SPECIAL ISSUE
New Public Management and the New Professionalism in Education: Compliance, Appropriation and Resistance

education policy analysis archives

A peer-reviewed, independent, open access, multilingual journal

epaa aape

Arizona State University

Volume 23 Number 86 September 14th, 2015 ISSN 1068-2341

Cultivating Disruptive Subjectivities: Interrupting the New Professionalism

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Citation: Herr, K. (2015). Cultivating disruptive subjectivities: Interrupting the new professionalism. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 23*(86). http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v23.2097. This article is part of the Special Issue on New Public Management and the New Professionalism in Education: Compliance, Appropriation and Resistance of EPAA/AAPE, Guest Edited by Gary Anderson & Kathryn Herr.

Abstract: This paper explores the everyday enactments of New Public Management in our professional lives utilizing principles of self-ethnography. Drawing on the reworking of an Action Research class, I explore the possibilities of a contextual analysis of the workplace to make more transparent the enactment of New Public Management. Little is known regarding how NPM plays out on the ground in local sites and how, in interacting with the culture it creates, professionals locate themselves and their work. I offer a close examination here of our changing context to explore the techniques and forms of power of NPM in the realms of higher education as well as how we might enact a politics of refusal.
Keywords: New professionalism; self-ethnography; New Public Management; practitioner research; resistance.

Cultivando subjetividades disruptivas: Interrumpiendo el nuevo Profesionalismo
Resumen: Utilizando principios de la auto-etnografía, este artículo explora las actuaciones cotidianas del Nuevo Management Público en nuestra vida profesional. Basado en la revisión de

Journal website: http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/
Facebook: /EPAAA
Twitter: @epaa_aape

Manuscript received: 4/11/2010
Revisions received: 7/4/2010
Accepted: 7/4/2010

una clase de investigación acción, exploro las posibilidades de un análisis contextual del lugar de trabajo para hacer mas transparente los procesos cotidianos de la nueva gestión pública . Se conoce poco sobre cómo el NMP se manifiesta en sitios locales y cómo, interactuando con la cultura que crea, como los profesionales se ubican a sí mismos y a su trabajo. Ofrezco un análisis cercano de nuestro contexto cambiante para investigar las técnicas y formas de poder de Nuevo Management Público en las universidades y cómo podríamos participar en una política de resistencia.
Palabras-clave: Nuevo management público; auto-etnografía; investigación-acción; resistencia.

Cultivando subjetividades perturbadoras: Interrompendo o Novo Profissionalismo
Resumo: Usando princípios da auto-etnografia, este artigo explora as ações diárias da Nova Gestão Pública em nossas vidas profissionais. Com base na análise de uma classe sobre pesquisa-participativa, explorei as possibilidades de uma análise contextual do local de trabalho para tornar mais transparentes os processos diários de Nova Gestão Pública. Pouco se sabe sobre a forma como a Nova Gestão Pública se manifesta localmente e como interage com a cultura que cria, como os profissionais se entendem e entendem o trabalho. Eu ofereço uma análise detalhada da nossa mudança para investigar as técnicas e formas de poder da Nova Gestão Pública nas universidades e como podemos participar de uma política de resistência.
Palavras-chave: Novo management público; auto-etnografia; pesquisa-ação; resistência.

Cultivando subjetividades disruptivas: Introduction

> A small group of faculty gathers to rework our action research class in the face of changes in the Educational Leadership program, one of the programs that the class typically serves. It was now scheduled to be 7 ½ weeks and online, rather than the full semester, face-to-face class we usually offer. We muse together how to maintain the integrity of the action research aims and processes in this truncated version…What does abbreviated action research look like? Does it still look like action research?[1]

This paper explores the everyday events occurring in institutional life as we go about our professional lives. I make the case that the New Public Management (NPM) insinuates itself into our work lives in ways that seem barely worth noticing or resisting but rapidly become the new commonsense. For example, many universities quickly moved to large online and fast-track renderings of their programs, so much so that this is no longer "news" and has become fairly common place. Yet a close examination during this window of awareness of these types of major shifts in university practices can bring us inside practices of neoliberalism and the un/intended re-working of professional identities and practices presented via these changes.

Trying on practices of critical vigilance (Ball & Olmedo, 2013) and drawing on the reworking of an Action Research class as fodder for what Alvesson (2003) terms a self-ethnography, I explore the possibilities of a contextual analysis of our work sites to make more transparent the enactment of NPM. By NPM I refer to goals and practices imported into the public realm from the private sector characterized by competition, entrepreneurialism, measures of performance and output controls, to name just a few examples (Evetts, 2009). We know little of how NPM plays out on the

[1] Throughout this paper I narrate the experiences of a small group of faculty who teach action research courses in our department. I move between singular and plural voice to reflect that I am part of this small group but that the self-ethnography offered here is of my own crafting.

ground in local sites and how, in interacting with the culture it creates, professionals locate themselves and their work. I take up the attempts to reengineer our professional identities via the interplay between education professors, curriculum, and the re-creation of our professional work world as well as its aims.

In this case, a colleague and I began by exploring our own teaching of action research for cohorts of graduate students in an educational leadership program. But as we quickly came to understand, we had cast our research aims too narrowly. Our experience was taking place within a larger arena of change and in this sense the paper gives testimony to Ball & Olmedo's (2013) observational warning that neoliberalism is both "out there" and "in here." What began as an action research project to study our teaching of the course evolved to consider the larger aims of the New Public Management (NPM)—in part, the contested reworking of professional identities via changing expectations, structures and, ultimately, the curriculum. Over a period of several years, we worked to analyze the pressures being put on the class and then once it was replaced with one within the Educational Leadership program, I returned to our experiences to re-examine them for further understanding. The Action Research course came under particular scrutiny in that much of what it promises puts it at odds with the aims of the discourse of educational leadership espoused via NPM (Hall, 2013). Eventually the course came to be considered "disruptive" to the larger task of preparing professionals to seamlessly enter current constructions of schooling and was replaced.

I offer a close examination here of the changing context less to demonstrate struggles with or against a particular institution but rather to explore the techniques and forms of power of new public managerialism as they play out in the realms of higher education (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). I suggest that these types of tools are instrumental in implementing a neoliberal agenda, which, I believe, will be recognizable to many others as realities or tensions in their own settings. I also explore how to go about this process of recognition, building off of Alvesson's (2003) notions of a "close study," that is, how to interrogate our professional contexts as we work within them.

Over a decade ago, Reed (2002) predicted that managerialism had the potential to radically transform the material, experiential and social reality of life within the university.
Many of us in higher education are currently living in the realities of that forecast and recognize our experiences as similar to those that our K-12 colleagues have been immersed in for some time. As Ball & Olmedo (2013) observe, "We are…very aware that these are not 'their' struggles, they are also 'our' struggles" (p. 86). This sense of congruence of the changes at multiple levels of the educational enterprise system is important to the case I make here of the effects of the larger neoliberal enterprise on our teaching context. In his discussion of teacher education and notions of a "new professionalism" for teachers, Zeichner (2010) observes that the "same ideas have entered university education where our role is to ensure that teachers"--and, I would suggest, those who are preparing to be educational administrators—"are prepared to assume their limited roles as educational clerks who are not to exercise their judgment…" in their various school roles (p. 1545). The goals of our classroom teaching are being called into question and are potentially recast from the preparation of educators to exercise and execute their professional judgment informed by inquiry to one of shaping professionals who will enter schools prepared to be compliant "managed professionals" (Rhoades, 1998). As university professors, the question became one of resisting attempts at this same kind of reworking of our own professional identities, designed as Rhoades (1998) points out, for ease of command and a subordination of our own values to those of the entrepreneurial university.

Redefining the Public Sector and Ourselves

Ward (2011) observes that, historically, public professionals such as professors and teachers were fairly immune to the intrusion of managers and managerialism into their work lives. Educators

were viewed as capable of directing their own work performance and autonomy was seen as "necessary for creating the integrity of professional work and the motivation and creativity of professional workers" (Ward, 2011, pp. 209-210). At one time vibrant unions and professional organizations offered additional layers of insulation from managerial oversight through legal protections and the cultivation of respect for various public professions. Public service fields expected a kind of moral commitment from their workers and self-selection into fields such as education assumed an ethical commitment and dedication reflective of a sense of calling that many brought to public service.

But Ward documents a shift over the past few decades whereby the "bottom line economic rationality of the marketplace" has been brought into the public sector (2011, p. 206). With the creation of a more entrepreneurial environment, employment is based on staying competitive, both individually and as an organization. In education, non-university based programs in teacher and administrator preparation offer fast-tracks to the classroom or principalship, offering what Zeichner (2010) terms a "technicist" lens on these roles. But universities eye these emerging programs with a view toward the market share the competitors potentially pull from them. This view of the competition is coupled with a growing perception that public institutions have absorbed a large share of public resources but do not necessarily have quality "products" to show for this investment.

To motivate public servants to work to their optimum, systems of rewards and sanctions are put into place. For example, those working in public education have seen the intertwining of student test data with teachers' evaluations, holding teachers "accountable" via data created and collected for other purposes. While this critique is well-known, it has not halted the penalties that teachers face—being placed on probation, loss of tenure, etc.—for what is seen as an individual failure, in this case, "poor" teaching. University programs in teacher and leadership education face being held "accountable" for the performance of their graduates and the way they and their schools perform on these measures, invoking an image of management and surveillance via "six degrees of separation" (Fuller & Hollingsworth, 2014; Knight et al., 2012).

A close observation of NPM allows for the delineation of varying but generally agreed upon management goals and practices drawn from the private sector and now imported into the public realm (Evetts, 2009). The result is a concern for more explicit and measurable standards of performance, pre-set output measures, and enhanced competition. Educators at all levels of educational work are immersed in the increasing demands of systems of accountability and competition. At the k-12 level this involves measures such as state testing, school "report cards" and rankings, and new forms of performance evaluations. In academe similar aims are accomplished via tabulating and publicizing the amount of grant monies awarded, the types and nature of research products produced and marketed, and/or the numbers of students taught per semester per individual faculty member toward a threshold number that ensures they are reaching "enough" students. These demands are couched within a discourse of economic efficiency and a questioning eye or nudge toward being sure that faculty "earn their keep."

Professional practices of self-and peer-review are eclipsed as faculty attention is redirected to external accountability systems. Time is increasingly given over to producing the documentation of performativity (Ball, 2003). While experiencing job intensification, the work is less gratifying and more alienating (Chandler, Barry, & Clark, 2002). Trust no longer links the professional to the workplace, but rather mechanisms of accountability designed to demonstrate that the worker is doing her job (Ward, 2011). In essence faculty are being "re-worked." "As in industry, the price of worship at the altar of efficiency is the alienation of the worker from his work…" (Kliebard, 1975, cited in Au, 2011, p. 25). Those who have been educators for some time struggle to recognize themselves and the work they originally set out to do as public servants. Those newer to education

may simply accept the current environment as the way things work and what must be done to be rewarded with tenure.

This promotion of new professional subjectivities is seen by many as the real threat of NPM (Thomas & Davies, 2002). Citing work by du Gay (1996) Thomas and Davies (2002) argue that NPM is "an identity project," striking at the heart of academic professionalism, increasing management's power and reducing professional autonomy. Essentially these shifts in the workplace serve as mechanisms for reforming teachers, scholars and researchers, changing what it means to be a teacher and producing new kinds of teacher subjects (Ball, 2003). As Ball (2003) observes, current reforms do not simply change what we as educators do, it changes who we are.

But, as Hall, Gunter & Bragg (2013) point out there is an interactive process whereby seeking to actively change the professional identities of public service employees is part of a wider agenda to "re-model" schools as well. To foster the changing of professional identities of school personnel and the re-modeled school, higher education is actively being reconstructed on multiple levels in keeping with a neoliberal agenda. A case in point is Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's recent proposal to cut $300 million over the next two years to the University of Wisconsin's budget and realign the university mission statement toward preparation of the workforce. With an eye on his presidential run, it is believed that Walker had a larger audience in mind. He communicated a view popular with many conservatives: "that state universities have become elite bastions of liberal academics that do not prepare students for work and are a burden on taxpayers" (Bosman, 2015, p. A13). But Giroux (2002) makes the case that, in contrast to Walker's vision, higher education has a long history of educating citizens who can sustain and nurture public spheres that sustain democratic life. Slaughter (2001, cited in Giroux, 2002) points out that professors have long seen as their task the creation of "a space between capital and labor where [they] could support a common intellectual project directed toward the public good" (p. 432). Needless to say this stance puts the historical work of education at odds with those who would link our nation's place in the global economy with a focused educational system that produces a workforce ready to meet the demands of the competitive global market (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009)

The Role of Educational Leaders

As with the work of educators overall the tasks set before educational administrators reflect the values and conditions of the "new economy of schooling" (Anderson, 2009). Cohen (2014) observes that school leaders' time is increasingly focused on meeting the demands of accountability and competition: for example, state testing, school rankings, standardized and audited curricula, new forms of performance evaluation. But while educational leaders at the school level are increasingly immersed in accountability measures, their overall role in the implementation of new public management reforms is much broader. Hall (2013) describes them as "acting in part at least as local carriers of NPM," being "used in order to secure the compliance" of those working within their schools (p. 269). They are tasked with creating and carrying out practices that ease the adaptation of their teachers to the new circumstances in which they find themselves (Hall, 2013). In this role, principals are essential in the creation of the new professional subjectivities of those who work under their guidance and authority.

A principal's ability to persuade those in her building to work on meeting state performance targets, even if both the principal and the teachers perceive them as misguided or unreasonable, may mean the difference between retaining or losing the leadership position she currently occupies (Cohen, 2014). But in communicating current policy requirements to their staff, principals "unwittingly circulate a particular set of discourses associated with the conservative restoration in their schools and communities" (Ylimaki, 2012, p. 307) and further frame the way that teachers see their work. Anderson (2009) points out that it is not only what administrators are required to do,

tasks which they may not believe in, but also how they make meaning of these tasks and project that meaning to those with whom they work.

> Anderson warns that:
>
> […]unless they make it clear to themselves and others that they are not happy about doing them, then sooner or later they find it easier to defend such actions to themselves and others….Leaders who internalize these discourses and successfully resolve inner contradictions will feel little dissonance as they go about their work. They will be highly sought after as leaders because they legitimate the status quo with 'authentic' conviction. (2009, p.174)

But the growing dissonance felt by educators also places them in untenable positions. Hall (2013) observes that while the role of educational leaders is primarily one whereby they are implementing reforms determined elsewhere, they are also positioned as agents of change, able to shape and determine policies and practices in the contexts in which they work. Given the tensions that understandably arise in these competing conceptions, Hall notes "potentially irreconcilable differences that place leaders within educational institutions in an almost impossible position, caught between a leadership inspired imaginary of agential change and the need to implement reforms that have been centrally determined" (2013, p. 270).

The Culture of Data and Action Research

The current culture of schools is one of being awash in data, much of it generated to meet the demands of the audit culture and compiled from test scores and other measures of accountability. We have seen the action research classes as a counterpoint to the data our students routinely encounter in their schools many of whom participate in "inquiry teams," convened to take up test score data to zero in on students and skills in need of improvement. We work to trouble narrow notions of data and introduce the idea of inquiry in support of questions that derive from their practices and contexts. We find that the term, data-driven-decision making, has become a commonplace shorthand to signify immersion in the compilation and interpretation of site-based statistics, with an eye toward "continuous improvement" of schools. Part of our work then in our course is to interrupt conceptions of data gathering that limit the potential of the action research process. Rather than preparing future educational leaders who are simply conversant in reading statistical outcomes, we hope to cultivate leaders whose conceptions of inquiry lead to a broader questioning of their own roles and the aims and possibilities of education.

Since the accountability movement dominates the educational discourse, it has moved front and center in teacher and leadership preparation at the university level and in professional development in schools. Stakes are increasingly high at all levels of the education profession with the linking of test-scores to educator quality, educator preparation, as well as the continued viability of any individual school. Under these conditions, teaching is seen as the transmission of agreed-upon knowledge with learners demonstrating their familiarity with that knowledge via high-stakes testing. From a perspective of technical rationality, professional practice is viewed as consisting of the application of science or systematic knowledge to the instrumental problems of practice. In this frame the underlying conception of knowledge

> […]is that practice is instrumental, consisting in adjusting technical means to ends that are clear, fixed, and internally consistent, and that instrumental practice becomes professional when it is based on the science or systematic knowledge produced by the schools of higher learning. (Schon, 1995, p. 29)

Such a data driven approach reduces inquiry to a series of test/improve, test/improve, test/improve cycles that narrow a teacher's vision toward the teaching and learning process. To the extent that students are seen as numbers on spreadsheets, a relational, holistic, rigorous and critical education becomes less likely (Anderson & Herr, 2010).

These broader educational conversations provide the context for the work of teaching action research as well as that of the educators in our classes. They frame how educators increasingly see their tasks as well as their considerations of research and meaningful data. While data are generated locally, from the test scores of students, for example, the decision to generate it in this form as well as the purposes the data serve is made more centrally. In an era of scientifically-based research and evidence-based education, practitioners are positioned as consumers of others' knowledge and research aims, incrementally implementing interventions as a means to particular ends. Practitioner action research can potentially push back on these trends, disrupting narrow conceptions of teaching, learning and research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) or it too can be seen as a means to an end, helping teacher and administrators "better" carry out the current accountability regime of education.

Tripp (1990), describing action research as a "family of activities," draws on Jurgens Habermas to delineate at least three different forms, each informed by various vested interests. In discussing the technical, the practical and the emancipatory interests informing action research, Tripp offers the following distinction:

> The main difference between technical and practical kinds of action research is that the former is primarily concerned with answering the questions, "What can I do and how best can I do it?" whereas the latter also asks, "What should I do and why ought I do it?" Both these kinds of action research, however, ask their questions within the constraints of the existing situation, whereas the third kind of interest (the emancipatory) also questions the social assumptions on which technical and practical action is based. (1990, p. 160)

While also concerned with data and inquiry, much of what emancipatory action research aims to do is at odds with the current political and policy climate in U.S. education. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) observe

> …at the heart of practitioner inquiry is problematizing the ends question. Practitioner researchers question the fundamental goals of teaching, learning and schooling. What purposes—besides academic achievement as indicated by test scores—are important in the schools? What about teaching toward the democratic ideal, deliberation and debate, and challenging inequity? (p. 9)

In terms of the class we teach in action research, our intent is in cultivating educators who "problematize the ends questions," those who are reflective but couple it with challenge and critique. But this stance toward inquiry also potentially puts our students in the dissonance described earlier, those who, as they make meaning, continue to ask about the purposes of schools and the current actions they are being asked to carry out. To see and question the taken for granted routines of schooling and the dominant interests currently at play, we incorporated Tripp's (2012) critical incidents approach as a means to deliberately view the world of practice in new ways.

Tripp encourages the recognition of everyday events as data for interrogation. While definitions of critical incidents vary, it is often simply a fairly straightforward account of routine, professional practices or everyday events (Tripp, 2012). But it is in the *naming* of an event as critical that signals it as a stimulus for reflection. In rendering an everyday event critical we signal a commitment to interrogate it via probing questions designed to unearth various interests and power relationships with an aim toward viewing the incident through new lenses of understanding. Tripp suggests that the naming of an event as critical potentially interrupts institutional meaning

management and invites reflection on business as usual. It assumes that educational practices are embedded in social structures that are often invisible but no less real; practices and structures are seen as complex and immersed in layered power relations that are often taken for granted and remain unquestioned (Miles & Huberman, 1994, cited in Halquist & Musanti, 2010). In this sense, then, critical incidents are not 'things' that happen independently of the norms of the institution, but rather are a manifestation of the institutional culture. Their analysis potentially unearths assumptions that remain largely unexamined or outside the realms of public awareness (Herr, 2005).

Thomas & Davies (2002) caution that viewing NPM discourses as hegemonic fails to recognize that the enactment of these discourses is far from fixed at the local level. They make the case that to present NPM as colonizing, "stamping its authority on hapless academics in a deterministic and unidirectional way" is a failure to recognize and understand individuals as active in resisting and challenging the changes that are affecting them (Thomas & Davies, 2002, p. 376). Mechanisms of neoliberalism are realized and constituted within mundane and everyday practices of institutional life and while it imposes limiting conditions, at the same time, new spaces for resistance and struggle are possible (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). While there is nothing inherently critical about action research as has been seen in the preponderance of projects that fall within the technical realm, the aims of the action research class were set toward cultivating emancipatory work that questions the social assumptions on which technical and practical action is based (Tripp, 1990).

Although they were discussing pre-service education, I appropriate here Zeichner & Gore's (1995) sentiments and apply them to educational leadership preparation. In cautioning against romanticizing what can be accomplished, they reflect that: "Pedagogy within educational institutions has always functioned, in part, to regulate groups of people. Emancipatory action research, as a course requirement, struggles to maintain any emancipatory effect within such a context" (p. 21). While recognizing the limitations of the course, the hope was that the students would be able to move toward questioning and exposing the theoretical undergirding of many current school practices, that they could maintain an inquiry stance to their roles as educational leaders (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

The Intended Study

A small group of us have regularly taught action research over the years and we routinely rework the course, adding and discarding elements in a desire to offer the most effective introduction to the possibilities of action research that we can. It is always considered a work in progress. Our hope is that through action research students would consider everyday events more critically, coming to question common-sense understandings or the taken for granted that may interfere with their work as educators. Toward this end we decided to incorporate Tripp's (2012) ideas on critical incidents into our classes and study our own pedagogy in doing this.

Below I describe our evolving teaching context and how it was a catalyst for the evolution of our work as researchers. We did study our own pedagogy much as planned (see Herr & Price, 2013; Price & Herr, 2013) but ultimately much of our interest was drawn to what was transpiring beyond our classrooms. Ironically much of our reading and teaching of Tripp's (2012) ideas around critical incidents infiltrated the ways we moved through our professional lives in the college. We found that everyday events became somewhat freeze framed in our minds, inviting inquiry and interrogation.

Evolving Context, Evolving Research, Evolving Researchers

Earlier in the paper I noted the changing landscape of higher education and the work of academe being more thoroughly attuned to the culture of NPM and business sector values. While aware of the rapidly changing culture of my own institution, much of this had been, until this point, somewhat a worry at a distance. But when the implications of an entrepreneurial vision on campus arrived at our doorstep, we began to experience firsthand the idea that changes were not only taking place "out there" but necessitated changes "in here" as well.

Our research classes are required for graduate students across programs, so any programmatic changes have implications for our classes as well, even if not initiated by our department. My premise in exploring the changing context of our teaching is that while it sometimes felt like whiplash from our position as instructors of, in this case, action research, those professors making changes to their programs felt it no less so. Decision making writ large was being recalibrated, imbued with the values of entrepreneurialism. With that reference point, academic business as usual was being recreated around us, interrupting, for example, premises and resources for programs and curriculum, dependent on how well matched they were with the larger aims of the university to be competitive. This is an important frame for the narrative that follows regarding the changes in the Educational Leadership program that then brought changes to our action research course. All involved had to reposition themselves in the face of the changing landscape. Some found the new environment exhilarating while others of us saw it as somewhat perilous.

In an age of educational entrepreneurialism on and off university campuses, university departments that bolster enrollments through innovative, (e.g. marketable) programs are held in high regard by administrators and are rewarded for their efforts. Those programs unable to demonstrate a niche in today's market are faced with being phased out. Resources for new programs or reconfigured iterations of established ones are meted out via a cost/benefit accounting algorithm and value is established by a marketplace where efficiency and ease of delivery for busy, pragmatic, working adults "counts" along with an increasing enrollment

A shift in state policy and politics no longer required teachers to earn masters' degrees. Beyond this, the era of a teacher shortage had come to an end other than in high need areas such as science and foreign languages. But with graduate enrollments declining across campus, part of the speculation was that students who would typically enroll in a local, state university were being drawn to programs that could be completed primarily online. Suddenly universities such as ours that could, in the past, count on drawing mainly from a geographically local population faced competition, primarily in cyberspace. At the same time, since the geographical boundary lines were being blurred, our own university could be "open for business" beyond the driving range to campus. The appeal of the latter was quickly incentivized, with the university putting resources toward online and hybrid programs. The university created an office to foster and oversee their development across campus, employing design engineers and others to help package products for the programs. The discourse surrounding all of this was a mix of messaging: who better to create these new learning environments than university educators and, if we stay out of the game, a large number of "customers" will be conceded to those who would offer a lesser educational experience.

The Educational Leadership program quickly retooled their program, offering students multiple options in terms of how they wanted to approach and complete their graduate degrees. They created one of the first completely online masters' degrees on campus as well as a hybrid "fast-track" version of the program that, while primarily online, offered some face-to-face teaching within a course. The curriculum was reworked or repackaged, allowing students to take two 7 and a half week online courses per semester and enroll in one other hybrid class that spanned the entire

semester. So although the graduate students were working full time, they were on a "fast track" to complete their masters' degree and be eligible for an administrator certification within 18 months. Clinical faculty were hired to direct both the fast track program as well as the fully online one. The hope was that the students who would be attracted to the fast-paced, intense programs would enter with an awareness of the demands and have the willingness to sacrifice the time and energy to more quickly get to a desired degree.

Our department, Educational Foundations, offers research classes for the college. With the creation of the new tracks in Educational Leadership, we were asked to prepare an action research class specifically for these cohorts of students. Action Research is a required class in the Educational Leadership programs, as it is for a number of programs in the college. Permanent certification as an administrator in the State of NJ requires candidates to complete and submit an action research project. The new formats of the Educational Leadership programs and their use of a cohort model would necessitate the development of research courses for their specific program. This was a departure from our usual research classes that draw across multiple programs and serve the whole college, among them the graduate programs in Educational Leadership.

Once these reconfigured programs were put in place, the Educational Leadership Department experienced the fastest growing graduate enrollment on campus. The programs and the department were frequently and publicly held up as the ones to emulate, representing the entrepreneurial spirit the university is working to cultivate. The department has been consistently rewarded for the increased student enrollment with, for example, new tenure-track and clinical faculty lines.

While the discourse in the university surrounding the reworking of programs such as the ones in Educational Leaderships was one of championing the growing marketability of the offerings, we had a sense of unease. We wondered what the university might be losing as it traded in what it once did well to meet the current demands of the increasingly competitive marketplace. Our role as we saw it was not about defending the past but to demonstrate that we could thoughtfully recognize and critique the current context while offering programmatic pathways to cultivate reflective, effective educators. We were increasingly uneasy that the evolving programmatic iterations being developed were more similar to alternative programs than different. Overall we were not unlike the teachers Ball and Olmedo (2013) describe "…who stands alone in their classroom or their staff common room, and sees something 'cracked', something that to their colleagues is no more than the steady drone of the mundane and the normal, and finds it intolerable…" (p. 85). They suggest that it is at this point that teachers and professors begin

> to look for answers to questions about the *how(s) of power* inside and around him or her, the *how(s)* of his or her beliefs and practices. In these moments, the power relations in which the teacher is imbricated come to the fore. It is then that he or she can begin to take an active role in their own self-definition as a 'teaching subject', to think in terms of what they do not want to be and do not want to *become,* or, in another words, begin to *care for themselves.* Such care also rests upon and is realized through practice, practices of critique, vigilance, reflexivity, and of writing. (pp. 85-86)

Drawing on the idea above, we committed ourselves to a stance of critical vigilance as we made our way through our rapidly reconfiguring environment.

Finding A Way into "Close" Research

Alvesson (2003) notes that it is a rare occurrence that academics study the "lived realities" of their own organizations. Part of this may be the reality that it is difficult to "make the familiar strange," that is, step back and make meaning of the everyday. And while agreeing with the complexity of the task, Alvesson suggests there is more to our hesitation than this: "Ideas about organizational loyalty requiring that one is not exposing 'backstage' conditions may lead to, or be an excuse for, self-disciplination and subordination to conventions on proper behavior which are taken for granted" (2003, p. 167). But if our task is to interrogate how neoliberalism manifests in the "mundane and everyday practices of institutional life" (Ball & Olmedo, 2013) a focus on our own institutions makes sense even if seemingly transgressive (Alvesson, 2003).

There is a rich history of insider/practitioner research as an approach to organizational change and professional learning (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) but accounts from university settings are not common (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). When it is taken up, Brannick and Coghlan (2007) observe, often the argument is a warning against going native. Morse (1998 cited in Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) makes the case that "The dual roles of investigator and employee are incompatible, and they may place the researcher in an untenable position" (p. 59). But others push against the notion of dualistic categories presented as "pure breaks rather than as unstable oppositions that shift and collapse both within and between categories" (Lather, 2006, p. 36). Thomson & Gunter (2011) go on to make the case that these unstable, multiple and dialogical researcher identities may enhance practices of research whether deliberately or fortuitously enlightened in the process of the research. As their own work demonstrates, simple descriptors such as whether a researcher is an insider or outsider limit a full consideration of the multiplicity of roles and identities employed in the duration of a research undertaking.

While there is a plethora of work regarding autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, Denzin, 2006) and self-study (Bullough, Jr. R.V. & Pinnegar, S. 2001; Loughran, J. 2007), the aims desired here are a bit different: rather than a focus on the researcher herself, the idea is to "draw attention to one's own cultural context, what goes on around oneself rather than putting oneself and one's experience in the centre" (Alvesson, 2003, p. 175). Alvesson terms this type of study a self-ethnography. It is an interrogation of the everyday event or ethos via a stance that asks "what can this mean?" This is not unlike Tripp's (2012) use of critical incidents as a means to interrogate common practices and reframe them bringing new understanding as well as strategies of intervention. The work is to understand the commonplace in new ways, in this case, as possible enactments of neoliberalism and/or as resistance thereof. Alvesson frames this kind of work as "emergent spontaneous" study, whereby the participant/worker turned researcher is alert for the interesting or revealing; she is in an inquiry stance, as she goes about everyday practices of work. It is the cultivation of a questioning pose and a pausing to reconsider the ordinary.

> What it is really all about is to develop a sensitivity for and preparedness to do something with the rich empirical material that one, at least occasionally, is facing. The idea is that consistent, long-term scanning of what one experiences produces a more extended set of incidents candidating for analysis. (Alvesson, 2003, p. 182)

Alvesson suggests micro-anchoring the account of the noticed incident by focusing on specific acts, events and actors. The task is to explore the richness of one or two of these, leading to interpretations that are more theoretical in nature. This is accomplished by establishing a framework, a cultural understanding distinct from that which is understood in the culture being studied. In essence, that which is well-known becomes something to be understood in a new way, to address the question "What does it mean (apart from the obvious)?" (Asplund, 1970, cited in Alvesson,

2003, p. 185). It is the commitment to developing "reflexivity in relation to one's own organizational practice, thus combining theory and practice, and transcend the border between doing research and being an organizational member in other capacities (teacher, committee member, administrator)" p.189.

Brannick & Coghlan (2007) distinguish between insider research which is more thought through and planned for initially, and Alvesson's self-ethnography where the research task is seen as almost incidental. This work falls into both descriptors, with our classroom research more closely aligned with the tenets of teacher research. This part of the research relied on student generated artifacts, our own researcher journaling, ongoing meetings and discussion between those teaching the course to compare experiences, observations and espoused insights. Capturing the larger context of our work falls more clearly into the emergent/spontaneous research described by Alvesson (2003). While we were noting in an ongoing fashion any disjuncture with our previous experience teaching the course and having ongoing discussions about these, these observations simply became part of our researcher journals. It was only at the conclusion of the classroom portion of the research that I attempted to pull out these disjunctive capturings and understand how they might be part of the research story to be told. Much in the way Thomson & Gunter (2011) conducted a post-hoc analysis to trace their multiple researcher positionalities in their study, with Alvesson as my guide I sought to further make meaning of our observations. For purposes of this paper I concentrate on this post-hoc analysis rather than our classroom analyses.

Kaihlavirta, Isomöttönen and Kärkkäinen (2015) note that in a recent search they could locate little work directly related to assessing and analyzing educational work through self-ethnography. Methodologically, Alvesson sketches more of a stance toward the consideration of contexts and leaves those of us intrigued with his ideas to venture into fairly uncharted terrain. The few examples located (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013, Hoffman et al., 2014, Kaihlavirta, et al., 2015) seemed to share little in common other than the general outlines of the approach or stance.

In an attempt to anchor our impressions I combed our researcher narratives and observations for what I termed contextual disjunctures. By this I mean, those instances of a shift or disconnection from typical ways of operating, where the university initiated or signaled a departure from common practices that trickled down to our sphere of daily work. I then posed the question: "What does it mean (apart from the obvious)?" as per Alvesson's suggestion.

Micro-Anchoring: De-Regulating Academe

The scene is a college faculty meeting. For weeks, in various venues, we have all been encouraged to think and act entrepreneurially, to create new programs - particularly graduate programs - that will "sell." A portion of this meeting is the unveiling of the new iterations of the Educational Leadership program, our first fully online offering as well as the new fast-track hybrid program. Power points are projected on big screens in the room and we idly scan through the courses that make up the programs, a long list of Ed Lead prefixes and course numbers, repackaged and repurposed. Surprisingly among them is our own action research class, an Educational Foundations prefix in the mix, the only class in the line-up offered outside of Educational Leadership. The clinical faculty member heading up the new programs and the one leading us through the afternoon hastily thanks the Department of Educational Foundation for graciously collaborating with them on the new programs and the incorporation of "our" course into their planning. Our then department chairperson is sitting next to me and mutters his surprise since he has known nothing of this "collaboration."

What does this mean (apart from the obvious)? Processes of program and curriculum development are well-established on campus. They involve multiple layers of approvals and

vetting by various curriculum committees. In addition, there are established venues for working across departments to incorporate another department or college's coursework in another department's program. There is a paper trail that documents all of these agreements and as a course or program moves forward it is accompanied by forms gradually accruing a long list of signatures. No doubt the process can be cumbersome but at the same time, it makes it difficult to circumvent any entity with an interest in the changes; it also signals that all involved are in agreement with the proposed changes and in this way, gathers support across various vested interests. Since these same colleagues are needed to sign-off on the proposed changes, it builds in a dialogue regarding any coursework shared across programs, incorporating varying faculty views. A quality control of sorts is established, with multiple eyes on any course changes or newly developed programs.

At the same time, these processes cultivate a level of collegial collaboration and trust, where we come to agreements regarding proposed offerings. Years of successfully collaborating across departmental lines were called into question as we heard ourselves being thanked in a public forum for a collaboration of which we knew nothing. In her discussion of shifts in professionalism, Evetts (2011) notes that notions of partnership, collegiality and trust give way to increasing levels of standardization, bureaucracy, and managerialism, to name just a few. With the advent of the push for more online programs, the university established a central office to oversee and support their development and coordination. Proposals went directly from departments to this centralized entity, in essence, eliminating the" middlemen" and faculty oversight and governance. This is an example of the new mean, lean, deregulated organization, replacing or circumventing cumbersome bureaucratic structures that are seen as stifling to innovation (Barry, Chandler, & Clark, 2001).

In the scenario described above, we are equally interested in being thanked for a "collaboration" that was obviously a fiction since, until that moment we knew nothing about it. As delineated above, this was a shift from previous ways of working. The public performance at the college faculty meeting invoked these past collaborations even though they did not reflect current realities. Drawing on Bourdieu, Scott (1990) warns that when a euphemism is invoked, it is virtually always a sign of having stumbled on to a subject of some delicacy. He suggests that euphemisms are used to obscure something that would be an embarrassment if declared in a more straightforward way. Scott (1990) observes that

> [...]we have a host of terms…designed to euphemize that place where urination and defecation take place…The imposition of euphemisms on the public transcript plays a similar role in masking the many nasty facts of domination and giving them a harmless or sanitized aspect. In particular, they are designed to obscure the use of coercion. (p. 53)

As things unfolded, it became apparent that coercion was part of a carrot and a stick approach to the commodification of the action research course. I take this up by returning to the opening scene of this paper about the restructuring of the action research class.

Micro-Anchoring: Collaborating in Creating Teacher Technicians

The scene is a meeting of action research faculty. We puzzle through how to offer action research with any integrity in the new formats necessitated by the changes to the Educational Leadership program. 7 ½ weeks – we worry that it is not possible to retain the spirit of the action research spiral in such a truncated version. Our goal is less to talk *about* action research than to have the students *experience* its possibilities. We suggest that the department create a different kind of research offering for their purposes that might more easily fit the shortened timeline. This, we learn is not possible, that to quickly get the new online programs up and running, the cyber versions of campus programs needed to mirror the same required coursework that had been approved when the

original face-to-face program made its way through the state approval processes. Since action research was in that initial line-up, it would appear in the new iteration of the program as well.

We continue to voice our concerns and are "reassured" not to worry, that if we do not see ourselves developing the needed course, the university will contract it out, pay others with "expert knowledge" to create an action research course for the new programs. We are beginning to realize we do not "own" our own curricular offering. As an incentive, the university is offering a lump sum to any faculty members willing to create the versions of courses needed for online programming. We eventually decide it is better to be in the conversation than having our own course be developed without us. We fret, work and discard. We infuse the use of critical incidents a la Tripp (2012), still trying to critically reframe the taken for granted in the time we have. Finally we are somewhat doubtfully satisfied that it is the best we can do within the constraints. Our course is sent off to university design engineers. It is repackaged so as to conform to the specifications of the programs – blue banners, a set number of modules, now all with lead-in film clips, etc. and sent back to us as "the course shell." We are told the uniformity of the look is important so that students will not be confused by differing formats. The shell is owned by the university, available for uploading each semester and easily facilitated by interchangeable faculty.

What does this mean (apart from the obvious)? Anderson & Cohen (this issue), in delineating the shift toward managerialism in the construction of new teacher and leader identities, warn of the proletarianization of teaching. Course and curriculum development is a clear part of expected faculty labor, encompassed in our roles as faculty members. To be paid extra for what has always been part of our job descriptions, moved faculty from being professionals to wage laborers, in Marxist terms, a clear signal of downward social mobility. The transaction resulted in a product that could clearly be commodified, "owned" by the university. Anderson and Cohen warn of the commodification of teaching through a new education industry and a narrow, scripted conception of teaching that diminishes professional judgment and separates conception from execution. Our sense is that when these characteristics are cloaked with the legitimacy of university offerings, we move in these directions at our own peril, cooperating in our own diminishment and possibly, extinction.

Our decision to "stay in the conversation," that is, re-create our own course within constraints was a difficult one. As Anderson & Cohen (this issue) observe, the appearance of choice may feel like professionalization but in reality, we were, on one level, positioned according to the tenets of NPM. While technically we could have "opted out," the course re-creation would move ahead with or without us. We did not, for example, have a choice as to whether action research would be included in this abbreviated version in the reconfigured programs. The "choice" was simply whether we would do it versus a hired hand of the university's choosing.

What we could choose though was not to accept the notion of a static course, a shell that could be taught by any instructor. We re-appropriated the course shell, keeping it permeable for our own purposes. We managed this in two strategic ways. First, we retained control of the teaching of the course despite repeated offers from the person directing the educational leadership programs to staff it for us from her network of adjuncts. This was more complex than it may appear on the surface. The rapid growth of the programs increased demand for sections of the course, in varying formats. Initially full-time professors in Educational Foundations prioritized teaching the class; when we could no longer keep up with the demand, we gathered a small group of adjuncts of our choosing to partner with us in tending and teaching the course. We came to somewhat jokingly refer to ourselves as the McDonald's of Action Research, waiting for the Educational Leadership order to come in: "We'll have two online in 7 ½ weeks, one face-to-face in 16, and 3 hybrids, please." There is a growing recognition that as universities are under increasing pressure, both economic and

political, to create and deliver a system of mass higher education, the end result is an academic production line aptly termed the McUniversity (Barry et al., 2001).

Secondly, rather than treating the course shell as a static entity, we "remembered" that actual courses are in a state of constant refinement and revision as per the professional judgment of those of us actually teaching them. In reclaiming the shell as a course, it was once again familiar, albeit reconfigured, and therefore fair game to ongoing reworking. A small group of faculty continued to tend to the course, continuing to refine it over a period of 3 years, keeping it dynamic and fluid. We nurtured the course with the aim of holding firm to action research principles, where questions of practice are addressed via data specifically gathered to inform local questions. Educational leaders are to be well-versed in interpreting data not of their own choosing to match questions that originate elsewhere (e.g. performance of students on tests and the study of test results to ascertain the skills needed to move those students "on the bubble" over the line). We wanted to trouble, for example, notions of data and for what purposes, aimed at disrupting narrow conceptions of teaching, learning, leadership and research. We desired to cultivate future educational leaders who could use inquiry in their school practices to address questions of importance to their local community. Cultivation of the questioning educational practitioner is in itself an example of resistance in the current neoliberal era.

In their analysis of the micro-politics of resistance, Thomas and Davies (2005) warn against a dualistic debate about resisting NPM, where the only options seen are compliance versus resistance. They suggest instead the exploration of "the production of meanings and subjectivities within NPM, and how individuals come to know and challenge the ways in which their identities are constituted" (p. 684). It was important to us to continue to recognize ourselves as action researchers. Our teaching of the course grew out of strong histories with the process and commitments to the transformative possibilities of this genre of research. While other courses may have hit less close to home in terms of our professional identities, action research was core to what we saw as our work. Thomas and Davies (2005) argue that it is at this level of identities and subjectivities that resistance is conceptualized, a response to effects of power felt at the micro-level of experience.

Micro-Anchoring Epilogue: 3 Years In

The scene is a short meeting to break the news to us that action research would no longer be part of the new versions of the Educational Leadership program. A course of their own design would be substituted with the hope that it would be less "disruptive" than the action research currently being offered. Feeling blind-sided, we try to marshal a bit of a protest, arguing that student response and course evaluations have been extremely positive, that we have continued to re-invent the class as per the department's requests. But the decision has been made and the brief meeting wraps up. None of us ask just what "disruptive" means and we are left to our own conjuring.

What does this mean (apart from the obvious)? Ball (2003) observes that the key elements of current educational reform, at all levels, are embedded in three interrelated policy technologies: the market, managerialism, and performativity. When deployed together the result is a "devolved environment" (OCED, 1995 cited in Ball, 2003) where central management concentrates on setting the overall framework rather than micromanaging. As individuals as well as collectively, we have the "freedom" to locate ourselves and our programs within this environment, but how our actions are regarded are a matter of who controls the field of judgment.

Ball goes on to describe performativity as a means of regulation, whereby judgments, comparisons, and public displays serve both as incentives as well as controls (2003, p. 216). Within this "devolved environment" limits of possible options and decision boundaries are in place if not immediately visible and Ball would warn, set the pre-conditions for commodification and

privatization. A few years earlier, the graduate program in Educational Leadership was seen as in jeopardy, with student numbers declining. Their move toward fast-tracking their programs resulted in both major growth as well as acclaim at the university level. Their programs became exemplars for the rest of us in terms of entrepreneurialism and the successful realization of the university's current direction. Besides public recognition, they were rewarded with faculty tenure-track lines to support their growing programs.

Initial choices begin to set a pathway as we all make our way in a new landscape. For those of us teaching action research, our attempts to hold a space of resistance and authenticity eventually resulted in the course being cut. And some faculty in Educational Leadership, while the department is valorized in the public discourse, continue to assess the costs of choices made as they transform their programs. These struggles of decision-making each reflect values being challenged or displaced altogether within the "terrors of performativity" that set the pre-conditions for our freedom of choice.

> We become uncertain about the reasons for actions. Are we doing this because it is important, because we believe in it, because it is worthwhile? Or is it being done ultimately because it will be measured or compared?... Do we value who we are able to be, [who] we are becoming in the labyrinth of performativity? (Ball, 2003, p. 220)

Lorenz & Watkins (2001) suggest that it is in looking at ourselves compassionately that we can begin to make out the contours of the landscape in which we act: that in reflecting on the everyday, we become aware of multiple and contradictory dialogue as we think through situations and alternatives. "If we reflect on everyday thought, we can see the multiple and contradictory internal dialogues that arise as we think situations through or respond internally to events and experiences. Self and community are reflections of each other (p. 9)." Decisions we make are negotiated within the constraints of structures of everyday new public management, explicitly recognized or not.

Discussion

Recognizing subjectivity as a key site of political struggle within neoliberalism generally, Ball (2015) outlines a "politics of refusal." He draws on work by Rose to critique more orthodox ontologies of resistance that are "too simple and flattening" (Rose, 1999 cited in Ball, 2015, p. 2). Ball instead makes the case that neoliberalism is enacted or refused by the individual, "never in an absolute sense, rather within multiple 'strategic skirmishes.' The issue is one of a recognition of and engagement with relations of power" (2015, p. 3).

This paper has made the case that "close-study" (Alvesson, 2003) of our work environments can support this process of recognition of power through an analysis of what could be considered everyday non-events. This is reminiscent of Tripp's (2012) notions of rendering incidents critical. In this paper, it has involved a noticing of departures from common practices and policies, what I have called "contextual disjunctures." Once noticed, we as professionals can choose to essentially go with the proposed enactment or strategically refuse or recreate. As Ball (2015) points out, this politics of refusal is played out in multiple strategic skirmishes rather than fall on your sword heroisms.

We made a conscious decision to "stay at the table" in terms of continuing to create and teach the action research class even amidst shifting, challenging teaching conditions. In part we thought it was important to hold a questioning space where the new but now taken for granted routines of schooling could be reconsidered and reconceived. Since data gathering of a certain ilk is such a key piece of this enterprise, it was particularly important to us to offer alternative conceptions of research through the action research class.

In trying to safeguard the class, we were essentially assessing how much authentic teaching space we could retain in the face of constricting circumstances. But beyond this, we were fully aware that the knowledge base of practitioner action research has long been marginalized (Anderson & Herr, 1999), a reality particularly apt in a regime of standardized assessments and measures. This genre of research positions practitioners as more than consumers of research and affirms the knowledge offered from the ground up. It has the potential to remind educators of professional roles and expertise that interrupt–to quote Zeichner once again--the creation of "educational clerks who are not to exercise their judgment...in their various school roles" (2010, p. 1545). Practitioner action research then can be seen as a counterpoint to the new professionalism currently being cultivated for ease of management and compliancy (Rhoades, 1998).

But given that the same reworking is at play in university life, retaining our input into the action research class for as long as we could was an exercise in our own professional judgment, a move away from expected compliancy while straining to remain collaborative as the educational leadership program was recreated. Much as Mungal (this issue) found, these collaborations are possible for a time until the fundamental disparate assumptions become more visible, casting collaboration then as obstructing the overall aims of the neoliberal endeavor.

Foucault (2013 cited in Ball, 2015) suggests that we should question why we place ourselves "absolutely under the thrall" of constraining truths, exercised in both discourse and practices (p. 4). I am suggesting in this paper that we learn to closely examine our workplaces, but also warn that in practicing the exercise of critical vigilance, we create dissonance--for ourselves as well as our workplaces--for the enterprise of reworking our professional identities. But I am also suggesting that these close examinations are potentially important contributions to a more nuanced understanding of the daily enactments of NPM.

At the same time, we are reluctant and unsure of how to do this kind of exploration (Alvesson, 2003). While more commonly recognizing the identity reworking involved in other facets of our lives as professors, implications for our researcher selves have gone relatively untroubled despite being well positioned as insiders to make important contributions. Yet insiders producing knowledge regarding their own sites has not been particularly welcome in academe (Anderson & Herr, 1999). But as Lather (2006) suggests, the sharp boundaries we impose around our own research are untenable: "Dualistic categories are represented as pure breaks rather than as unstable oppositions that shift and collapse both within and between categories. The slides of inside and outside that so characterize the contemporary hybridity of positionalities and consequent knowledge forms are tidied over" (p. 36). Rather than accepting the binaries, fruitful work exploring and troubling the borders and boundaries seems warranted (Lather, 2006). Zygmunt Bauman suggests that any examination of our identities, as researchers or professionals in general, must come to terms with highly liquid, porous, unbounded identities: "Social science must do its part to trace the opportunities and challenges of the hybrid work of becoming, being and belonging" (2000, cited in Thomson & Gunter, 2011, p. 27).

Santner (1990, cited in Lorenz & Watkins, 2001), draws on the notion of the "postconventional identity" put forth by Habermas, meaning those who "dis-identify from identifications with injurious cultural norms," feel entitled to play with boundaries rather than denying or reifying them. In the process, he suggests, they ground the human capacity to bear witness. Toward this end, Lorenz and Watkins (2011) observe:

> Many silenced knowings can exist within apparently ordinary lives and communities, the lives of others and our own lives. By silenced knowings we mean understanding that we each carry that take refuge in silence, as it feels dangerous to speak them to ourselves and to others. The sanctions against them in the family, community or wider culture render them mute and increasingly inaccessible. Once silenced, these

> knowings are no longer available to inform our lives, to strengthen our moral discernment. (pp. 1-2).

But Lorenz and Watkins suggest that, should we pursue them, our own individual identity workings "also includes something for the culture," providing a lens through which we see through and bring to consciousness (2011, p. 13). Only via these more permeable membranes can we register the narratives that will ultimately help us re-imagine the structures of which we are a part (Lorenz & Watkins, 2011).

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Volume 23 Number 93 September 14th, 2015 ISSN 1068-2341