



# Teachers' Changing Subjectivities: Putting the Soul to Work for the Principle of the Market or for Facilitating Risk?

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## Abstract

Here we reconsider teachers' changing subjectivities as autonomous agents whose practices acknowledge risk as an essential element in intellectual inquiry. We seek alternative descriptions to the limiting language of teachers' current practices within the primacy of the market. We are convinced by Levinas's claim that ethics is the first philosophy with its concomitant responsibility for the Other (Alterity). This provides a valuable point of departure and our understanding of its relevance is expanded by Biesta and Todd. This perspective allows interruption of the global reform ensemble with its reductionist understandings of teachers' subjectivities within concerns for a 'visible pedagogy' and performativity. We illustrate how this global policy imperative is reworked in policies in the Republic of Ireland and share reflexive insights from our tutoring of teachers studying for a Master's degree in Education. We show that teachers' autonomy, which we understand as the capacity of teachers to facilitate risk and make ethically informed local judgements, is severely restricted by imposed standards, codes and laws to which there is tightly policed adherence. Instead we describe teachers' practices occurring within an Invisible Pedagogy, which is not concerned with totalising and limited performativity but instead, explores risks associated with existential possibilities beyond commodification.

**Keywords** Teachers' subjectivities · Autonomy · Teachers' work practices · Risk · Primacy of ethics · Invisible Pedagogy · Existential possibilities · Performativity

*Whoever cannot seek the unforeseen sees nothing for the known way is an impasse. Heraclitus.*

## Introduction

Philosophical inquiry in relation to the purpose of education in contemporary times regularly expresses deep concerns with the reshaping of pedagogical interactions for a machine code of performativity (Biesta 2015; Lundie 2016; Paolantonio 2019; Santoro 2017;

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Santoro and Rocha 2015; Saeverot et al. 2013; Todd 2003). Paolantonio (2019) describes how post-industrial education draws from mind–brain research and puts body and soul to work generating a new class of creative professionals, teachers and school leaders, who reflect the primacy of the market: ‘who follow their curiosity, are constantly learning, who are innovators, problem solvers and critical thinkers in the digital era—are the driving force for economic prosperity in the post-industrial city’ (p. 6). Arts and humanities become reified as commodities and their possibility to interrupt and bring education beyond ‘performativity’ is denied. Naughton et al. (2018) see recent references to ‘creativity and expression’ as ‘amount(ing) to a fabrication’. Teachers need ‘the courage necessary...to take risks, and to encourage students to have an encounter *with* the world’.

In this article we seek an alternative description of teachers’ changing subjectivities and work practices as autonomous agents not for a totalising and limited performativity but instead for reflecting a primacy of ethics, facilitating risk within a justified and considered ethical discourse. This requires recognition of open-ended spaces for the Other and for imagining a ‘good life’ for all to emerge: ‘what matters educationally is the possibility of fostering openings for ‘subjectivity’ to emerge. In contrast to optimizing one’s ‘brain power’ for performing specific measureable outcomes, education has to do with allotment of a time and place in which the existential singularity, irreplaceability and particularity of each person can emerge through being in a responsive relationship to others and to the world’ (Paolantonio 2019, p. 4).

We speak of teachers’ subjectivities and soul work practices by foregrounding the centrality of ethics and the essential role of risk-taking in the context of fast changing global policy imperatives that put teachers’ bodies and souls to work in pre-scribed directions with imposed rules and roles. While we resist offering what might be perceived as a definition of the soul, we rely instead on an understanding shared by Paolantonio (2019): ‘the soul, as ‘the very best part of us’, is an ensemble of affective and libidinal forces that animates our bodies toward each other and so gives shelter to other possibilities for recomposing the structures and pleasures of collective life. It is an aesthetic organ for wondering, for taking flight and delight, and which, in so doing, allows our bodies to attach in ‘conjunction’: to extend care and to give time and Eros to a world...to experiment together with being human: with being amidst the pleasures of collective life beyond the imperatives of work’ (pp. 8–9).

Levinas’ philosophy of the primacy of ethics and his understanding of unconditional responsibility for the Other becomes a valuable point of departure from the existing canon of Western philosophy. We elucidate this further using writings of Biesta and Todd, who specifically write about philosophy of education (Biesta 2008, 2012a, b, 2013, 2015, 2017; Todd 2003, 2008, 2016). Throughout the article we make the case for framing teachers’ subjectivities and practices as primarily relational, concerned with productive co-inquiry for human (Face-to-Face) encounters that necessarily embrace the ‘beautiful risk of education’ (Biesta 2013, p. 1). We contend that bearing responsibility for the Other must be justified by teachers from a living ethical base. Teachers’ practices based on considered and intellectually defensible ethics which are comfortable with Alterity—not convinced by the primacy of the market—work with recognition of the uniqueness of each student and a future-orientation that is prepared to grapple with uncertainty and refuses to be reduced to a system of codes, rules and legislation (Lundie 2016; Todd 2008).

We show how teachers’ changing subjectivities for autonomy and freedom are currently directed toward a global and European neoliberal turn of ‘visible pedagogy’ and performativity (Todd 2016). This all pervasive reform advances a new concept of the nature and purpose of education and what it means to be a teacher subject. It asserts epistemic

dominance in more than thirty countries as it justifies education as 'teaching and learning' and 'learnification' (Biesta 2012a, b) and repositions teachers' subjectivities for a shock doctrine of constant global, national and local comparison. Teacher subjectification becomes reconstructed as an actuarial 'elastic self' for self-evaluation working within the calculus of individual gain for the primacy of national economic competitiveness (Brady 2019).

Market-led education in what we are indicating as the wrong direction puts the 'moral goods of teaching in jeopardy' (Santoro 2017, p. 49) and reframes them in ways where ethical concerns in teachers' work practices are 'parsed into social and emotional learning competencies'. Teachers are asked to leave their former moral commitments and beliefs behind and instead work within a public policy space where efficiency and efficacy, prescribed rules, moral codes and laws are prized above all else (O'Neill and Bourke 2010). Teachers, who criticise or question policy mandates out of a sense of professional obligation risk being labelled insubordinate, and worse, only self-interested (Santoro 2017, p. 50). This spells an 'all-out assault and impoverishment of the soul, since all learning, creativity, pleasure, communication and cooperation is already pre-determined, calculated and valorized within the logic of economy and utility' (Paolantonio 2019, p. 8). Framing teachers as pliable entrepreneurs offers no affordances for teachers to arrive at their own ethical judgements, to make meaning, slow down, pause and wonder aloud: 'nowadays education tends to replicate a form of learning that puts the soul to work, as it were, prompting a narrow, self-enterprising subject with a frantic instrumental orientation to the world' (Paolantonio 2019, p. 1). A joyless approach to teacher subjectivities aligns with an instrumental approach to good teaching (Mooney Simmie et al. 2019).

We illustrate how this fast-paced global reform ensemble is gaining traction in education policy documents in the Republic of Ireland (Ireland) and how it currently (re)positions teachers subjectivities and work practices along the lines of 'a perfect technology' (Biesta 2013, p. 1) as it seeks to prescribe teachers' conduct using the carrot-and-stick approach of a neoliberal imaginary: Fitness to Practice legislation connected to Codes of Conduct on one side and on the other a new public space for teachers to continually showcase their 'creative' classroom innovations (Teaching Council 2016, 2018, 2019). We draw some reflexive insights from a decade of acting as tutors with over two hundred and fifty postgraduate students, experienced teachers, mentor teachers and school principals in primary and secondary schools, in a Master's in Education programme (Mooney Simmie and Moles 2011). We show that teachers' autonomy, which we understand as the capacity of teachers to facilitate risk within ethically informed local judgements, is severely restricted by imposed standards for constant comparison that use a soft language of autonomy, celebration and creativity for a neoliberal imaginary, already beginning to be tightly policed.

We have structured the article as follows. First, we discuss Levinas's philosophy in relation to the primacy of ethics and responsibility for the Other, further developed and expanded within education by writers including Biesta and Todd. Second, we use our understanding of Levinas to show how ethically defended risk-taking can interrupt teachers' subjectification to the global reform ensemble and the epistemic dominance of a market-led language of constant comparison and performativity. Third, we shine a spotlight on teachers' subjectivities in Ireland, found in policy documents and in reflexive insights from our tutoring of Masters in Education students. Our aim is to advance alternative teachers' subjectivities which acknowledge teachers' work practices not for a neoliberal direction of limited performativity and predetermined outcomes but instead reflecting the primacy of ethics in allowing teachers' freedom to open productive spaces for facilitating risk and making localised autonomous judgments within an 'Invisible Pedagogy' of immeasurable

soul work and challenging encounters with the world. We are not writing here about unfettered autonomy and we do not envisage teachers as free from accountability, however we defend the role of critical reflexivity accepting the Socratic aphorism that ‘the unexamined life is not worth living’.

### **Alterity and the Beautiful Risk of Education**

In this section we outline the basis of our inquiry, informed by concepts promulgated by Levinas and applied to philosophy and education by Biesta (2008, 2012a, b, 2013, 2015, 2017) and Todd (2003, 2008). This positions our aspiration to interrupt the global reform ensemble by facilitating teachers’ work practices as embodying risk within their considered ethical stances. By illuminating interplays between global and national policies and local practices we indicate the extent of the incursion of neoliberal ideas and practices into contemporary education.

Biesta (2013) speaks to the importance of retaining what he calls the ‘beautiful risk’ in education (p. 1). He indicates this risk is apparent in an assertion by the Irish poet and mystic W.B. Yeats, that education is ‘not the filling of a pail, but rather the lighting of a fire’ and that education encounters take place between human beings and not robots. He argues that having a well-defined risk-managed technology of teaching, operating as a perfect input-outcome machine is therefore neither possible nor desirable. Biesta’s concern here is that if ‘we take out the risk’ from education and teaching then there is a real danger that we will take out ‘education entirely’ (Biesta 2013, p. 1).

Santoro and Rocha (2015), in their review of Biesta’s book *The Beautiful Risk of Education* remind us of the ‘value of maintaining the complexity and risk involved in a dialogic approach to education’ (p. 413) and locate what they call the ‘theological circuitry’ (p. 414) in Biesta’s assertions, citing his call on creativity, the divine and glimpses of transcendence. In this regard, rather than instrumental understandings of teachers working within closed planning systems for delivery of predetermined products, Biesta is instead arguing that teachers bring something new to teaching as a human encounter where ‘the teacher serves as the sine qua non of the risk of education’ (Santoro and Rocha 2015, p. 414). This clearly demonstrates the need for consideration of one’s relationship with ‘freedom’ and ‘autonomy’.

This is particularly relevant to the integrity of teachers’ practices in a globalised world awash with technocratic discourses of standards, competences, skills, knowledge and dispositions that threaten the plurality upon which dialogue rests. We understand teachers work benefits from an ethical call for contextualised consideration of their practices: ‘those who have the moral luck to work in schools where they are permitted to practice educational wisdom, occupy a moral high ground because they can demonstrate their virtuosity. Those who may possess the capacity for wisdom, but who are institutionally hamstrung in exercising judgment, may feel morally diminished or demoralised’ (Santoro and Rocha 2015, p. 417). Teaching is described as seeking to build a bridge between moral, but apolitical individualism and a practice-based political and moral orientation for individuals engaged and committed to a collective, but non-identical, practice.

### **Simplistic Concepts of Learning**

Biesta considers the development of the individual as a subject and an agent in a function he calls ‘subjectification’. A central question of the nature and purpose of education and

pedagogy, which has preoccupied philosophers since the Ancient Greeks, is scrutinized by Biesta and Miedema (2002). They show how this distinguishes between a broad view of (liberal) education and pedagogy and a narrow view of schooling, training, instruction and learning. Within their analysis they advocate for a transformative conception of education which does not separate pedagogy from instruction using a Cartesian dualism. Instead they argue for the intersubjective nature of knowledge, skills, norms and values. They present the philosophical purpose of pedagogy as a relational dynamic for holistic development where instruction is based on shared inquiry: 'The pedagogical task, understood as a concern for the whole person of the student, is the central and proper task of all educative processes, instruction included' (Biesta and Miedema 2002, p. 181).

This distinction has particular relevance when we later consider how contemporary global discourses of education are narrowly reframed as 'teaching and learning' and where pedagogy is confined to the behavioural science of how young people learn. In this regard, Biesta (2012a, b) decries efforts by policymakers to redefine education using a language of 'learning', 'teaching and learning' and what he calls 'learnification'. He argues against this 'empty discourse of learning' (p. 35) that fails to recognise in a human endeavour the role of the teacher who needs to carefully consider what content is to be learned, why this content needs to be learned and who this content is to be learned from.

Biesta's analysis includes hope that education will start 'serving humanity in its struggle for meaningful and peaceful coexistence within the boundaries of what the earth can sustain.' We acknowledge the significance of the unseen, the invisible, the immaterial aspects of human existence when we create open-ended productive spaces for teachers' risk taking and localised ethical judgments. The boundaries to which Biesta refers provide adequate framing if they are understood, appreciated and philosophically interrogated.

### Levinas and Education

Biesta and Todd writing about Levinas see merit in the challenge his philosophy offers to interrupt a contemporary system of education that has become preoccupied with self, debased notions of self-evaluation for performativity and human capital (Brady 2019). Levinas questions whether Western humanism can any longer be accepted as an effective strategy to 'safeguard' humanity and, in this, Levinas exposes many shortcomings in the numerous atrocities of the twentieth century, and we can add to this the twenty-first century (Lundie 2016). According to Biesta, Levinas approaches subjectivity from a completely new direction and perceives a problem with positing a normative definition of what it means to be human that excludes those who do not measure up: 'humanism can only think of education as socialisation...the insertion of newcomers into a pre-existing conception of humanity....and a rational order' (Biesta 2008, p. 202).

Levinas thinks differently by positioning ethics as the first philosophy and beginning with a phenomenology that describes human relations, the primacy of the inter-human encounter and ethical responsibility to the Other sourced from a deep-seated existential place for radical moral commitments. His approach understands subjectivity differently by giving recognition to the uniqueness of each human being (Alterity). Biesta (2008) suggests that learning from Levinas is about opening a dialogical space in teaching where pedagogy can become and remain an event, something which is open to the future. In this way 'learning is not about the acquisition of knowledge and truth....it is about responding..... offering opportunities for students to find their own responses, to find, dare I say, their own voice' (p. 206).

Todd (2008) argues for a cultural (re)imagination of education and suggest that ‘economic rationales need to be replaced with alternative visions of education’ (p. 970). Culture has an existential as well as a social and political component and a process through which each person becomes a subject able to interpret the world and therefore able to make decisions about one’s life and to act in relation with others. This is of particular importance where teachers are no longer required to have an educational rationale for their practices and where outcomes that are calculable are prized possessions. Todd (2008) shows how Levinas does not offer new answers to the same old questions, instead he upturns the questions being asked: ‘an implied ethics takes seriously the conditions of the self’s implication in responding to the Other within an educational setting, and it means reading education through a structure of Alterity, where the emergence of the ethical subject is at stake in teaching–learning encounters...learning to become, perhaps, more mistress than master of our own discourse, to see discourse as both gift and response to the Other—this is the difficult task that readers of Levinas in education face’ (pp. 182–183).

The aim of our paper is to advance an argument for the desirability of teachers’ facilitating risk in education. The idea of risk is expounded by Biesta (2012a, b, 2013) and is informed by Levinas’s assertion that ethics is the first philosophy, with its associated concern for social justice. Clearly the two ideas overlap as it would be irresponsible to encourage teachers to take risks without there being an underlying ethical concern among the risk-takers. The pursuit of social justice involves uncomfortable, or even worse, confrontation of the status quo. As each individual and each situation is unique, teachers rely on ability to not only assess risk but to ensure that it is contained within some defensible ethical position.

Teachers who undertake their work as concerned ethical professionals are positioned against the prevailing ethos which prefers teachers to be unproblematic implementers of policies and curricula provided from external sources. The current concern of governments is explicitly that education functions to support and develop the economy of the country. Concern for students’ welfare is positioned within this regulative discourse. For example, in Physical Education the maxim ‘appropriate challenge and acceptable risk’ provides a measure of guidance while allowing the educator some judgement around appropriateness and acceptability. The requirement for teachers to undertake risk assessments can become a lip-service exercise in avoiding blame for accidents rather than describing pupils’ challenges within an ethically constructed experience, where responsibility for one’s own safety is pursued as a desirable quality.

## Respect and Trust

Respect is an essential component if risks are being undertaken. It is unlikely that a risk will be shared with someone who is not respected. Respect can develop into trust whereby asymmetry in the relationship is reduced and the strength of this relationship reflects awareness and concern for the other which is not premised on dominance or control. Biesta describes a link between trust and risk indicating that ‘trust is ...incalculable’ (Biesta 2006, p. 25) and acknowledging that trust ‘entails a moment of risk.’ (ibid.). Teachers are constantly involved in investing hope and ultimately trust in their students. As a significant adult in his or her students’ lives, receiving a teacher’s trust has implications for developing a positive relationship with education and a positive view of oneself.

Teachers are valued when they embrace care ethics and see their students as significant Others, with each student a unique individual who merits individual care. This commitment

to students as fellow humans allows a caring teacher to position requirements to satisfy externally provided criteria within an ethically informed frame which at least questions the dominant approach and perhaps contests it. The invisible commitments informing such a contestation indicate a human dimension which concurs with Biesta's (2017) 'reminder that there is more to education than where policy makers and politicians keep wanting to push it.' The ability to transcend the dominant requires spirit, definable as an existential quality consistent with a human soul.

Clearly it is impossible to remove risks, but by removing obvious and predictable critical questions and positing 'correct answers' and pre-worked solutions, the definition of risk changes to a more nuanced and more personally experienced concept. For example teachers who do not accept the dominant position with regard to 'learning outcomes', and prefer to think in terms of shared inquiry with no predicted outcome, run the risk of censure for not following prescribed procedures.

Within this process teachers are not concerned with Alterity. Sameness is celebrated. Students who present as different are marked and labelled and attempts are made to make them familiar. Levinas provides a concept of the Other which does not encourage a teacher, or whoever, to try to adjust that 'Other' to conform to some pre-conception. Rather Levinas sees dialogue and Face-to-Face interactions as ways in which the teacher can learn about and relate to someone whose way of being is new and challenging. Reproduction of the 'known' is at variance with understanding and relating to individuals and examining their processes of thought. There is a conflict here between meeting imposed, prescribed standards and acknowledging and enjoying difference. As argued above, to maximise on opportunities for students to develop awareness of self and others, the existence of a relationship of trust with a teacher mitigates the risk involved in making oneself vulnerable.

The capacity to define and pursue an ethical position can be identified as soul work. Central to Levinas's thinking is the idea that there is a responsibility for the Other which Biesta (2013, p. 19) describes as 'an ethical relationship, a relationship of infinite and unconditional responsibility for the Other.' The invisible and immeasurable nature of this relationship places it outside the constraints and controls of provided rules, codes and laws. There is a responsibility for the Other which involves dialogue and a genuine concern for interpersonal sharing. This is quite different from the measurable outcomes approach which nowadays dominates the global reform ensemble and Irish teachers' subjectivities.

### **Invisible Pedagogy**

When teachers' localised judgments and pedagogical interactions can exert change independent of official policies then the education system is an open-ended and productive system with authentic autonomy. However, when the state, state agencies and supranational agencies move to exert epistemic dominance then teachers' work practices become part of a deeply distorted system where only one side—what can be seen and measured in 'Visible Pedagogy' is recognised and, where the other side, the soul work of teaching understood by us as teachers' capability to facilitate risk and make ethically informed local judgements is denied. In this article we are calling this the 'Invisible Pedagogy'.

Saeverot et al. (2013) as they connect with soul work and existentialism suggest that current policies merely act to strengthen 'egocentricity and lack of responsible actions—in other words, it hides a deep moral betrayal in relation to having responsibility for the other and to the world as such' (p. 448). It is clear that teachers' work practices are complex processes that can become quickly distorted when reduced to visible measurable components

for a pre-specified totalitarian view, such as found in checklists of moral codes, rules, regulations, laws and standards.

Describing teachers' work practices as a technocratic endeavour for a perfect technology prevents open-ended inquiry which necessarily involves human encounter and opening potential for teachers' facilitating the 'beautiful risk of education' (Biesta 2013, p. 1). There is always more going on than can be seen and measured and we are asserting the need for teachers as philosophical, critical inquirers whose practice is ethically informed.

## Global Reshaping of Teachers' Subjectivities

Stephen Ball writing about a neoliberal turn in education explains it as a struggle for the soul of the teacher versus the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball 2003). He shows how former views of professionalism and bureaucracy have been replaced by new policy technologies of the market, new quality management and performativity. Ball defines 'performativity' as a 'technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change—based on rewards and sanctions (both, material and symbolic)' (p. 216). Teachers are required to 'organise themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations. To set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation. The new performative worker is a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence' (p. 215).

In this way ethical values and authenticity are sacrificed in what Ball calls an 'ethical retooling' of the teacher as a rational actor living according to the principle of the market and impression management. New controls are in use, whereby teachers who want to be part of the system are required to do hands-off control to themselves: the focus is less on meaning making and facilitating risk and more on showcasing 'what works'. This neoliberal imaginary can be detected in the diminishing role of the State in all aspects of contemporary education and the dominance of global corporations, philanthropists, and supranational agencies, such as the World Bank, the European Commission and the *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD). In this section we show how a reform ensemble emanating from global policy actors has influenced teachers changing subjectivities and practices, especially in the last decade since the global world recession.

For example, the OECD reshapes teaching through financially lucrative streams in its comparative testing regime, seeking young people's attainment levels in standardised testing (e.g. *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment PISA*) and well defined listings of comparative indicators in relation to teachers' work practices and identification of new performative modes of public accountability (e.g. *OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS*). The shock doctrine emanating from PISA embeds itself in over thirty OECD countries through international comparison. This mechanism of constant comparison plays out in teacher education through TALIS surveys, which reduces the complex and messy narrative of good teaching to predefined categories of standards and learning outcomes (Mooney Simmie et al. 2019).

In agreement with Biesta, Todd (2016) observes that education is becoming replaced by a new language of learning, where learning is lying within a 'narrow band width, becoming what we can 'see' and 'measure' through 'outcomes', 'outputs' and 'performance' (p. 621). The European Commission has recently redefined education as nested 'systems of learning' (European Commission 2018). Todd (2016) observes a sharp turn toward commonality and social harmonisation in her examination of European policy, which she describes as a Eurovision acting in response to anxieties about social and economic



concerns. According to Todd this misses the mark in paying attention to uncertainty, that which is human, the aesthetic and 'who' we are 'as relational subjects, etching out a life of meaning with others in complex and changing circumstances' (Todd 2016, p. 624). She proposes education as an existential experience that is not something to be controlled but must be open to surprise:

While the knee-jerk reaction in facing grave social and economic problems is to suture over the uncertainties they bring to education, what I am suggesting is that it would be better to accept uncertainty as a valuable feature of education itself and think about how that might actually inform educational policy...a response to uncertainty is to face uncertainty meaningfully, not to pacify it through a Eurovision lullaby (Todd 2016, p. 623).

Ball (2003) shows how a limited 'performative' focus changes not only what teachers do but is instead calling up a new type of teacher, an 'entrepreneur' interested in self-promotion within a (clinical) cycle of diagnostics, delivery and reporting success. For Todd, Alterity cannot be secured through ethics understood as sets of codes, rules and laws but instead requires teacher responsibility as a living practice in an educational setting and in response to the uniqueness of the Other (Todd 2003). The ambiguity inherent in teaching as an ethical practice is shared by O'Neill and Bourke (2010) when they argue for teachers' capabilities for autonomous and justifiable ethical judgements as they create meaningful learning spaces:

What is good or bad, or right or wrong, like so much else in education, usually depends on the context in which judgements are made and decisions executed. The teacher therefore has to judge, what is the right thing to do here and now in this context with these students. In another context, with different students and at another time, the resolution for that same teacher may be quite different and for good reason (p. 167).

Another instance of the global turn toward performativity can be found in *The OECD Handbook for Innovative Learning Environments* (2017). This handbook provides a blueprint for pedagogical interaction and teachers' practices as extended professionals in networks and communities of practice. Teachers are required to engage using body and soul as a new creative professional class. This mandated creativity and innovation is not considered for facilitating risk for localised autonomous judgements but instead is turned in a neoliberal direction of performativity (Paolantonio 2019). An ethical retooling of teachers' work practices in line with the principle of the market can be found through futuristic scenarios of new markets. The language throughout the document is one of design thinking, learning and an evaluative mind-set: using 'fit-for-purpose evidence' and applying given tool-kits. Biesta (2017) suggests a narrow focus on learning repositions teachers' work practices as an intelligent adaptive system which is instrumentally-oriented and functional and has comparison to the workings of a robot vacuum cleaner. Practices that achieve continuing improvement in identifying the specifics of its environment without ever asking anything purposeful—contained in a utilitarian focus of 'what works'.

The global reform ensemble (re)positions teachers' moral responsibility for situations in which 'they have not been given sufficient power to exercise that responsibility' (Santoro 2017, p. 50), found in moral injunctions such as 'every student achieves excellence' and/or 'every student succeeds'. Santoro (2017) regards this moral violence as a reversal of vices and virtues: 'teachers may have been taught that professional responsibility requires that they speak out if they believe they witness student suffering or educational malpractice. A

teacher advocating on behalf of students or the profession may find that what they believed was virtuous behaviour is now shunned' (p. 50). Within OECD policies teacher responsibility is directed toward a competitive self-focus rather than a Levinasian approach of Alterity, unconditional responsibility for Other and for facilitating risk. We now put a spotlight in how teachers' changing subjectivities and work practices at a global reform level are gaining traction and becoming interpreted in national policy and local practices in Ireland.

### **Teachers' Changing Subjectivities in Ireland**

We have so far made a case for teachers' changing subjectivities and work practices as autonomous agents facilitating risk, within an understanding of ethical justification for selections and responsibility for Other (Biesta 2008, 2013; Todd 2008). We have shown how our understanding is at odds with a Eurovision and global reform ensemble that seeks to position teachers' work within a neoliberal subjectification, a focus on an elastic actuarial self for a performative practice of measureable outcomes (Ball 2003; Biesta 2017; Todd 2016).

We illuminate our proposition with a spotlight on teachers' changing subjectivities in Ireland, first from the perspective of policy documents and second from the lived experience of teachers reported to us over a decade of tutoring in a Master's in Education programme at our university. We present our propositions not with the closure of definitive statements but rather as a hypothesis worthy of further open inquiry.

### **Spotlight on Policy Changes in Ireland**

Ireland's system of education is unusual in Europe in that it is a state-aided system—publicly funded and yet the vast majority of schools, primary and secondary schools are private and denominational with a long history of patronage and ownership by the Catholic Church. The influence of all the denominational churches is in evidence in policy documents and texts where there is a discernible emphasis on communitarian/humanistic views of a values-based education and explicit inclusion of the moral goods of teaching.

This system can be better explained through glimpsing Irish education's historical roots—public schools were first founded in the 1800s when Ireland was still a British colony. This colonisation was understood as an effort of state control to shape education using a 'policy of anglicisation' where issues of 'moral socialisation took precedence over issues of technical socialisation' (Clancy 1986, p. 120). This meant that when Ireland gained independence in the 1920s a new ideology of cultural nationalism took hold in shaping schooling and teacher education. The Catholic Church held prime position of patronage and ownership of denominational schools and a denominational system of higher education and training colleges for teachers.

Successive Ministers of Education adopted a principle of subsidiarity where the role of the state was understood as a subsidiary one: 'this principle of subsidiarity is reflected in the structure of education in the Republic of Ireland, where the degree of control by the religious personnel is almost without parallel' (Clancy 1986, p. 121). While a full historical account of how subsidiarity played out between church and state through the intervening years is not undertaken here it is important to understand that, despite a market-led education playing out relentlessly in policy since the 1960s the Catholic Church continues to date, to retain the primacy of its ethos in the majority of schools and this status is

guaranteed in the Education Act (1998). While a public policy of divesting some Catholic schools into ownership of the State has been ongoing since 2014 to date this policy has only ever seen a handful of schools returned to State ownership.

Teachers and schools have traditionally worked with other policy actors in a paradigm of 'consensualism', where everyone is understood to be coming from the same vision and moral code, a system of consensus and social harmony where difference is perceived as something to be avoided and/or assimilated rather than accepted and celebrated as recognition and responsibility for the Other (Clancy 1986; Mooney Simmie and Moles 2011). Clancy (1986, p.) explains the dominant framework for Irish education as one of structuralism underpinned by rationalism, consensus and concern for a values-oriented education rather than a conflict model that recognises difference and challenges the socialisation of inequalities and/or an interpretive model of critique and analysis that recognises plurality and responsibility to the Other (Alterity).

In former times, Irish teachers were inducted into understanding their roles as about following managerial and bureaucratic rules and responsibilities, being altruistic and caring persons willing to defer to higher moral authority and with no requirement to mediate roles with issues related to the wider world. In contemporary times, teachers' roles are understood as contained in ethical Codes of Conduct and Fitness to Practice legislation than in any localised ethical judgements made in dynamic practice settings (Todd 2016; Teaching Council 2016, 2019). The policy landscape, since the global recession of 2008 and the financial bailout of Ireland's banking system, uses a business-like language of rankings and international benchmarks for competitive individualism and national economic success that reflects the global reform ensemble discussed above (Brady 2019; Mooney Simmie et al. 2019). What made Irish people different, their 'immersion in Catholic culture which emphasised sameness—is being eroded by their immersion in a consumer culture which emphasizes individual difference' (Inglis 2008, p. 33). A formerly stifled individualism has been set loose in all public services including education.

The *Department of Education and Skills* (DES) states that its central vision is for Irish education and training to become 'the best in Europe' over the next decade (DES 2016–2019, p. 1). It explains 'This is a realistic ambition. Ireland already has a top 5 position in Europe in several important spheres (for example, post-primary literacy, third level participation, take up of STEM at third level) and a top 10 position in others (educational attainment, innovation, low dropout from schools)' (DES 2016–2019, p. 1). Teachers' subjectivities are understood as a personalised career trajectory of distinct stages, from initial teacher education to an induction phase and finally to in-career teacher education that (re)contextualises development as professional lifelong learning (Teaching Council 2016). A business-like language describes an ideal teacher acting as a neoliberal subject, a competitive entrepreneurial individual engaging in self-evaluation and constant comparison.

In this reform ensemble, there is evidence of a master plan for education and teaching based on certainty about the future needs of young people (The Irish Times, March 13th, 2019). Teachers' affordances for localised autonomy to facilitate the beautiful risk of education, for transformative possibility and recognition of the Other is denied. In the past decade teacher evaluation changed from a dialogical system of high trust to new low trust modes of public accountability, such as top-down incidental inspections; 360° degree evaluations by peers and new soft forms of self-evaluation (DES 2016–2019; DES 2016a, b). Brady (2019) shows that self-evaluation while promising increased freedom and autonomy (re)positions teachers' subjectivities within a limited neoliberal imaginary. Teachers invited by the Teaching Council to showcase evidence of innovation in an annual festival (Teaching Council 2018) closely resemble what Paolantonio (2019) calls the induction of

teachers into a creative professional class for a neoliberal performative turn. Espoused ethics in the Code of Conduct are important in that they facilitate the smooth running of a school and coincide with the professed Christian ethics of most Irish schools (Teaching Council 2016). However, the context in which they are described does not promote personal responsibility as the code is more consistent with provided morals, what Todd (2008) describes as ‘Philosophical ideas.....presented as helpful navigational aids to teachers who might otherwise be lost in a dark sea of moral indecision’ (p. 191).

### Reflexive Insights from Practicing Teachers

Teachers, mentor teacher and school principals involved in a Master’s in Education study reflect a concern to inform their practices and indicate their willingness to become involved in academia with its potential for intellectual challenge and productive interruption of mainstream discourses (Mooney Simmie and Moles 2011).

These primary and secondary school teachers and school principals/administrators allow us as tutors to acknowledge a shared desire for and a concern to provoke informed debate about the nature and purpose of education, ‘good teaching’ and ‘Productive Mentoring’, specifically within formal schooling (Mooney Simmie et al. 2019). These students report the complexity of their challenging practice settings and contexts. They share with us the rapid increase in social problems in their classrooms and schools, such as, suicides of students, issues of homelessness and mental health. This is happening within a traditional and mostly denominational system of schooling as discussed above, where the emphasis is on sameness and consensus and where such issues have become reframed as issues of the individual and no longer the responsibility of society and the public sphere. Those who are already advantaged benefit from social reproduction of their understandings and their access to resources and privileges.

We are convinced that the pursuit of identified standards and the uncritical celebration of achievement, presented in reform policies in Ireland is received by these postgraduate students both as a reassuring set of goals which can be actively pursued in a ‘busy’ uncritical and unreflective practice, and as a restrictive set of criteria which are designed without due consideration of individual contexts and unique capabilities. Methods of ‘marking’ students for progression, such as, designation of students as ‘special educational needs’ have become more pronounced, as have ICT-enhanced platforms to exert regulatory and restorative justice.

We have observed that teacher autonomy for this postgraduate cohort is severely restricted by imposed standards and adherence to new modes of performative self-evaluation (Brady 2019). Reductionist modes of public accountability share a considerable degree of overlap with new approaches of soft-sculpting and monitoring teachers across more than thirty OECD countries. Concerns of these teachers with meeting prescribed standards and achieving success in a publically acknowledged format is deeply rooted. The drive for compliance with regulations has increased since the Teaching Council became a statutory body in 2006 advocating for teacher professionalism while, at the same time, positioning schools as autonomous using a business-like rhetoric of a reform policy ensemble (re)framed by measureable outcomes and legal sanctions (Teaching Council 2016, 2019).

Carr’s (2018) study explored the understandings of teachers to DES inspection in one secondary school (n=20). Her case study shows how teachers fully accepted and without critique the policy rhetoric of autonomy, freedom and choice. However, her thesis shows that in the lived reality of teachers’ work practices this was somewhat of a pseudo-choice

as teachers quickly became technicians, fulfilling technocratic requirements and prescribed routines laid down in new top-down inspections (p. 82). Kelly (2012) examined a new mode of incidental inspection, designed to provide an accurate snap-shot in time of teachers' practices to the DES. She found that it shifted pedagogy toward a technicist turn, a tick-the-box performance underpinned by a traditional conformist culture unconcerned with facilitating risk and localised teacher autonomy for transformative possibility. Kelly (2012) found practising teachers in her study (n = 18) generally 'willing to alter their pedagogy in the name of performativity' (p. 67) without any effort at interruption or critical questioning. Only two teachers expressed concern of a possible 'detrimental' effect on teacher autonomy and creativity and 'devastating effects on the holistic education of young people' (p. 67).

Commensurate with what has been an unprecedented rate of reform policies there has been the downgrading of teachers' professional status through emergency legislation that has resulted in immediate loss of income, the government's withholding of supplementary payments for teachers partaking in industrial relations disputes in relation to curriculum reform, and a reduced pay scale for teachers entering the workforce from 2011. Some teachers on the M.Ed. programme experience precarious living conditions—in some cases these teachers are unable to sustain themselves on their incomes and were supplementing incomes with extra-curricular employment. The description of teachers as working within small budgets and becoming functionaries of the system is a sobering reflection in Ireland and in western society. Apparently contribution to the economic growth of their nation states does not imply teachers' own financial security.

## Conclusions

In this article we reconsider teachers changing subjectivities as a consequence of a global reform ensemble exerting dominance in more than thirty OECD and European countries, including Ireland, in the direction of a technology of performativity (Ball 2003; Biesta 2017; Todd 2016). We show how this global reform impulse negatively impacts teachers' subjectivities in Ireland, and how a technocratic direction adopted has hastened in response to economic recession and financial aid (Mooney Simmie et al. 2019).

We found that ideas from Levinas's philosophy as explicated in philosophy and education by Biesta and Todd became a valuable point of departure for us to interrupt the limited performativity associated with the primacy of the market and instead allows us offer alternative descriptions of teachers' subjectivities and work practices. We have shown that teacher's autonomy, which we understand as the capacity of teachers to facilitate risk and make ethically informed local judgements, is severely restricted by imposed standards to which there is tightly policed adherence. The tension between responsibility for the Other and freedom as an autonomous decision-maker opens us to 'the possibility of what Levinas calls "heteronomous freedom"—a view of freedom and rights made possible only by investing one's own freedom in the freedom and rights of the other.' (Chinnery and Bai 2008, p. 234).

The potential of ethics, as the first philosophy is currently restricted in Irish education, 'Being Good' involves accepting and demonstrating the mores and moral position which was in former times propounded by the churches and which nowadays are made explicit in the Teaching Council's Codes of Conduct and Fitness to Practice legislation (Teaching Council 2016, 2019). Irish teachers' subjectivities have changed in the

direction of a limited performative turn using an identifiable amalgam of Codes of Conduct, Fitness to Practice, Self-Evaluation and the new body and soul work of teachers' showcasing innovations for public modes of constant comparison (Brady 2019; Teaching Council 2016, 2018, 2019).

What is nowadays at stake in teaching is moulding young people in the direction of a technology of performativity for a promise of personal and national economic success.

However, if teachers accept ethical guidelines and become autonomous decision makers whose souls are involved in teaching, they will not necessarily mould their students in this corporate identity. That is the policy-makers' perceived risk. If teachers are afforded trust to behave as autonomous professionals they may involve their students in critical thinking which may not progress the neo-liberal agenda so important to contemporary governments.

Losing 'control' and allowing young people to explore and grapple with an unknown future is a risk-embracing process. The loss of soul when teachers are equated to automations, as for example in Biesta's (2017) comparison of intelligent adaptive systems to robotic vacuum cleaners, contains the process within a 'safe' space. Currently neoliberal ideologies are narrowing the boundaries of 'safety'. By creating precariousness for workers and insisting that teachers' practices are constrained and controlled, government agencies ensure that resistance is futile—or at least is not rewarded. Responding to one's own perceptions of what is of value can be a serious breach of what is required.

In this article we are considering the liminal spaces created between policies and risk-taking teachers. The potential for teachers to develop autonomy is stronger when state control does not extend to pedagogy. If, as is happening in Ireland, teachers are required to teach in a prescribed way, the space for autonomy and by implication, facilitating risk taking is considerably reduced. A market-led outcomes-based pedagogy favoured in a Eurovision and OECD driven curriculum does not facilitate teachers who see ethics and values as a living practice (Todd 2008, 2016). In Ireland there is an irony because of the explicit values of all churches where a Kantian categorical imperative is shared as a base-line. This does not sit easily within a neoliberal commitment to competitive individualism. Teachers, even teachers whose concerns about ethics and values are relatively superficial, find themselves within a structured system in which their values are inimical to the implicit goals.

In contemporary times, it appears that every aspect of life is assessable with provided criteria. The capacity for 'being aware' is being 'taught' in schools and colleges as 'mindfulness' and people of all ages are being 'taught' how to breathe in a yogic way. The simple joys of moving and making are transformed into comparable statistical criteria. Social media and popular television programmes encourage the idea that the Arts are yet another way in which competitive individualism can be facilitated. In this article, we assert that spaces to engage with the immeasurable, immaterial, mystical (soul) world of an Invisible Pedagogy involving existential possibility and an awareness of the aesthetic based on a positive awareness of oneself and one's potential for joy in living productively, will strengthen and balance all aspects of education and teaching.

The role of a successful teacher in Irish schools is currently defined primarily as a transmitter, sharing (re)contextualised knowledge and knower dispositions with his or her students. Students can reproduce this content in exchange for cultural capital and examination success. The pedagogy of a teacher who is reflexively working within our proposition for an Invisible Pedagogy is quite different. Students and their teachers move together into unknown areas of co-inquiry where questions are posed and critically analysed often without answers. It is not being suggested that an invisible curriculum is only present when it is acknowledged and recognised by policymakers. Educators must be aware of their potential

to influence their students holistically and by primarily focusing on measurable outcomes they are merely training students as conforming and potentially robotic examinees.

Once called the island of Saints and Scholars, Ireland nowadays promotes itself as a place where global corporations find a 'well-qualified workforce'. The once valued invisible soul world acknowledged throughout Irish society and which found expression within lyrical language and a deeply felt connection with nature, has been replaced by a desire for qualification and financial gain. This reductionist pedagogy ensures that qualifications assure an ability to work in a controlled environment and move to the beat of another's drum.

We have indicated several paradoxes associated with the ways in which education is currently provided in Ireland. Teachers' traditionally valued role of holistic education has been transformed into service provision, viewed in functional terms and commodified. Education's ethical responsibility for public interest values and society have been replaced by economic concerns. Competitive individualism is the dominant motivational perspective with the gap between society and economy becoming more obvious and less easily broached.

In this article we show how teachers' changing subjectivities and contemporary work practices are primarily refracted in global and national reforms and localised practices toward a limited performativity and away from facilitating an Invisible Pedagogy inclusive of the beautiful risk of education, responsibility for the Other, grappling with uncertainty and future challenging encounters with the world beyond anything we can ever imagine possible.

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