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'Cruel optimism': Teacher attachment to professionalism in an era of performativity

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Abstract
This paper provides a critical exploration of the way teachers' attachment to notions of professionalism may facilitate a process whereby teachers find themselves obliged to enact centralised and local education policies that they do not believe in but are required to implement. The paper argues that professionalism involves an entanglement of (past) egalitarian and (present) performative discourses and that the remainders of the former facilitate the enactment of the latter. The paper draws on Berlant's notion of cruel optimism to help understand this process, whereby teachers' attachment to professionalism may assist them in undermining the very values they believe it embodies.

Keywords: Education policy, politics, teacher professionalism, discourse, attachment

Background and rationale

Although this paper is essentially theoretical in nature, it has emerged from several research studies undertaken by the authors, along with many years' experience working with beginning teachers and teachers on professional development courses in the UK and Australia. In particular, it is informed by an earlier UK interview-based study of seventy qualified teachers' understandings of the construction of professional identities (Moore *et al*, 2002; Moore, George & Halpin, 2002), along with an ongoing interview- and observation-based study of thirty teachers across five UK schools exploring the nature and role of affect in the ways in which teachers respond to and enact mandated education policy (Moore & Clarke, 2015). Each of these studies has included asking respondents what brought them into teaching in the first place, what tensions, if any, they may have experienced between their own views and motivations and the various mandated requirements of the job, and, where such tensions have existed, how they have experienced and managed them. In line with the earlier study, our current research suggests that while many teachers find no substantial difference between their own preferred classroom practices and those embedded within central policy directives, a significant number do experience such tensions, often describing these as serious and/or troubling (see also Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005).

It is too soon to draw any firm conclusions from our current study. However, we have sufficient data to suggest, provisionally, a broad categorisation of stances, comprising:

- teachers who are broadly supportive of central education policy (policy understood, in this paper, as essentially neoliberal in nature);

- teachers who substantially reject or resist key aspects of central policy (for example, a perceived over-emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy, or output-based measures of successful teaching and learning, or the prescribed content of the national curriculum), and who actively seek out spaces and opportunities within practice in which alternative pedagogies can flourish without detriment to students;

- teachers who are unhappy with key aspects of central policy but feel they have no option other than to go along with it, often expressing a professional imperative to ensure that their students succeed within a given system even though they may personally feel the system is unfair, misguided or potentially harmful.

It is essentially the needs and experiences of this last group - identified here as 'resistant teachers' - on whom this current paper focuses, seeking to move toward a theory of the role of affect in the (reluctant) acceptance of public policy as it is recontextualised in school and classroom practice. In particular, we are concerned to explore not just the ways in which

teachers may sometimes find themselves having to do things they do not believe in, but to the ways in which they may also invest in (or 'attach to') certain ideas which they might previously have been opposed to and which they might potentially oppose again in the future – effectively becoming the 'bearers' of those ideas as they assume responsibility for their implementation in practice. This analysis is offered in a spirit that does not blame teachers or depict them as the dupes or victims of free-market capitalism and neoliberal education policy, but rather seeks to offer support and understanding in unpacking the affective mechanisms involved in such apparently internally contradictory practices. As Sameshima argues: 'The teaching profession is dramatically strengthened when teachers understand who they are, know how their experiences have shaped their ideologies, and find and acknowledge their place of contribution in the broader context of the educational setting' (Sameshima 2008, p. 34).

Implementing public policy locally: compliance, resistance and affect

We begin with an understanding, based both on our own research and that of others in the field (e.g. OECD, 2005; Rots *et al*, 2012; Wilkins *et al*, 2012), that teachers in general, both in the UK and elsewhere, are driven to their chosen profession by a desire to help and do their best for young learners - even though they might not share the same idea as how best to go about this, or agree on *central government's* apparent views on what is best for young learners or how best to bring it about. Understandably and laudably, teachers attempt to instil in children - indeed, 'in every child', as the discourse has it - a belief that they can succeed just as well as anyone else in the socio-economic world they inhabit, hoping that in the process they might be contributing to a wider project of bringing about a fairer, more socially just world. What happens, however, when teachers recognise at some level that the socio-economic system itself depends on *in*equality: i.e. that every child might matter, but only in the sense that every child contributes to and perpetuates an enduringly and (in the case of capitalism) necessarily inequitable system? In reality, is it possible for every child to succeed equally as an adult in terms of social status and income? Is that really how the system works?

This not infrequent tension between having to do what one is told and wanting to put into practice what one believes in and thinks to be in the best interests of one's students raises a number of important issues for us in the policy context. In particular:

- In buying in to what sounds like a humanist, egalitarian agenda of helping every individual student and perpetuating an 'every child can succeed equally' discourse,

are teachers (including those who may be generally supportive of central policy) unwittingly and ironically working against the realisation of the better world they long for? That is to say, in the very act of helping each child to 'do their best' - typically, and most tellingly, through 'performance' within a fundamentally and systematically stratifying examination system which itself demands success and failure - are teachers simply helping to perpetuate or (re)create the very conditions in which the dream of success for most of their students is rendered impossible?

- How do teachers *manage* tensions that may arise, both practically, in their pedagogical adjustments, and affectively, in reconciling to themselves the perpetration of practices that they may not support ideologically, philosophically or theoretically - including things they may feel are actually detrimental to many students?

- By what processes and mechanisms does a partially non-compliant workforce behave compliantly, and how does it experience and manage complicity?

In exploring these issues, this paper focuses on current reconceptualisations of teacher professionalism, drawing on Laurent Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism' both as an effect (on teachers' lived experience) and as an appropriated mechanism deliberately made use of within the public policy domain to work in opposition to potential teacher resistance to public policy directives. In utilising this concept, in which 'something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing' (Berlant 2011, p.1), we will draw not only on cruel optimism's capacity to sustain belief in a possible 'better' (better education, better future, better society, better world) at the same time as keeping that better's achievement out of reach, but also on its capacity to 'foreclose future capacities for consciousness' (ibid., p. 14). Inevitably, such analysis involves considerations of the role played by language and discourse, both in insinuating policy as compliance and in the absorption of policy as survival strategy, as well as in the working relationship between discourse and affect. In particular, we are drawn in this exploration to the frequently overlooked or denied affective aspects that lie, partially hidden, behind neoliberalism's surface rationalism, including its sub-discourse of performativity[1], and the distinction, and dynamic relationship, between what Massumi calls 'affective acts' in the realm of an individual's experience and behaviour,

which take place autonomously and apparently unintentionally, and 'affective facts', which can be manipulated (for various ends in the more deliberate[d] world of public policy (Massumi 2002; see also Berlant 2011, p.14; Stewart 2007, pp.15-16).   Effectively, this amounts to an examination of the dialectical relationship between the individual self and the 'external' structure(s) in which the individual acts and makes choices - with a degree of autonomy, but within limiting, predetermined constraints and boundaries; we might say, of how the individual psyche 'enters' the external world of policy, and how the external world of policy simultaneously enters and establishes itself in the individual psyche.

Cruel Optimism

In her book of the same name, Laurent Berlant (2011) coins the term 'cruel optimism' to describe a particular relation, short- or long-lived, between the human subject and the social world they inhabit. Put simply, a relationship of cruel optimism involves situations of attachment to hopes and aspirations in which not only are the latter likely to remain unfulfilled, but the very sustaining of the attachment itself has negative, constraining effects in relation to one's life and development. Such a relationship may exist, Berlant suggests, in our private lives, in connection, for example, with personal relationships, or with our broad aspirations in relation to achieving the good life for ourselves and for our loved ones; but it may also affect our working lives, where, rather than moving us forward in an ongoing process of professional 'becoming' (Britzman 1991, p.8), our attachment to the idea[l] of that which is - or makes life - better becomes itself attached to a fantasy relationship with what currently 'is'.

Among many examples of how things which are desired work as obstacles to flourishing, Moore (forthcoming) describes how one teacher's ongoing pursuit of and fascination with the (seemingly unobtainable) ideal lesson ('I never quite seem to get to that point where I can say to myself "That was as good as it gets"') stands in the way of more measured and achievable professional development, while another teacher finds it 'impossible' to remain for more than two or three years in any one school, always seeking out a position from which he is, in his own words, 'actually able to achieve something positive'. For such teachers, it is as if 'the very pleasures of being inside a relation [have] become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation' (Berlant 2011, p.2). This relation might involve

little more than the pursuit itself, but it might equally be applied to the 'place' within and from which the fantasy of achieving the desired goal is situated; for 'one of optimism's ordinary pleasures is to induce *conventionality*, that place where appetites find a shape in the predictable comforts of the good-life genres that a person or a world has seen fit to formulate' (ibid. p.2, emphasis added).

Such accommodations of desire to the predictable contours of conventionality are emotional rather than purely cognitive, and involve affective attachment. As Berlant continues:

> 'Whatever the *experience* of optimism is … the *affective* structure of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of the fantasy that enables you to expect that, *this* time, nearness to the thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way.' (Berlant 2011, p.2)

Attachment

The notion of attachment is central to Berlant's configuration of cruel optimism, and is of particular relevance to the substance of this current paper, which concerns the function[ing] of 'professionalism' as attachment, and of the affective structure of that attachment, including the capacity for professionalism, re-cast as a particular managerial *discourse*, to enable certain forms of affective *persuasion*.

Berlant devotes much of her argument precisely to the issue of the relationship between the affective attachment of the individual practitioner or group of practitioners and the 'external' domain of public policy enforcement. For, while it is true that relationships approximating to cruel optimism may have existed for as long as there have been organised societies (and perhaps even before that), the relationship takes on a particular inflection and perhaps a new function in relation to the experience of living in modern-day free market capitalist societies. This is because the contemporary moment is characterised not simply by neoliberal discourses, philosophies and rhetoric, but by the deliberate production and marketisation of 'anxiety, contingency and precarity' (Berlant 2011, p.19) – so that fear of change, of potential loss, of 'otherness' (other people, other nations, other systems) leads us

to embrace our condition and the system that has produced it, even as we may recognise and regret its failure to meet our expectations.

To elaborate a little, Berlant suggests that one of the central difficulties for large numbers of us in the West concerns our re-negotiation and/or denial of expectations, hopes, possibilities and sense of stability, as the promise of the good life and our personal (and perhaps collective, professional) vision of that life, including fantasies of upward mobility, job security, more equal social and economic societies, and lasting, dependable relationships - visions that may have served to give our lives some sense of purpose and meaning - become increasingly and obviously untenable.

While such a situation affects everyone, regardless of how they earn a living, we suggest that there may be a particular issue here for teachers. For one thing, as we have already suggested, the decision to enter teaching , and certainly to remain in teaching for any length of time, is typically born of a desire to help other people. On the basis of our own experience, large numbers of teachers - perhaps most, indeed - have a vision of the good life that is not only for themselves but for society more broadly. Furthermore, they have entered a profession in which, they may not unreasonably have believed, they might help to bring that vision to fruition. We might, then, argue that teachers are not only sustained by the same (imaginary) fantasy of the future 'good life' as others; they are, certainly in a 'felt sense', very much involved in the project of *bringing it about* - often, on the evidence of our own studies, putting in extra hours to help students who have been deemed to be failing, or taking particular care to help students from underprivileged backgrounds.

This particular situation reminds us of a further difficulty for some teachers. Pursuing Berlant's analysis a little further, we can see how teachers may find themselves placed in something of a double bind. To begin with, they may need to convince *themselves* of the possibility of helping bring about the better world they envision, in spite of the fact that its translation/mutation into the terms and conditions of neoliberal policy – and even its *possibility* in the latter-day capitalist systems which such policy reflects and supports – may be working against the realisation of that vision. In a relation not unlike Freud's conceptualisations of the 'split ego' and 'disavowal', involving simultaneous belief and denial, they must keep on working at the realisation and its possibility as though it *might*

happen, even though it may be apparent at some level of awareness that it probably will not - at least, not in their professional lifetime and perhaps not even in the lifetimes of their students. Harder yet, resistant teachers must also continue to persuade their *students* of the continued existence of the possibility of the good life – both for the individual student and for *all* students. This practice of sustaining a set of beliefs in students may necessitate another kind of personal disavowal, that involves the recognition and management of one's own duplicity and complicity in the act: that is to say, 'I know there is little chance for many of you of achieving as much of what you would like from life as anyone else in this class, this school, this society, but I am going to tell you that there is, and we are going to work together to bring about these impossible futures.'

It should be noted that this is seldom, if ever, a cynical move on the part of the teacher, or one of deliberated complicity. Rather, it is likely to be akin to those very feelings that have brought the teacher into the profession in the first place - the desire to do good: in Berlant's terms, 'a kind of love' (Berlant 2011, p.1). We might, then, suggest that it is the same 'kind of love' that draws many teachers into the profession that also acts as an obstacle to the achievement of the desired, 'love'-driven end, as it refocuses itself on somebody else's notion of achievement and of success within it. Of course teachers want their students to succeed; if not within the system and the world they would ideally choose, then within the system and the world that exists. Sustaining the fantasy of equality of opportunity, and blaming (with some justification) the injustices of 'the system', may in turn serve to avoid painful confrontation with the traumatic realisation of one's own role in the classification, stratification and segregation of these same students.

Professionalism and affect

Language - that is to say, certain individual words; collections of words; and what we understand as 'discourse' - is saturated with affect. As Frosh reminds us, 'feeling fills out the message, gives it particularity and human warmth; without it, we are in the realm of the alien, that which we cannot understand' (2011, p.27). This helps to explain how, through its affective dimension, language renders us so readily manipulable, and why the choice of words, including the appropriation of metaphors, discourses and catch-phrases, is such a key element of public policy design and dissemination. Examples from both education

policy and wider political discourse spring readily to mind: for example, 'standards', playing on associative links to the flag as a rallying point in the heat of battle, as well as to notions of common decency; or the instinctive negativity of fear or ridicule that is, for many people, carried within and engendered by such terms as 'left wing' and 'socialism' – so much so that politicians who may privately perceive themselves as socialists or 'on the left' will often go to considerable lengths to publically deny the fact. As Worsnip (2012) has argued: 'Modern politicians - taking their cue from advertising and business - tend to use words which come attached with an aura of positive buzz, often without having a grip on what they actually mean.' Using pragmatism as a 'classic example', Worsnip argues that pragmatism, elevated as virtue, 'allows politicians to subtly stifle dissent, and causes us to neglect the most fundamental questions about what our society ought to look like' (ibid.).

Professionalism (not unlike pragmatism) is a particularly interesting case, not least because of its increasingly ubiquitous appearance in the education policy rhetoric of central governments, and because it is a somewhat slippery, contested term (Ozga & Lawn, 1981) whose meanings have undergone a number of changes over time, rendering it particularly susceptible to appropriation. (See, for example, Hargreaves, 2000, on the 'four ages of professionalism', and Ozga, 2000, p.36, on how professionalism's shifting meanings in the field of public education in the UK can be seen to reflect 'fluctuating relationships between teachers and the government'.) Of particular relevance to our own analysis, both Hargreaves and Ozga suggest that differing conceptualisations of professionalism can be contextualised within questions of who decides what professionalism comprises and who is responsible for its monitoring and development - in particular, whether it is 'professionals' themselves or some other body such as central government.

Although the precise *meaning(s)* of professionalism may have changed or been added to over time, however, it is a word, a concept, a discourse that remains associated and imbued with *positivity*. Who does not want to be professional, when the word is used so very often - in the worlds of education, of business, of politics, of entertainment - to indicate approval and respect? It is in this abiding aspect of professionalism that lies both the problem and the potential: that is to say, while the *definition* of professionalism may change, not only the *affective saturation* but also, crucially, the *affective attachment to* the word remains. Those of us labelled or self-perceiving as 'professionals' may not agree at the conscious level with

what professionalism has become in official discourses, but we still want to *be* professional, and *to be seen as being* professional, even if this is in relation to another's conceptualisation of the term. To ease such an adjustment, particularly in situations in which professionalism has come to be associated more with obedience to externally imposed regulations, procedures and criteria that are fundamentally 'entrepreneurial and business-minded' (Bailey 2015, p. 164), we may, furthermore, continue to make our own links with previous or alternative versions of professionalism with which we may be more comfortable. These might include notions of honesty, fairness, sacrifice, and the professional's capacity for making wise judgments. It is these reminders - in essence, these remaindered elements - that may continue to circle the revised concept (or, as we shall argue in the next section, the concept's progression as *discourse*) like moons around a newly formed planet. As Bailey observes, in discussing how policy more broadly 'subjectivises' individuals and modifies subjectivities in line with its own modifications over time: 'material and epistemological remnants and relics of previous regimes may remain, transform or find a new or more dominant function, rather than disappearing in the shifts from one singularity to another' (Bailey 2015, p. 77).

The power of the rem[a]inder: professionalism as discourse

It is not our intention to suggest that, once upon a time, in some Golden Age of public education, teachers all acted in accordance with, and with equal allegiance to, the same conseptualisations of professionalism (those, for example, that we have described above as rem[a]inders), or that these have been entirely swept away by a neoliberal tsunami of reconfigured professionalism which is interested only in reproducing neoliberal (teacher and learner) subjects. Nor, however, do we subscribe to a view or an implication, apparent within many current policy emphases on professionalism, that teachers previously behaved 'un-professionally' or perhaps 'pre-professionally' in some earlier, rather shameful era of public education.

What we are concerned with is the manufactured evolution of professionalism from a term or set of terms that is open to and perhaps welcomes interpretation, contestation and debate, to a *discourse*, in which meaning(s) endeavour to become fixed and narrowed - to be challenged or rejected only as an act of heresy, or when modified or effectively ousted by

another discourse within dominant policy rhetoric. To return to an earlier observation concerning the tendency of professionalism's meanings to shift over time, we suggest, following on to an extent from the accounts of Hargreaves (2000) and Ozga & Lawn (1981), that previous understandings of - and practices related to - professionalism in public education, in whatever form it took, tended to originate within the professional group itself, and involved authority based on trust and relational notions of accountability. We call this 'occupational professionalism'. We suggest that currently this occupational professionalism is being ousted by a different understanding of professionalism that originates with policy makers and managers, and that involves hierarchical authority and accountability (Evetts, 2009). This professionalism we are calling 'organisational professionalism'. While the old occupational professionalism might itself be viewed in terms of discourse, we argue that it was a relatively weak discourse, in that it lacked the external validation of official policy rhetoric, and was based on practice and custom rather than being imbued with policy intent. This relative weakness, we suggest, has rendered occupational professionalism vulnerable to charges of vagueness and toothlessness, as well as to colonisation or replacement by the more aggressive, more strictly defined and more monitored discourse of organisational professionalism.

We are adopting here a Foucauldian representation of discourse, in which discourse is understood not only as delimiting meanings but as also attempting to construct realities and shape identities.   Understood in terms of discourse thus defined, reconstructed ('organisational') professionalism itself can be seen as having been rendered unproblematic and non-negotiable. What professionalism might mean is no longer a subject for serious discussion. Professionalism becomes both a good and an essential characteristic of the 'effective teacher' (a similarly evolved concept) in the 'effective school'. Furthermore, the deployment of professionalism in support of neoliberal policy involves not just promoting a particular version of professionalism, but setting up in opposition – either explicitly or implicitly - an *alternative* to professionalism: that is to say, not a different version or versions of professionalism (since the 'truth' of the discourse tells us there can be no other versions), but simply un-professionalism. Unprofessionalism must then, like professionalism, be absorbed through language and discourse at the micro level to reinforce, affectively *and* discursively, the value of the 'aesthetic of existence' (Bailey 2015, p.35) that is being

promoted. The discourse of professionalism, thus constituted through a series (and also a process) of inclusions and exclusions, establishes a structure of relations that organizes how we think about teachers' (and other professionals') work.

It is this affective aspect of discourse which is central in relation to the extent to which discourses - themselves the bearers of official policy - become dominant, and acquire a level of seeming fixety and resistance to opposition. As individuals, we might become consciously aware of discourse and the strength of its influence - on ourselves and on others - but this does not necessarily make it any easier for us to resist it or to act outside it. As Hook (2006, p. 215) observes, discourse also structures and makes use of *desire* 'within the machinery of subjectivity that is not entirely accessible to rational discursive consciousness'.

Hook's observation encourages to examine through a more affective lens than is perhaps present in Foucault's analysis the ways in which individuals – including resistant individuals – are coerced and co-opted into becoming themselves the bearers and disseminators of discourse. We have already mentioned the way in which certain words, phrases, concepts ('socialism', 'the Left') can create in people an automatic negative orientation - one that is effectively beyond their reach and control - just as others can elicit an automatic positive orientation. This orientation, which may have had something to do with rationality at the beginning, is no longer subject to conscious, rational interrogation but has been internalised to, so to speak, develop an existence of its own.

This functioning of hidden affect is critical in understanding the responses of many teachers to policy and their implementation of (in particular) policy to which they may have been initially (rationally and consciously) oppositional. First, we need to understand that affect, like discourse, is *constructed*; it is the product of a process of internalisation, not something which is immanent and has always been there inside us. Then, we need to think about how affect is produced and how it is made use of as (to adopt a Foucauldian term) a technology of control (Foucault, 1992). Our suggestion is that each of these processes operates and is brought about by discourse as we have understood it: specifically, by the ways in which discourse both carries and makes use of desire.

Discourse and desire

Like affect, what we are calling desire does not emerge from some deep wellspring, expressing the inner essence of our selves, but is structured by the social order of the symbolic world into which we are born, involving, centrally, identification with the signifiers and discourses that comprise that order. Desire is, thus, 'always the desire of the Other' (Lacan 1981, p. 235): that is to say, desire involves the earnest wish, perhaps even the need, to be the object of the other's desire, to be recognised and 'loved' by the other (Evans, 1996, pp. 37-38; see also Dashtipour, 2012). Elaborating on Lacan's theory of the individual subject's inter-relationship with the symbolic order (the 'Other'), Žižek draws our attention to two related kinds of 'identification': the symbolic and the imaginary (Žižek 1989, p.105). Imaginary identification relates to 'identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves' - the image, that is of 'what we would like to be' (ibid.) Symbolic identification, on the other hand, concerns the way in which we perceive ourselves within and in relation to the 'symbolic order' of language, ritual, custom and representation within which we operate and within which we perceive and understand all experience'. ('What is - and what do I have to do to merit the title of – a [good] teacher, parent, child, etc., in the eyes of others?)

It is now possible to trace a specific relationship between discourse, desire and affect, in which discourse both produces and makes use of affect through the portal offered by desire. Policy, rationally presented, may then be understood as depending upon affect and desire for its successful implementation - not least, its implementation by those who find it most troublesome; i.e. it is *through* the workings of affect and desire that policy becomes 'owned' by the individual, even when, at the level of conscious rationalism and conscious emotionality, the individual may find it repugnant.

Drawing on her analyses of a number of feature films, Berlant draws attention to the ways in which we may, in spite of ourselves, be drawn to identify with the established, constructed norms of (capitalist) society, of the need to belong, to fit in - to such an extent, that fitting in may become life's overpowering dream. In Lacanian terms, symbolic identification (knowing and feeling secure about one's place in the established social-symbolic order) can become even more important in terms of how we act than imaginary identification (how we see/wish to see ourself as a person).[2]

It has been argued (see, e.g., Bibby 2011; Moore, 2004) that this particular aspect of desire has a conservatising tendency in the professional lives of teachers, working, that is, in establishments and within systems in which norms are habitually valued and validated through such mechanisms as school rules, public examination syllabuses and criteria, accepted pedagogies, and dress codes for students and staff – drawing us toward validated norms in relation to what we do and what we say. Elsewhere, Zembylas (2003, p. 112) talks of the equal and opposite risk, if we do transgress the rules of an institution, of 'being seen as eccentric, if not outrageous' and of becoming - and feeling - marginalised. In short, schools may both attract and reward obedience to conformity, at the same time as presenting inhospitable conditions for the survival of dis-obedience and non-conformity. (See, also, Ahmed, 2010, on how challenging oppression can cause un-happiness.)

Endorsing the view that desire can have this fundamentally conservatising tendency, we suggest that the desire to be 'loved', to fit in (effectively, to be and be seen as normal), while it may be worked out in detail in the form of articulated recognitions or misrecognitions of other people's responses to us, or in specific strategies we might adopt to achieve the desired end, also produces and nourishes affective responses which may be understood as akin to the hidden unconscious of rational thought. These affective responses serve to orientate, to prepare, to *dispose* ourselves in relation to situations and to events but also when we encounter and engage with discourse. Thus, discourse itself can be said to have a conservatising nature, not just in the way it seeks to limit meanings, definitions and what is acceptable, but also in the limits it imposes on individual subjects in relation to behaviour – including possible opposition or resistance to dominant ideas and meanings through acts of subversion or the active 'disruption' of discourse (Mockler, 2001).

We suggest that with reference to a current discourse of *organisational professionalism*, teachers will almost inevitably (if unconsciously) align their desires in relation to whom and what they want to be as teachers with the desires embedded in the discourse. Hence, professionalism, in its more fixed and limited articulation, is likely to involve little more than getting on with the simple business of preparing students to pass memory-based tests and examinations, 'managing behaviour', and keeping students quiet and 'on task' in the classroom - that is to say, aspects of what has come to be known as performativity.

Other ambitions that the teacher might have - or have had - such as developing and promoting mixed-ability teaching and open-ended or collaborative learning, or promoting critical literacy, may become pathologised within the same policy discourse as 'damaging' students, even if valued and retained by the teacher.

The allure of normalcy

All of this returns us to Berlant's notion of cruel optimism, and what she calls 'the messy dynamics of attachment, self-continuity, and the reproduction of life' (2011, p. 15) - as (for example) teachers may struggle to survive (and, importantly and sometimes seemingly impossibly, to more-than-survive, in their own terms rather than somebody else's) the onslaught of public policy that may sometimes appear to undermine their most deeply held educational, social and philosophical convictions. Drawing on Berlant's analysis, we are prompted to posit a relationship between policy directives and their local implementation in terms of negotiated, though ultimately lopsided settlements, undertaken at the symbolic level through language, but accepted at a deeper level in response to affect. If the affective remainder of professionalism makes possible professionalism's offering of a safe, rationalised space in which the tensions, the conflict and the disparities of professional life can be managed, and if the pursuit and practice of a version of professionalism comes to fill the space (as it were) between the imposition and the implementation, between the tension and compliance, it is not hard to see how professionalism, like 'performance', becomes a goal in itself rather than the route to a goal. As in the case of 'virtuous pragmatism' (Moore, 2004; 2006), whereby practitioners reconstruct and embrace pragmatism as a virtue in itself rather than as a more troubling matter of expediency or surrender, the accepted reconstruction of professionalism may be seen to operate in two ways and in two domains: the affective (hidden, unarticulated) domain of personal experience and practice, and the conscious, deliberative domain of policy. This latter domain, in which the discourse originates and from which it is disseminated, not only appeals to the affective remainders of the 'old professionalism' in bringing about its successful recontextualisation in schools, in classrooms, in the minds and 'souls' of teachers (Ball, 2003); it also deploys rhetoric to inscribe reconstructed professionalism within other discourses (e.g. of 'choice', 'freedom', 'responsibility') that themselves are affectively saturated with and appeal to positivity. To return to Worsnip (ibid.), politicians are just as

likely to make use of rema[i]nders as of the (co-opted) bearers of their policies - albeit for different ends and in different ways.

Concluding thoughts: policy's affective base

Our discussion began by referencing how some teachers may feel caught between, on the one hand, egalitarian hopes of making a difference to the lives of each and every child they teach, and, on the other hand, the necessity of preparing those same children for the precarious realities of contemporary capitalism (and, related to that, preparing them for success in assessment processes which themselves demand a degree of failure). We went on to discuss how attachments to new, reworked discourses of organisational professionalism can work to facilitate teachers' enactment of the demands that neoliberal capitalism makes on education. These discourses, we have suggested, secure allegiance through teachers' desire for recognition and approval, whilst also drawing support from the remainders of earlier forms of professionalism that continue to echo along the corridors and recesses of affect, lingering around the margins of the new discourse even as they struggle to find realisation in the world of practice. Drawing on Lauren Berlant's analysis of politics and popular culture, we describe the dilemmas of this situation as instances of the paradoxical notion of cruel optimism: that is to say, the ultimately self-defeating pursuit of what is hoped for or desired.

What we have argued might seem to suggest that the power of official discourse, of desire, and of affect, might be so great as to render psychic (and physical) compliance - for many teachers at least - more of a necessity than an option, and that the best that can be hoped for on the part of 'resistant teachers' is to learn how to cope with the uncomfortable position in which they may find themselves. (Of course, there are other - more material - reasons impelling us to conform: not least, the fear of loss of employment for ourselves, negative consequences for our students, or the possibility of our school being deemed as 'failing' and taken out of our control.) It is not our intention, however, to paint such a picture, any more than it is to blame teachers for the circumstances in which they may find themselves and the limited responses available to them. Nor is it our place to present teachers, whether resistant or compliant, with a call to arms. This is partly out of recognition of a counter-argument, that, regardless of our own or anybody else's opinion of

the fundamental 'rightness' of neoliberal policy and ideology, it is not a teacher's business to be resistant anyway. However, it also connects with a point we have already made, that resistance is seldom a simple or a comfortable business, and that its pursuit is generally more easily talked about than put into practice.

While we might, thus, personally empathise with resistant teachers, and might suggest strategies via which they might seek out more active forms of resistance, we are more concerned here with something else. That is, to suggest that an analysis of the tensions experienced by such teachers can help us, whether as theorists or as classroom practitioners or as both, toward richer, more nuanced understandings not just of the observable and often measurable *effects* of central policy on local practice, but on how policy implementation *works* as, to use Bernstein's (2000) terminology, it is recontextualised from the Official Recontextualising Field of policy formation into the Pedagogic Recontextualising Field in (for example) classroom practice and local decision-making. Our research tells us that affect plays a key role in this process, and suggests the value of further considerations of the nature and role of discourse, including its affective base, in public policy rhetoric and implementation - both in the field of public education and in the wider social context of policy imposition and policy engagement. Though we have focussed in this current paper on one neoliberal discourse, professionalism, there are many others - for example, pragmatism, freedom, choice responsibility - whose interrogation may be equally helpful in this endeavour.

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Notes

1. Neoliberalism is understood in this paper as an ideology and a theory of social, political and economic practices espousing a belief that 'human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade' - a theory in which '[t]he role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices' (Harvey 2007: 22; see also Davies 2014). In relation to public education, neoliberalism is centrally concerned with the preparation for individual and national participation in an unchallenged but constantly evolving global free-market - ensuring, that a suitably educated citizenry is able to work with that evolving system in ways that preserve the economic *status quo* or render it more advantageous to the nation state. In practical terms, neoliberalism attaches a market value to performance and product - sometimes referred to as 'performativity'

(see, for example, Ball 2003, Wilkins *et al* 2012) - embracing or introducing numerical measures of the 'quality' of such production, such as test and examination scores, or inter-institutional 'league tables'. Individual freedom and responsibility are stressed in policy rhetoric, in each case attached to the notion that social and financial success (and presumably consequential happiness) is within the grasp of every 'hardworking' individual within the current socio-economic system. Teacher professionalism, meanwhile, becomes attached to individual and collective success in meeting targets within a highly competitive quasi marketplace (Clarke, 2012; Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998), mainly related to the numbers of students achieving success within the terms imposed.

2. Berlant illustrates her analysis with reference to the Dardenne brothers' film *Rosetta*, in which an impoverished young woman living literally and psychically on the margins of 'normal' society is so driven by her desire to work - to become a normal earner in the socio-symbolic order - that she is prepared to betray her only friend and lose his love in order to achieve that end.