the hallway. This time Enrique ducked and came back up with a smile. Preferring to teach and worry about the pigeon after class, I calmed the class down and convinced them they could still learn even with the banging, the heat, the hair in Enrique's face, the pigeon, the giggling with Rosie, and a frustrated and exhausted teacher. I yelled the rest of my instruction across the room over the noise of the heater. On the plus side, the window was open, so I wasn't sweating as profusely. Students strained to hear me during instruction, and wore looks of agony and frustration as we moved into the work period. They complained of being unable to concentrate. But many worked hard to write something down in their second language with the banging, the heat, the hair, the pigeon, the giggling, and the frustrated and exhausted teacher. When the bell rang, I collected their papers and stuffed them into my backpack in a hurry to get to my next classroom. By the end of the day, the pigeon had escaped unharmed. The students, I'm not so sure. (An Urban Teacher's Education 1/26/12)

In this post, the teacher made visible the invisible the physical conditions of classrooms. Using language like "unable to concentrate," "agony," "frustrated and exhausted teacher," the blogger surfaces issues that are not accounted for within the paradigm of performativity. This teacher argued that students may be "harmed" under a system which ignores the physical conditions of

classrooms by privileging test scores. Under a neoliberal paradigm, physical conditions, emotions, and classroom dynamics are to be ignored and overcome by a successful teacher carries on despite conditions around him/her, preparing students for tests and reaching for incentives and rewards. By exposing the deleterious conditions, this blog post presented a counter-narrative about the conditions of classrooms that neoliberal discourse excludes. The "commons knowledge" that the teacher bloggers created are built upon these counter-narratives (Lievrouw, 2011).

Rejecting Competition and Privatization

Another teacher raised a series of questions that convey the problem with the neoliberal approach to teaching, which inevitably leads to firing teachers. This series of questions conveyed the importance of conditions that teachers work within and how they go unaccounted for under a paradigm of performativity. This made her very skeptical of neoliberal approaches to teaching:

> Do you fire the fifth grade teacher who took on the inclusion classroom with 10 children with learning or behavior problems? Do you fire the kindergarten teacher whose students had never been to school before? Do you fire the 3rd grade teacher whose students had had a string of subs the entire year before and were completely out of control? Do you fire the special ed teacher whose students do not make progress as quickly as their peers? And what do you do with the 1st year teacher who is still learning her trade, is she to be fired because she hasn't had time to improve? What about the art teacher? How do you judge her work? (Ms. Katie's Ramblings, 12/5/11)

In her series of "do you fire" questions, this blogger rejected the gaze that keeps the idea of performativity in place. She showed that there is no neutrality and no order to performativity by pointing out a host of conditions outside of school that impact teachers every day, but that cannot be measured ("students who had never been to school," "string of subs," "little time to improve"). In a system of performativity, these conditions are ignored, and data points like test scores and other measures are privileged so that the decision to fire teachers appears objective. In reality, firing further divests in the public school system making it vulnerable to privatization.

Another teacher takes on individualism, another central tenet of performativity, and explained:

> I thought I would be given credit for going to conferences like the National Council of Teachers of English or for running my study hall. None of this has occurred, making the contract a failure... Were we to assume that 90% or 94% of Baltimore's teachers - whose pay won't go up quickly - were ineffective? We don't need a star system. We need to continue working together as equals, helping each other to best serve our students' educational needs. (Epiphany in Baltimore, 12/1/11)

This teacher rejected the incentive system ("we don't need a star system"), a key feature of performativity. Rather, she suggested that teachers need to work collectively ("as equals") instead of individually and in competition. Many bloggers, like this one, rejected the paradigm on which neoliberalism and performativity are premised. They saw the incentive system for what it is. Far from neutral, it is a system that claims to reward hard-working individuals but in reality is a system that controls individual teachers by making them fear what might happen if they do

not strive for the rewards of competition. By expressing solidarity with co-workers, this blogger undermined that idea of individualism and attempts to reclaim the perspective and approach of labor unions, to surface what Foucault has called "subjugated knowledges" (Gordon, 1980).

Additionally, teacher bloggers exposed the thinly veiled attempt at privatization behind the discourse of performativity and rejected that as well. As one Los Angeles teacher described:

> This is the first time in my 16-year teaching career at LAUSD that I've EVER been asked my opinion. EVER. You'd think after using the 'Sink or Swim Method of Creating Successful Teachers' they might ask about my mad teaching skills but, sadly, I've learned, they don't care. Instead, I was made to attend professional development meetings where poorly researched ideas about small learning communities were forced on me. At the time, I wasn't sure why the LAUSD spent all those years implementing an idea that no one seemed to believe in, but now I know that in doing so, they received hundreds of millions of dollars from the Gates Foundation. (One Teacher Left Behind, 5/1/12)

This blogger argued that the system privileges knowledge of private funders, not her experience and knowledge. In this way, the teacher contributed another key element to "commons knowledge" of teaching (Lievrouw, 2011). By writing about her long career (relatively speaking), she conveyed that she had experience in the field. Yet, she had never been asked "EVER," which she says twice, her opinion. She explained that her experience does not count in a paradigm that only values test-score improvement, and that only knowledge of the privatizers, the funders counts. Indeed in a neoliberal system, certain knowledge is privileged. She argued that experience is devalued in the school system in which she worked and conveyed a sense that ("sadly") a teacher's knowledge is worthless. Teacher knowledge, a subjugated knowledge (Gordon, 1980), is marginalized in a system of performativity. Neither experience, local knowledge, nor community history are pieces of data that will support a system premised on competition and individualism, and therefore is irrelevant.

Toward a Commons Knowledge

Throughout the blogs, teachers began to assert a "commons knowledge" of what teaching should be by enumerating the practices that teachers engage in that are unmeasurable. As California teachers writing on a group blog put forth, relationship-building, not testing, was the most valuable work teachers do:

> After all, we're in the learning business. With experience comes not only time to learn more content and more pedagogy, but also to learn more about children, psychology and brain neurology, about working effectively with peers, administrators, and the community. Think of other professions, and let me know if you know of any where experience isn't valued. I talk to students differently now than I did ten years ago. I know more about when and how to listen rather than talk, when and how to allow students to work out their own problems, when and how to step in to provide essential support. I relate to students differently, with a clearer sense of what is essential, what is non-negotiable, and what situations call for more flexibility or creative approaches. I relate to parents, administrators, and community members in different ways now than I did ten years ago, with a greater understanding of what we can do for each other, and how to work together

> effectively. My ability to connect with students, to read them and help them in school and in life, *may not be measurable by any standardized measure.* (Interact ∫teacher, 4/20/12)

This blog asserted a different paradigm than that of "performativity." These bloggers put forth the idea that experience is central to quality teaching. Experience is not what will get the curriculum across better, but experience will enable them to "listen," "to allow students to work out problems," and "to relate to parents, administrators, and community members." This was quite a different paradigm than what is put forth by the notion of performativity. They advocated for relationship-building, a counter to neoliberal notions of performativity. It also placed power in the hands of teachers, parents, and students rather than in the hands of administrators, district representatives, and state auditors that all use measurement data to evaluate the performance of teachers. By putting relationships at the center, as these bloggers argued, teaching is redefined as unmeasurable but not easily controlled easily by those in power.

The blogs suggested that there is meaning being derived for teachers outside of test scores, and through the blogs teachers began to suggest an alternative paradigm based on relationships, which cannot be quantified or measured. As the teachers wrote their blogs, they explained the flaws in performativity: test-driven accountability and measurement of teacher quality (Ball, 2012). In so doing, these teachers tried to confront a wide-reaching power structure that upholds marketplace as the paradigm for private and public sector work. Moreover, they presented a differing ideological view of teacher quality through social media, offering the potential to rally people to confront neoliberal discourses and structures (Lievrouw, 2011; Carty, 2011).

Discussion: Toward a Commons Knowledge on Teaching

Commons knowledge is a genre that allows everyday people to challenge so-called expert, official, and/or institutional knowledge. By making the everyday people experts, they can produce their own knowledge to which the public can access. It does not need to be purchased, and one need not be a member of an institution to get it (Lievrouw, 2011). Lievrouw calls commons knowledge both alternative and activist (p. 193). It presents an alternative to establishment institutions of knowledge and it allows for anyone to emerge as an expert, upending the conventional notions of whose knowledge counts.

Through their blogs, teachers present their ideas as "local experts." The blogs serve as spaces for teachers to offer counter-narratives, to surface subjugated knowledges, and to advance alternatives to the neoliberal logic of performativity. Foucault has said, "Human freedom is to never accept anything as definitive, untouchable, obvious, or immobile," (Bess, 1980, p.1). These bloggers exercise their freedom by questioning and pushing back on the "common sense" of neoliberal discourse and ideology.

Teacher bloggers have put themselves out there for the world to see, sometimes putting themselves at risk, as they have faced challenges and attempts to marginalize and silence them. As one blogger wrote in a personal email, "I have intentionally used my blog to organize other teachers and activists, but I received an extraordinarily bad evaluation from my principal because of my blog." Teacher bloggers have all had to weigh the costs of speaking out. Jose Vilson, a New York City teacher blogger, has a quote on his blog by KRS One "It's not about a salary, it's about reality," (thejosevilson.com) which suggests that he has thought hard about the

consequences, but has decided that the consequences of not speaking out are far worse than the consequences of doing so.

The power of the blogs should not be overstated, however. The authors of these blogs were particularly disgruntled with the ways in which teaching was being redefined around them, and were not representative of all teachers. Therefore, there are limits to the conclusions that can be drawn around their power to re-frame discourse. As Lievrouw argues, though, social media has the potential to unleash activism (Lievrouw, 2011). The blogs in this study have followers and enough interest that they can begin to contribute toward activism that is already happening outside of the realm of social media. The Chicago teachers strike of 2012, for example, and organizing that has followed provides an opportunity for bloggers to not only redefine discourses, but to engage in "participatory journalism" which Lievrouw argues is a critical outlet for activists to have their stories told and to reach people that have not been organized yet (Lievrouw, 2011). Much more research is needed to understand how social media is being used for activism and how social media may be influencing public opinion or impacting new social movements.

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