

Teacher Education in Canada and Denmark in an Era of ‘Neutrality’

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...without conflict and division, a pluralist democratic politics would be impossible. (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xvii).

Words are never ‘only words’; they matter because they define the contours of what we can do. (Zizek, 2008a, p. 3).

Introduction

Teacher education prepares teachers to fit into existing norms and structures of profession, schooling and society; it plays an integrating rather than a radicalizing role whereby dominant political sensibilities and habitual patterns of inference are reproduced (Britzman, 2003; Phelan, 2001; Lortie, 1975). It is largely assumed that democracy takes the form of the state and that the role of state-funded schooling and teachers is the production of citizens for the state. Little effort is made in initial teacher education to engage the political by complicating these assumptions or by questioning the historical significance of ideological conflict for social and educational policy (Ranciere, 2010; Zizek, 2009). As such, teacher education is complicit in concealing society’s differences, naturalizing political regimes of truth, and producing teachers in keeping with state interests.

Historically, two discourses – idealism and realism – have structured the social order, public schooling and teacher education, creating *two* distinct forms of “consensus democracy” in both Canada and Denmark (Newman, 2007, p. 146). Consensus democracy presents itself as post-ideological and it exists when one perspective has become so deeply entrenched that it has become orthodoxy for all on the political spectrum (Newman, 2007). The discourse of idealism is associated with the social democratic welfare state while the discourse of realism underpins the neo-liberal competition state. While welfarism promotes collectivism, solidarity (Briggs, 1961/2009), and equality, neo-liberalism promotes individualism, competition, and inequality (Cerny, 1997). The goal of welfarism, based on the ideal of ‘all the best to all’, is to maintain *the social order* and promote human and social rights in the larger society (integrating educational questions with economic, social, environmental and political questions). State schooling and teachers’ colleges are positioned as “responsible for ... securing the social promotion of society and eradicating the sources of evil, poverty and oppression which prevent it from corresponding to its idea” (Donzelot, 1988, p. 424). The goals of neo-liberalism are concerned with maintaining *the economic status quo*, defending free-market capitalism by making it more effective in terms of global competition (Moore, 2015; Pedersen, 2011). As such, educational relations are



cast in terms of “value, competitive individualism and market exchange” (Moore, 2015, p. 209) and the production of exploitative identities for students (i.e. self-stylized, test score-driven, entrepreneurial ‘learners’ that abuse their own talents to do well within the system) is the singular preoccupation. There is little doubt that the discourse of realism has achieved *hegemony* in both national contexts. As educational relations are increasingly cast in terms of commodification, their political dimension, as extensions of the power of capital, becomes increasingly obscured.

The grand seductions of realism and idealism need to be understood if we are to appreciate the complicity of teacher education with political regimes of truth and the (ab)use of teacher education as a neutralizing agent of “consensus democracy” (Newman, 2007, p. 150). In what follows we trace the rise of welfarism and neo-liberalism in both Canada and Denmark. We illustrate the entanglements of teacher education (i.e. teacher subjectification) with the currently hegemonic rule of neo-liberalism. And, we ask (we hope not naively!) if teacher education could play a *radicalizing role* rather than have its efforts recuperated or neutralized by the state? Could teacher education provide a space for revealing and engaging political difference, for producing conditions in which different modes of teacher subjectivity are possible (other than those planned for them by the state), and for imagining new social-political worlds? We argue that if teacher education is to be more than a tool for “consensus democracy” (Newman, 2007, p. 150), it has to reject an understanding of democracy as a form of the state sovereignty and promote “an ethic of contestability” that remains open to *difference* and *division* (Newman, 2007, p. 139).

Understanding the political: Beyond consensus toward radical democracy

We turn to the work of Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to help us interrogate the basic assumptions of consensus democracy, and to wonder about the possibilities of embracing democracy in terms of *agonistic pluralism* – the necessary existence of dispute and disagreement about contested ideological views.

While the political reveals a society’s difference to itself (Rancière, 2010), politics is that “ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seeks to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflicting, since they are affected by the dimension of the political” (Mouffe, 2013, p. 2-3). Every kind of social order is ‘hegemonic’ because it is the product of ‘hegemonic practices’ aimed at the creation of social institutions and the establishment of order “in a context of contingency” (p. 2). As such, every order (and every attempt at consensus) is the expression of a particular configuration of power relations; things could be otherwise and “every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities” (p. 2).

The universality that is inherent in any hegemony results from the interrelationships between “logics of difference and logics of equivalence” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xiii). Social actors occupy differential positions within the discourses that constitute the social fabric. As such they are all “particularities.” However, there are “social antagonisms” that create “internal frontiers” within society (p. xiii). Through oppressive forces, for instance, a set of particularities establishes relations of equivalences between themselves; “the relation, by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it,” is what Laclau and Mouffe call “a hegemonic relation” (p. xiii). The result is a “contaminated” universality, which “lives in this unresolvable tension between universality and particularity”; that said, the hegemonic universality does not last forever as it is always reversible (p. xiii).

Universality is a *political* universality and is dependent on the internal boundaries within society. The argument follows that

Antagonisms are not objective relations, but relations, which reveal the limits of all objectivity. Society is constituted around these limits, and they are antagonistic limits ... conceived literally.... This is why we conceive of the political not as a superstructure but as having the status of an *ontology of the social* (p. xiv)

In these sense, social division is inherent to the very possibility of a (democratic) politics. All forces are fighting for hegemony and the possibility of challenge to the dominant regime is ever present. The political, according to Mouffe (2013), refers to this aspect of antagonism that can take various forms and *cannot* be eliminated or overcome. This suggests that *antagonism* is inherent to all societies; it is, at the same time, the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of every identity. “Proper political questions,” she writes, “always involve decisions that require making a choice between conflicting alternatives” (p. 3).

Antagonism would foreclose any possibility of “a final reconciliation, of any kind of rational consensus, of a fully inclusive ‘we’” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xvii). Any form of consensus is the result of a hegemonic articulation, “and that it always has an ‘outside’ that impedes its full realization” (p. xviii).

For us, a non-exclusive public sphere of rational argument is a conceptual impossibility. Conflict and division, in our view, are neither disturbances that unfortunately cannot be eliminated nor empirical impediments that render impossible the full realization of a harmony that we cannot attain because we will never be able to leave our particularities completely aside in order to act in accordance with our rational self – a harmony which should nonetheless constitute the idea towards which we strive. Indeed, we maintain that without conflict and division, a pluralist democratic politics would be impossible (p. xvii).

The challenge is how to establish an *us/them* distinction, which for Mouffe (2013) is constitutive of politics, in a way that is compatible with the recognition of pluralism. The aim of democratic politics is to transform antagonism (struggle between enemies) into agonism (struggle among adversaries) (p. 7). Agonistic politics asserts that *all* ideas deserve to be heard and defended. So while adversaries (e.g., advocates for a welfare vs. competition state) may disagree vehemently about what constitutes a good education or the good of education, both must agree in the importance of “the agonistic struggle” as the very condition of a living democracy within and beyond the profession (Clarke & Phelan, Forthcoming).

Following Laclau and Mouffe (2001), therefore, it seems that if democracy is to exist that conflict must be created and sustained. However, how do antagonisms emerge? What are the conditions that need to be in place or at play? A brief history of how the once hegemonic welfare state gave way to the neo-liberal hegemony of the competition state in two western states is illustrative in this regard.

Antagonistic relations: Welfarism and Neo-liberalism

The term ‘welfare state’ is of relatively recent origin and was apparently first used in the English language in a book from 1941 written by William Temple (Moscovitch, 2006). From the beginning of the 1960s, the term was used more systematically to describe a range of western state activities to modify the play of the market forces by guaranteeing families and individuals a minimum income regardless of market value and by developing a social system where: “all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standards available in relation to a certain agreed range of social services” (Briggs, 1961/2009, p. 228). ‘All the best to all’ was the idealistic welfare state ethos. Public professions, it was believed, should and could realize this ethos.

Within the welfare state discourse, professions are met with high expectations and are seen as a positive ‘nodal point’ of creating a welfare state with equality of opportunity for ‘all citizens’ (see Parsons, 1968; 1978). The professions serve to define what is normal/right based on the values institutionalized in society (Richardson, 1997, p. 635). Rather than a race-to-the-top discourse, the school is understood using keywords as democracy, social community, social responsibility, public interest, solidarity, justice and equality (Telhaug, Mediås and Aasen, 2006; Arnesen and Lundahl 2006; Cerny, 1997). The underlying rationality behind these words is based on an assumption of *social consensus* and *neutrality* ‘free’ from antagonisms, contradictions, and ambivalences.

The welfare discourse was heavily criticized during the 1970s and 1980s. The public professions were criticised for not been able live up to the increasing expectations and the accelerating world, where today’s solutions are ‘antiquated’ tomorrow and they were criticised for social and professional closure in their striving for wealth, power and status (Abbot, 1988). The economic burden of the professions was also criticised. In 1981 the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warned that the welfare state faced a financial crisis, which could lead to economic or moral bankruptcy of the state (Fujimura, 2000; Andersen, 1997). During the 1990s globalization became a central concept to describe new challenges and changes in the western welfare societies (Giddens, 1990). Globalization brought about major changes in society and these changes also produced changes in human relationships, which can be described as a move *from* community (being long lasting) *to* association (characterized as open and with flexible structures). Within the understanding of society as community, knowledge was cultural and changed slowly, and therefore it could be regarded as truth (Jarvis, 2007: 37). Globalization brought about a time where no fixed social knowledge existed. Confidence in what we can call *idealism* or in great narratives/ethos’ had declined (Lyotard, 1984; Rorty, 1989; Telhaug; Mediås and Aasen, 2006).

Using two of Tönnies central concepts, Cerny argues that we can understand the above transformation as an erosion of the underlying bond/rationality (Gemeinschaft) to a pragmatic association for common ends (Gesellschaft). The combination of the economic institution and information technology points us to the location of global power. The welfare state project became ‘reformulated’ in terms of marketization and competitiveness terms, which are assumed to mirror the real ‘natural’ order (Cerny, 1997; Rorty, 1979).

If neo-liberalism is understood as a doctrine or ideology it is both anti-state and anti-bureaucracy and relies on Adam Smith’s classic economic dictum that the ‘invisible hand’ will regulate the market without interference. If we look at neo-liberalism as a set of governmental practices, as we do here, we are not witnesses to a decline of the state (Peters, 2009). Instead the state is expected – in the name of *necessity* – to install market norms in

public institutions (Hood, 1991). The state must ensure that these institutions do market in ‘the right competitive way’. The type of neo-liberalism we are confronted with today has not abandoned the belief in reason; however, it is another type of reason that is at stake. Instead of an ‘idealism’, which provided the starting point for the welfare state project, today’s competition state is based on ‘realism’. Here, ‘real reason’ is essential and instrumental; it is founded on ‘objective’ facts in the form of numbers, statistics, standards, evidence-based (evaluation) methods and quantitative conclusions (Lakoff, 2009; Taubman, 2009; Rüsselbæk Hansen and Qvortrup 2013).

Neo-liberalism as the pervasive hegemony in Western societies has had a profound impact on politics generally and the identity of the Left specifically. An excellent example of this is Britain’s ‘third way’ that poses as a non-partisan consensus/common sense. The argument is that the demise of Communism, the onset of globalization and the social transformation associated with information society has rendered Right/Left politics and their associated antagonisms obsolete (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). This state of affairs was also evident in 2013 in Denmark in the context of a teachers’ lockout where even the Leftist parties sided with the government against the teachers’ organization. A politics without frontiers – a win-win politics where solutions could favour everyone in society – suggests that political problems are technical problems (e.g. crisis in literacy and numeracy; cost of education too high for the taxpayer) and no longer structured around social division.

Similarly, tight fiscal constraints faced by governments are the only realistic possibility in a globalized world wherein global markets disallow any deviation from neo-liberal orthodoxy. The situation is posited as a historical *necessity* rather than the result of “a conjectural state of affairs” ... “there are no more left-wing or right-wing economic policies, only good and bad ones” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xvi). In education, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores are taken as Truth – irrefutable and incontestable – an objective ground of consensus upon which educational reform can be based and justified. Detached from their political dimension they become a *fate* and a *fantasy* (vs. a particular configuration of power relations) to which we must all submit (Zizek 2008b).

To resist the hegemony of neo-liberalism and to deepen and extend the democratic revolution, one could argue, involves the desacralization of consensus, the reassertion of frontiers between Left and Right, and the refusal to move to the Centre. In this way, liberal democracies with their constitutive values of liberty and equality for all are maintained and “the system of power which redefines and limits the operation of those values” is overturned (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xv).

It is clear that democracy is *not* a simple competition among different interests taking place on neutral terrain; the structure of power relations that configure and position those interests rendering some more potent than others cannot be ignored; neither can the possibility of establishing a new hegemony. *How are the teaching profession and teacher education in Canada and Denmark implicated in this hegemonic neo-liberal social order?*

Consensual Politics and the Teaching Profession in Canada and Denmark

Both the Canadian and the Danish political contexts might be described in terms of a series of complex, contradictory antagonistic ideas. Welfarism enforces the democratic rights of all citizens, including the protection of minorities in the spirit of pluralism, while economic neo-liberalism, emphasizing individual choice, property rights, and ‘free’ governmental controlled market, is installed in our respective education systems by the state.



British Columbia, Canada

The battle between these two forms of liberalism at the provincial level in Canada (which is where jurisdiction over Education resides) is reflected in recent policy reform. On the one hand, we witness an increasing emphasis on “student and parental choice, individual freedoms, competition, and accountability” and on the other hand, “a push from teacher education institutions and the profession itself for more autonomy and respect, with a desire for greater professionalization and self-regulation” (Walker & von Bergmann, 2013, p. 87). In the Canadian province of British Columbia, for example, self-regulation takes the form of the British Columbia Teachers’ Council, which receives its mandate from the Teachers Act and is responsible for establishing *standards* for teachers in the areas of teacher education, certification, conduct and competence (<http://www.bcteacherregulation.ca/AboutUs/Council.aspx>).

However, British Columbia has signed on to the Agreement for Internal Trade (AIT) - a labour mobility agreement across provinces; in this regard, Henley and Young (2009) fear a significant surrender of provincial jurisdiction in teacher education policy due to AIT, given the lack of inclusion of a cross-section of educational stakeholders and the lack of debate (Walker & von Bergmann, 2013).

If the definition of professionalism is related to concepts like professional ‘freedom’, autonomy, codes of ethics, co-determination and self-regulation (Hargreaves 2000; Carr, 2000; Ball 2003; Pinar 2012), one can say that the rhetoric of *professionalization* is evident in policy. (See: British Columbia’s Standards for the Education, Competence and Conduct of Teachers, 2004). There is at the same time a move towards *deprofessionalization* by weakening teachers unions (British Columbia Teachers Federation – BCTF) and collective bargaining processes (Walker & von Bergmann, 2013). Recently, a bill attempting to reduce the power of school boards and to mandate particular forms of professional development for teachers was introduced in British Columbia. Such attempts at centralization has already begun in another western Canadian province, Alberta, where there is far less professional self-regulation in the face of government regulation of teacher education including the promotion of a competency-based professionalism, the articulation of 17 professional standards (for beginning teachers; 11 for certified teachers), and the monitoring of teachers’ professional development activities. In both British Columbia and Alberta, regimes of accountability exist in the forms of standardized testing and representation in school league tables (a form of public shaming). The upshot of many of these policies is that they fuel the anxieties of prospective teachers and their teacher educators about the achievement of standards, replacing concerns about the ethical-political dimensions of teaching with strictly technical concerns.

Antagonistic relations at the provincial level was evident recently in the protracted teachers’ strike in the province of British Columbia. Neo-liberal government efforts to increase funding to private education (since 1970s), to privatize public education (via international fee-paying students) and to reduce funding to public education both in the form of teacher salaries (lower than the majority of provinces) and in the provision of working conditions related to class size and composition (refusing the Supreme Court of B.C. ruling that the latter must legally be part of the teachers’ collective bargaining as they constitute teachers’ work conditions) led to a four month teacher strike. The neo-liberal education agenda is clearly outlined in Harris & Manning’s (2005) polemic titled, “Caring for Canadians in a Canada Strong and Free”. This agenda is coming increasingly into focus



in British Columbia with standardized testing regimes. The social liberalism of Canadians was evident, however, in BC public opinion about the teachers' strike where 2-1 members of the public supported the teachers.

Denmark

The jurisdiction over Education in Denmark resides not as in Canada at the provincial level, but at the national level and since 1789, it has been government-controlled. The teacher education programme for primary and lower secondary levels are institutionally situated at one of the seven university colleges in Denmark and not at the universities (Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education, 2013). Since the beginning of the 1990s, teacher education has been reformed several times. This 'reform desire' relates to the circumstance that The International Association for Educational Achievement in the beginning of the 1990s revealed that the Danish students in primary school did not live up to the national expectations. This was a shock for the politicians and the public and was a springboard for questioning the welfare inspired school pedagogy, which was supposed to "facilitate social equality and access unexploited intellectual reserves" and "secure the reproduction of values" (Schmidt, 2011, p. 311-312). Today, a neo-liberal discourse of realism has gained hegemony as evidenced in heightened managerialism and evidence-based evaluation at the school level and competency-based teacher education at the tertiary level.

While the 'traditional' welfare state rhetoric of *professionalization* continues to be evident in teacher education policies in Denmark, teacher education is increasingly being regarded as a *nodal point* for the realization of political ambitions (Danish Ministry of Education, 2013a). The national teacher education program states that the teacher candidate must develop "fundamental teaching competences needed to ensure pupils' learning, development and well-being". It points out that the teacher candidate must "implement the mission statement of the Danish public school system", "develop professional ethics", and be able "to deal with complex challenges within the teaching profession in the context of cultural, value-based and religious pluralism" (Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education, 2013, p. 1). Educational policy continues to reflect the belief that teacher autonomy and self-regulation is needed if an open and inclusive school that creates whole persons should be realized (Danish Ministry of Education, 2014). In recent years, however, teachers have also been positioned as enemies of the state and relegated to a passive role so as to curtail their influence; such measures have contributed to a strong sense of *deprofessionalization* among teachers.

This state of affairs became clear with the 2013 School Agreement between the Danish Government and all the other parties (except one) in the parliament. The agreement is directed towards improvement of educational standards, measured by PISA. This means that *common educational objectives* must be clarified and simplified in terms of students' learning outcomes" (Danish Ministry of Education 2013b, p. 10-11). The school principal is positioned as the one facilitating "the teachers' daily work with planning, execution and evaluation of the teaching" (p. 11) and regulating teachers' working hours, preparation time and conditions towards the end of high test scores. With the new agreement, the school principal has become a key organizing principle for how schools should be organized (Serpieri and Grimaldi, 2014; Rüsselbæk Hansen, Beck & Bøje, 2014).

However, the teachers did not want to abandon the former principles upon which their working hours were regulated and they wished to maintain their right to a specific

length of preparation time. The Government dismissed this right. Therefore, about 44,000 members of the Danish Union of Teachers were locked out for almost four weeks in April 2013 (Witcombe 2013; Wandall 2013). Such labour action on the part of teachers highlighted competing ideological positions and introduced antagonistic relations to the educational scene. The struggle was quickly silenced by a consensus among Danish political parties to lock out the teachers; in Mouffe's (2013) terms, what could have been a struggle among adversaries was stymied by the government's action.

Teacher Education as Neutralizing Agent: 'Standardization' and 'Learnification'

What is clear from the foregoing analysis is that in the past two decades the teaching profession has become a key policy target and a site of strategic importance for neo-liberal policy-makers in both Canada and Denmark. Policy measures have attempted to depoliticize deep educational concerns rendering them matters of technical efficiency (Clarke, 2012). The impact of policy – teaching standards, learner outcomes – at the level of teacher education programs is clear but distinct in both jurisdictions.

British Columbia, Canada: 'Standardization'

At the policy level in British Columbia themes of accountability, competition and privatization and their associated Technologies – the market, managerialism, and performativity are increasingly in evidence (Clarke, 2012). Teaching standards continue to be impactful and teacher education programs have been compelled to induct new teachers into a “detailed mapping and scrutiny of their work” (Clarke & Moore, 2013, p. 488). To this end, teaching standards are offered as *descriptions of* the kinds of knowledge, skills, and attributes of *any* competent teacher. Teacher educators are simply left to the management of policy implications at the programmatic level – how do institutions keep sufficient records of all students graduated in the event of periodic audits; witness, for example, the arrival of the standards-driven portfolio as a prominent feature of assessment in teacher education (Wilson-Strong & Sanford, 2013); and, the explicit linking of course syllabi in teacher education programs to various teaching standards. Understandably, teacher candidates are keen to present themselves as ‘fitting’ with the standards, thereby adopting “a stable and positive identity obtained through identification with an existing socio-political order” (Biesta, 2011, p. 145). Moreover, the teaching standards invite teacher candidates to *individualize* their difficulty in teaching rather than critique the conditions of teachers' work. Teacher educators do little to uncover the standards' underlying political commitments (education as epiphenomenal to the economy); representations of the teacher or teaching appear natural and irrefutable rather than “the means for defining the boundaries of the educational field and for structuring relations of power within it” (Nespor & Barber, 1994, p. 5). There is a sense of self-evident consensus and little overt concern about how they impact the formation of teachers' intellectual and political freedom. To counter this trend the Deans of Faculties of Education in Canada have been pro-active in creating the Pan-Canadian Teacher Education Accord that outlines key principles of “effective initial teacher education” (Collins & Tierney, 2010, p. 74), stating that, among other things, effective teacher education:

- demonstrates the transformative power of learning for individuals and communities;



- envisions the teacher as a professional who observes, discerns, critiques, assesses, and acts accordingly;
- encourages teachers to assume a social and political leadership role (p. 74).

Although it is difficult to assess the impact of the Pan-Canadian Teacher Education Accord in real terms, it has had the effect of introducing an alternative view to provincial mandates regarding the education of teachers.

Denmark: 'Learnification'

"Learnification" is a term coined by Gert Biesta (2009, p. 36) to describe a context of in which the discourse of learning trumps all other educational discourses. The emphasis, as such, is on a direct relation between what is taught and what is learned and the emphasis is on achievement of learning outcomes. The Danish teacher education program is regulated through *output-based* areas of competence, each constituted by a number of practice oriented skills and corresponding knowledge objectives. There is no standard curriculum defining the content of the teacher education program. The overall aim in the Danish program is described as a *three* level taxonomy of teacher competences. The graduated teacher is expected to be able 1) to reproduce and identify relevant knowledge and skills, 2) to establish connections and analyze known educational situations and challenges through the application of acquired knowledge and skills, and on the basis of this, to act in a pedagogical practice, and 3) to be capable of reflecting on and evaluating new educational situations and challenges that demand independent assessments and alternative ways of action in a pedagogical practice (Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education, 2013, p. 2). This *triadic* system demonstrates an interesting tendency: that the teacher candidate must gain qualifications related to the processes of teaching and classroom management (qualifications and competences *to teach* without any specificities related to subjects and content and strong pedagogical and general management competences). This is also seen in competence development programs where initiatives are set in motion to ensure that teachers and school principals all have the best *qualifications and competences to teach* and *to manage* the public school. Last but not least, it manifests itself in the prioritization of engaging *learning* consultants in Danish schools. This is a change in focus from former support arrangement comprising only *subject* consultant (Danish Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 23). The shift is an expression of the focus on general *learning* competences, since the goal of the learning consultants is to gather best practice examples, exemplary teaching programs, knowledge from trial- and development programs, etc. (p. 24).

Both 'standardization' and 'learnification' are emblematic of the kind of consensus rhetoric that characterizes neo-liberal policy. Each, after its own fashion, attempts to decontextualize and generalize teaching such that the particularities of time/space, subjects, and practice are rendered insignificant in the face of universal statements about the child, learning, and best practices. In a consensual world where 'we' all agree on what is best for our children and youth, only one of us is thinking. This brings us to the nub of the matter: that consensual policies both *describe* and *produce* a particular kind of teaching subject. It is here that the *differences* between Denmark and Canada become stark.

In the Canadian context the emphasis is on shaping the teacher candidate as a certain kind of 'standard-based subject' capable of acting ethically and competently *for the sake of* students' growth, development and learning (British Columbia College of Teachers,

2004). Because a direct link has not yet been made between teacher education and student performance (learning outcomes), a plurality of educational ideals can still pervade teacher education, as we have witnessed in the juxtaposition of the Pan-Canadian Teacher Education Accord and teaching standards. While faculty members in teacher education in British Columbia are instructed to identify those teaching standards ‘covered’ in their courses, there is no direct oversight in this regard other than the vague possibility of periodic audits of archived standards-driven student e-portfolios. It continues to be unclear, for example, if all teacher education institutions in the province of British Columbia ever submitted the required “Standards of Attainment Reports” to the Ministry of Education, outlining how the standards were to be achieved or their achievement assessed, when the teaching standards were first introduced. Institutions, such as the University of British Columbia, that did, continued to assert the normative, relational quality of teaching and the importance of educating for teacher judgment. As such, the ongoing, ontological process of *becoming* a teacher is underscored. In British Columbia the continuum of teacher development is recognized in the form of a provincial mentoring program for new teachers. Discourses of reflection on practice and inquiry into one’s beliefs/values – disciplinary, socio-political – prevail and serve to sideline the standards to some degree. However, the single most impactful factor is that to date public school teachers have not embraced, actually acknowledged might be more appropriate here, the teaching standards. Teacher candidates do not encounter the standards while on teaching practice and given the relative weight assigned to field experiences by teacher candidates both in terms of their learning and future employment prospects, this is not an insignificant fact.

In Denmark, however, the closed, instrumental relation between teaching standards and learner performance ensures that the singular focus in teacher education is on preparing teachers to produce mandated learning outcomes. Moreover, the context of teacher education is essentially one of accountability rather than responsibility. As demonstrated with the terms ‘that’ as opposed to ‘what’, the Danish program seems to focus on the process of learning (*that* the teacher candidates must get insight, training and ability), whereas the Canadian program pays greater attention to the product of becoming (*what* the teacher candidates must become). The risk of the Danish program is that learning processes in themselves become the criteria for success, and that the normativity of learning replaces the normativity of teaching. This risk corresponds to the problem Biesta points at when he argues that, if learning “is indeed the only language available, then teachers end up being a kind of process-managers of empty, and in themselves, directionless learning processes” (Biesta, 2012, p. 38).

In summary, in Denmark the teacher is increasingly viewed as the *means* to an end that is student learning. As such, teacher education is compelled to focus on teachers not as ends in themselves but as instruments of students’ learning. In British Columbia, Canada, the teacher is the *end* of teacher education and not yet positioned as the means to student test scores. Emphasis on the knowledge, skills and disposition of the teacher candidate persists; the teacher candidate, and not the students s/he will teach, is still the end-in-view. In Denmark, political interests have trumped educational interests; in Canada, the battle is still being waged.

Both ‘standard-based’ and ‘learning-based’ teacher identities are limited and limiting. Such pre-given identities leave little room for the teachers to reflect on their *educational* values and commitments, and the degree to which these are compromised in particular political, historical contexts. Educationally speaking, an ethos of consensus

restricts imagination about alternatives. The neo-liberal consensus and the production of specific (teacher) subjectivities has to be challenged if we want teacher education to contribute to democracy “as an ethically and constitutively open and contingent form of politics” (Newman, 2007 p. 150).

Hegemony and Agonism: Towards New Modes of Identification

Within a neo-liberal hegemony, the production of subjectivity plays a crucial role as individuals learn to commodify and exploit their ‘value’ to the system in exchange for the ‘goods’ offered by the system (e.g. access to educational institutions, social status, capital) that ultimately reproduce and sustain the system. The need to embrace teacher education, in part, as a site of resistance that undermines the social imaginary necessary for capitalist reproduction seems clear. The field of educational relations, with its emphasis on the importance of individuals (in this case, teacher candidates) achieving “singularity and social commitment” (Pinar, 2011: xi), could be one site in which the grasp of competitive individualism is undermined and resisted.

As stated at the outset of this paper, the options for teacher education in the contemporary moment include educating teachers with a view to retrieving aspects of the social democratic welfare state; or educating teachers toward a *radical democracy* that embraces the existence of conflicting ideological views and promotes *the idea of agonism* (i.e. imagining resistance in terms of agonistic intervention into the existing common sense/status quo and foster teacher education as one agonistic public space that could contribute to the development of a counter-hegemony). The intent is to contribute to “engendering new practices of living, consuming and collective appropriation of common spaces and everyday culture (Mouffe 2013, p. 87).

As acknowledged earlier, the discourse of the welfare state, not unlike that of neo-liberalism, is consensus-driven and serves to neutralize fundamental *conflicts* between ideological views such that events and their impact appear as ‘natural’ rather than political. That said, the welfare state vocabulary allows a focus on important issues related to the teaching profession such as ethics, equality, norms, values and social rights in the larger society (integrating educational questions with economic, social, environmental and political questions). Within this vocabulary, however, there is a risk that the teacher is positioned as an instrument of the welfare state and expected to adopt a monolithic and consensus driven view. The upshot is the reproduction of existing norms and the capture of teaching within the normative vocabulary.

Instead, we would rather argue for a *political vision* for teacher education: Teacher education as one nodal point where pluralism is generated and organized and where the idea of conflicting consensus can be lived; through a process of “imaginative rehearsal” of action (Dewey, 1934, in Garrison, 1997, p. 121) teacher education could become a site of disarticulation (of existing hegemony) and rearticulation (new hegemony) (See Mouffe 2013, p. 74-79). As agonistic subjects, teachers have a shared project e.g. educating students but this does not mean that they must share a common identity and the same norms. On the contrary, ongoing discussions about *who* they are and the ability to refuse *who* they ought to be can secure some sort of ‘de-subjectivation’, which can challenge the status quo, open up new ways of thinking and acting in schools (Masschelein, 2007).

Nevertheless, an agonistic political vision for teacher education also entails problems. There is a danger of instrumentalizing teacher education with a view to constructing new forms of teacher subjectivity. “The role that affect plays in the process of

identification and the role of passionate attachments in the constitution of political identities” (See Mouffe, 2013, p. 96) means that it is only through inducing emotional responses that teacher educators could be ‘effective’ in transforming prospective teachers’ consciousness. Such an approach feels a little too like ‘identity correction’ and there is a danger that teacher educators could end up conflating the political with refusal/transgression or moral condemnation rather than rendering it agonistic (based on the assumption of the hegemonic political struggle) (see Mouffe 2013, p. 99).

The *actual* question for education and teacher education is how to keep a necessary antagonism alive even while educators attempt to mediate neo-liberalism humanely in our educational institutions. The education of teachers as political adversaries, in Mouffe’s (2013) terms, involves a recognition of teacher education as a form of *critical* educational practice that keeps agonism alive, provoking dissensus and bringing to the fore alternatives repressed by the hegemony. The preparation of teachers as “teacher citizens,” (Grumet, 2010, p. 71), capable and legitimate participants in public discussion about education and policy involves revitalizing an understanding of the political – the difference between moral and political disputes, and power as constitutive of society, educational purpose and teacher identities; cultivating political emotions such as anger at injustice as well as an appreciation of the cultural politics of emotion (Ahmed, 2004); and finally, developing an awareness of the historical and contemporary political projects of the “left” and “right” as they have played out in the field of education and in a range of historical contexts (Ruitenberg, 2007).

Conclusion

To resist the hegemony of neo-liberalism and to deepen and extend the democratic revolution, one could argue, involves the desacralization of consensus and the reassertion of frontiers between Left and Right (Clark & Phelan, Forthcoming). As we have emphasized, we *do not* seek to replace neo-liberalism with welfarism. Both discourses are – as we have illustrated – problematic because they seek neutrality and consensus. We must abandon the idea of a neutral and finalized society from which all conflicts, antagonisms, and disagreements have disappeared. With Mouffe’s concept of *agonism*, we have a different starting point in teacher education. “If we understand democracy not as a form of government or a set of rules on how to live a moral life, but as a political act of subjectification” (Friedrich, Jaastad & Popkewitz, 2011, p. 60), democratic struggles and values can be maintained in teacher education and “the system of power which redefines and limits the operation of those values” is overturned (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xv).

That is why we have argued, that not only must teacher education constitute teacher identities within the socially accepted norm, paradoxically, they must *also* produce agonistic teacher subjects who are able to question who others expect them to be within this norm. In this way, it becomes possible for teachers to reflect on *what* the contemporary neo-liberal hegemony does to them and others and with what consequences. Such reflections enable teachers to see themselves as more than a *means* to taming the public role of schools via performance objectives and standardized test scores.

Our hope is that teachers, as individuals and in a range of collectives, may learn to exchange ideas, opinions and arguments, form strategic alliances (e.g., with other professions), engage in the play of antagonism, and exercise dissent both *within* and *beyond* the profession, when they see fit (Clarke & Phelan, Forthcoming). There are limits to agonism, however. It is not enough to merely unsettle things; there comes a moment when new institutions and forms of power need to be established – “the necessary moment of

closure” (Mouffe, 2013, p. 15). While ethical discourse (within the field of education) might be able to avoid this moment, political discourse cannot. Acknowledging the constitutive character of social division, Mouffe (2013) argues against the possibility of a final reconciliation between adversaries. The multiplicity that is the people, or indeed the profession, must remain divided rather than just simply multiple.

Notes

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