

## **PUBLIC STORIES OF MATHEMATICS EDUCATORS**

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### **“Its Influence Taints All”: Urban Mathematics Teachers Resisting Performativity through Engagement with the Past<sup>1</sup>**

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In England, globalisation and neoliberal<sup>2</sup> political agendas have created an environment in which teachers are constantly measured and ranked and subjected to a discourse of marketisation, managerialism, and performativity. This measuring, ranking, and subjection is particularly strongly felt in urban schools, where a discourse that recognised the systematic disadvantages that many urban children experience has been replaced by a discourse of “failing” students, teachers, and schools. The effect is to erode teachers’ sense of independence and moral authority and to challenge their individual and collective professional and personal identities. The need to understand the current policy environment, to step aside and look on critically, becomes more important even as it becomes more difficult.

Many teachers are engaged in re-storying themselves against this audit culture. We argue that it is possible, through excavating the past, to offer current-day teachers’ stories to support this process of re-envisaging what they are, might be, and might become in their professional lives. Here we offer a response from one currently serving teacher, the third author, to the experience of performativity and

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier unpublished version of this article was presented at the 13th International Congress on Mathematical Education (ICME13), Hamburg, Germany, 24–31 July 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Neoliberalism as a political philosophy stands for such ideas as privatization, austerity, deregulation, free trade and reductions in government spending in order to increase the role of the private sector in the economy and society, including within education. It brings the market into all spheres of human life and regards human beings fundamentally as market-driven consumers.

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we illustrate some ways in which she is able to mobilise historical stories from a previous urban teachers' curriculum project in her resistance to dominant, neoliberal discourses.

### Social and Political Context

In England, since the 1988 Education Reform Act, education has been subject to constant reform. Government interventions, particularly the intense monitoring of students, teachers, and schools (particularly those schools working with students of less advantaged socio-economic status) and the high stakes consequences of the judgements which are then made, have had consequences for teachers' identities, subjecting them to increased surveillance and reducing their independence (Day & Smethem, 2009). The "audit ideology" (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009, p. 5), evident in the school inspection system, and the accompanying league tables are key tools of the neoliberal political context, an environment within which teachers and schools are constantly measured and ranked and education itself becomes recast as a consumer good to be marketed and made available under market forces rather than conceived as a moral enterprise and a public service (Macpherson, Robertson & Walford, 2014). This "epidemic of reform" (Ball, 2003, p. 215) changes who teachers are as well as what they do. Ball (2003) notes the three interrelated policy technologies of this epidemic: the market, managerialism, and performativity. The effect of government interventions in many countries, England included, is "to erode teachers' autonomy and challenge their individual and collective professional and personal identities" (Day & Smethem, 2009, p. 142). We are indeed in the grip of the terrors of performativity and a struggle over the teacher's soul (Ball, 2003).

In their study of one English urban comprehensive school, Hall and Noyes (2009) use the Foucauldian notion of regimes of truth<sup>3</sup> and note how these regimes, characterising what teachers do as "delivering" goods to their pupils, operate to normalise the use of data to determine the needs of staff and students, changing the nature of teachers' work as they come under increasing pressure to document and justify performance. This delivery discourse<sup>4</sup> has the ability to shape, order, position, and hierarchise those in the field through systems of comparison, evaluation, and documentation, making everything calculable:

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<sup>3</sup> Foucault (1979) claimed that each society has a regime of truth which are the kinds of discourses it accepts and makes function as true.

<sup>4</sup> Discourse in the sense employed in this article draws on the work of Foucault (1979). He defined discourses as thought systems composed of ideas, outlooks, beliefs, and practices that construct both subjects and the wider social processes that legitimate current taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world and the associated relations of power.

It is impossible to over-estimate the significance of this in the life of the school, as a complex of surveillance, monitoring, tracking, coordinating, reporting, targeting, motivating. (Ball, Maguire, Braun, Perryman, & Hoskins, 2012, p. 525)

Currently, in England, pupil performance in mathematics examinations at age sixteen usually operates as the single most important item of data in judging secondary schools. As a result, mathematics teachers routinely experience greater pressure and come under more scrutiny than most, if not all, of their colleagues. The stakes are high. Such pupil performance data are then used to terminate head-teachers' employment and to convert their schools from publicly run local schools working under a democratically elected authority to privately run academies (reminiscent of the charter schools movement in the United States). Urban schools working with disadvantaged communities are most vulnerable to such forced academisation and, even when vociferous local support from parents and the community is mobilised, protest is usually to no avail (see, for example, Millar, 2012: the school was ultimately taken over by the Harris multi-academy chain).

We agree that “not all teachers are convinced by the rhetorics of performance, and many teachers are not convinced all of the time” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 528). Imagining an alternative to the role that falls to teachers in such an audit society, Sachs (2001) calls for teachers to take on an activist identity, one that arises from democratic discourses and has social justice at its heart. The construction of reflexive self-narratives aids a critical examination of the policy environment; moreover, Sachs proposes that such narratives, made public, may be a productive support for professional learning. As Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark, and Warne (2002) write: “Professionals must re-story themselves in and against the audit culture” (p. 130).

Many teachers are engaged in this re-storying in a variety of ways; we argue that one way in which it is possible to support them is through excavating the past, creating a “public resource” (Nixon, Walker, & Clough, 2003, p. 87) or, as this journal has it, a public story (Bullock, 2014), available to current-day teachers to re-visualise what they are, might be, and might become in their professional lives. We are currently engaged in such an historical endeavour, centred on *Smile Mathematics*. The first author had been a founding member of the teacher-led *Smile* project and the second author had also been a *Smile* teacher. Both knew they had experienced participation in a vibrant, democratic, autonomous community of secondary mathematics teachers working together to create similarly democratic educational spaces in their mathematics classrooms. Relevant details about the *Smile* project are presented in the section that follows.

For those inhabiting the educational landscape, reforms following the Education Reform Act have supplanted existing ways of understanding, destroying organisational memory (Goodson, 2014). The current endeavour aims to counter this,

preserving such memory, by drawing on two interrelated narratives: a narrative of a mathematics curriculum initiative of the time (*Smile Mathematics*) and narratives of individual *Smile* teachers' professional life stories. The former "systemic narratives" are based on documentary analysis of historical documents (Goodson, 2014, pp. 34–35), some already archived and some collected as part of creating the public story; the latter are being collected through reflective writing and conversational interviews. We will also be seeking to address the interconnected questions: if the purpose of the curriculum is to control, to limit teachers' freedom (Goodson, 2014), how was this subverted in the *Smile Mathematics* project, with its central tenet of authority of teacher and learner? And what conditions are necessary for such a project to flourish in the future?

### *Smile Mathematics*

There is, to date, no socio-historical study that has explored the development of teacher-led curricular innovation in mathematics teaching in England during the period 1970 to 1990. The *Smile Mathematics* project, which was one of the most significant curriculum change projects of the era in England, has itself not been the subject of academic study although some contemporaneous accounts exist (not currently archived) and some retrospective descriptions are available (for example, Povey, 2014).

The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), abolished in 1990 by the Conservative central government, was a large urban authority serving some of the most deprived boroughs in the country. The *Smile Mathematics* project was financed and supported by the ILEA and was innovative in embracing a commitment to all attainment teaching,<sup>5</sup> teacher creativity, and an investigative, problem-solving pedagogy. *Smile* saw itself as learner centred and gave considerable responsibility to students for organising and shaping their own learning and that of their learning community. It had its roots in the 1970s, a time of reconstruction in the English school system characterised by a commitment to social justice and building upon curriculum development projects of the preceding decade (Goodson, 2014).

Although supported by the local education authority, *Smile* was the result of teacher-initiated change. Locally based, it nevertheless influenced thinking about mathematics teaching across the UK and internationally. Teachers were released from school duties for one day a week over many years to form a working collective to create, refine, and publish imaginative and inspiring mathematics curriculum

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<sup>5</sup> We use the term "all attainment" to refer to the absence of any tracking, setting, streaming or other forms of segregation of pupils on the basis of their prior attainment in organising school mathematics classes. We prefer this to the term "mixed ability," perhaps still more commonly used in the UK, because (a) we think any group of learners is going to be somewhat "mixed" and (b) "ability" suggests a pre-determined, fixed, and limited capacity.

materials for use in their own classrooms and beyond.<sup>6</sup> Equally distinctive and equally important, the structure of the project instilled a deep democracy, with decision-making resting with a consensus of those who participated. Any, and all, were welcome and could contribute. Fairly early on, the ILEA Chief Inspector for Mathematics argued with the assembly that a more conventional democratic structure consisting of elected hierarchies with committee members and so forth should be set up; but when this was rejected by the collective, he allowed its will to prevail despite his own misgivings. (That story alone speaks powerfully of a different worldview from that which is currently dominant.) With continuing support, both financial and philosophical, from the ILEA from 1972 to the late 1980s, *Smile* flourished with this open authority structure that placed the teacher at the heart of decision-making. In 1990, Margaret Thatcher's administration abolished the ILEA in "a grave error brought about through political spite" (Mortimore, 2008, para. 8); this action and the beginnings of the neoliberal ascendancy led gradually and then increasingly rapidly to *Smile*'s demise.

Our radical history of *Smile*—not yet complete at the time of this writing—examines the contrast between, on the one hand, the opportunities that *Smile* afforded for democratic professionalism, a concept that has collaboration at its core (Whitty, 2006) and, on the other, the current dominant discourse that enshrines a managerial perspective enforced through compliance with teaching 'standards' (Kennedy, 2007; Sachs, 2001). Through this history, we seek to illustrate and draw attention to the fact that this discourse draws on a historically contingent and fragile political rationality and to challenge its commonsensical appearance (Ball et al., 2012, p. 514).

The historical endeavour has initiated an archive using digital media.<sup>7</sup> The archive includes contemporaneous and recent accounts including some group interviews analysed using narrative enquiry. Some of those involved in *Smile*, including those present during its inception, were invited to participate in unstructured group conversations at various inner London venues during the early part of 2016. Participants were recruited through formal and informal mathematics education networks and by means of a snowball sampling process, with contacts proposing others who had a role in the project. They were offered several questions in advance of the meeting that asked them to reflect upon: how they became involved in *Smile*; how they understood their role and responsibilities; the nature of authority and autonomy within *Smile*; and the links to other events of the time. The group conversations involved between six and eight participants each, including the two main authors of this paper, and were supplemented by a single paired conversation. The group con-

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<sup>6</sup> These have been digitised and are now available at the National STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) Centre at <https://www.stem.org.uk/elibrary/collection/2765/smile-cards>.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://smilemaths.wordpress.com/>.

versations lasted approximately three hours and the paired conversation an hour and a half. All were audio recorded. These recordings have been transcribed, with initial narrative analysis shared with participants and with the wider mathematics education community. Participants to the conversations and others who were unable to attend have also provided further personal commentaries, usually by email, and additional archive material.

In addition to collecting this historical material, we are currently exploring how such tales from long ago may, or may not, speak to initial teacher education students and to practising teachers. We began in 2016 with a small number of recently qualified teachers. In this public story, we work with one of them, Rosie, to offer phenomenological insights into her experience of performativity and then to illustrate how she has been able to use the past, in this case *Smile* stories, to resist dominant, neoliberal discourses and to assert an alternative identity and set of practices in her classroom. We suggest that this account offers plausibility to our hopes for our historical endeavour.

### Introducing Rosie

Rosie entered teaching through a 2-year, post-graduate course in which the first year was spent studying undergraduate mathematics and the second on professional preparation for mathematics teaching. The first and second authors had known and taught Rosie during her studies and she had kept in touch. During her course, and as she was aware, Rosie was taught by several tutors, including but not limited to the first two authors, who had themselves been *Smile* teachers and who saw themselves as working within a mathematics pedagogy that valued autonomy, independence, personal authority, and democracy. She later remarked:

You could see how their teaching styles matched up with those used in the resources.  
(personal communication)

In the first year, it was not uncommon for her tutors to take *Smile* resources as a starting point for mathematical investigation:

We ... found the activities engaging, and they prompted us to think about different ways that we could present mathematics to students that would help them understand it more fully. (personal communication)

This stating with mathematical investigation was built on in her second year when the *Smile* resources were often used in professional sessions about the teaching and learning of mathematics in secondary schools.

### Performativity...

In 2016, Rosie worked in an urban school in the north of England, one that is perceived, and perceives itself, as a high-performing school with high “standards.” This reputation gave the school the right to offer leadership to lower performing neighbouring schools that work with more disadvantaged intakes. This school, therefore, functions as a link in the regulatory chain connecting neoliberal government policies with the practices of individual teachers, and through them to their objectified students, and the individualised performance and assessment of both. In her first year as a secondary mathematics teacher, as a prelude to some study at Masters level, Rosie was given Stephen Ball’s (2003) article “The Teacher’s Soul and the Terrors of Performativity” to read. Performativity as it is used here is the condition that has been brought about by all the reforms driving for more teacher-accountability, external monitoring, de-regulation, standardised testing: that is, “performance” as interpreted by what can be measured and found desirable. Rosie was asked to write about her own experiences of performativity in response to the article. The term “performativity” and the task immediately resonated with her:

Performativity is known to all teachers whether by name or not. Its influence taints all the day-to-day activities of teachers and subconsciously affects the way they view their role. (pre-Masters writing)

Rosie highlighted how demands of performativity absorb huge amounts of teacher time and energy, disciplining them through meticulous interaction with trifling and insignificant data (Ball et al., 2012, p. 523), and leaving them less time and energy with which to engage creatively in the moral and interpersonal endeavour of education:

The sheer amount of work involved causes a significant dilemma ... I have to sacrifice a huge amount of my time in order to do my job, [but] much of this is dedicated to monitoring performance and meeting targets, not improving the learning experience of my students. (pre-Masters writing)

She experienced in very concrete terms that Foucauldian technology of the self that permits individuals “to effect *by their own means* or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves” (Foucault, 1988, p. 16, emphasis added). Thus, the subject, Rosie, acts on herself to conform to the demands of neoliberalism (Lemke, 2001):

For me, the pressure to be an outstanding teacher is ever present. You are constantly being compared to others and the standards, but you are also constantly comparing yourself and judging how you are progressing. There have been occasions when I per-

sonally felt like I have been improving and doing a good job, but I still never feel like I am good enough. (pre-Masters writing)

As neoliberal subjects<sup>8</sup> we are expected to be constantly remaking ourselves and to be doing this autonomously, but the experience of constant surveillance and judgment gives the lie to this. Rosie wrote tellingly about this interplay of the judgment by self and the judgement of others:

Teachers now are responsible for making sure they are meeting the myriad of criteria to prove to others—and themselves—that they are a good teacher. Having to constantly prove themselves drives teachers to invest huge amounts of time and energy into their job. The feeling of being constantly judged by uncertain criteria heightens the stress levels. All together it leads to a teacher who constantly questions their own ability to do their job and faces a daily personal battle over doing a good job and getting swallowed up by their work. ...Teachers may have responsibility for their own performance but they have very little control over it and, if they are anything like me, feeling that you are constantly chasing a moving target and coming up short. (pre-Masters writing)

Rosie has a variety of strategies for resisting this neoliberal positioning. Here we explore the extent to which and in what ways she has been able to use the excavated past and stories of *Smile* as part of that resistance.

### ... And Resistance

During her third year as a teacher, we asked Rosie to write to us about her experiences of *Smile* and the relationship of these experiences, if any, to the discourses of performativity and her resistance to neoliberal positioning. Rosie wrote freely in emails to us about her encounters with *Smile* resources and stories about *Smile* she was told during the 2 years of her initial teacher education. She also wrote about her subsequent engagement with the digitised archived materials during her career as a teacher. We used this text to identify three ways<sup>9</sup> in which Rosie used *Smile* stories in the complex process of shaping her sense of a professional self:

- teaching in ways that were important to her and “against the grain” (Cochran-Smith, 1991);

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<sup>8</sup> Neoliberal subjects are individual entrepreneurs who provide for their own needs and ambitions, rational, calculating and self-regulating. They are autonomous, competitive and exercise self-governance and self-responsibility—each becomes a company of one (Verdouw, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> We returned these themes to Rosie who was happy that the analysis caught fundamentals of her experience. We then produced the original conference paper on which this article is based, and all three of us presented the paper at ICME13.

- fostering a more democratic way of knowing; and
- acknowledging collaborative teacher professionalism.

### *Teaching in Ways that are Important and Against the Grain*

It is very clear from Rosie's writing that she was able to use the *Smile* resources to resist the pressure of "our new performativity culture of teaching by level and showing linear progress" (pre-Masters writing). For example, she wrote:

The lessons we experienced at university really inspired me ... they showed me the excitement of discovery and how that can be incorporated into teaching. ... They also showed me a new approach to teaching mathematics, one that is more involved and engaging than I had experienced as a learner before. ... It is something that I keep in mind now as I plan for my own classes. ... The *Smile* resources for me represent a huge ideas bank with examples of some great teaching practice. ... I know that when I look through the activities I will find activities that will suit how I want to teach my students. (personal communication)

Rosie was able to draw on her previous experiences of *Smile* to inform and develop her current practice, using questioning and ideas from the materials to inform her planning. She used the ideas embedded in the resources to make the mathematics accessible to a wide range of students and to enrich their learning.

### *Fostering a More Democratic Way of Knowing*

Rosie valued the resources because they gave students access to meaning-making in mathematics. This access, in turn, promoted a more democratic epistemology (that is, our way of understanding what knowledge is, of how we come to know and of how knowledge is warranted) rather than subjugation to the "personal fatalism ... servility ...[and] negative self-esteem" (Skovsmose, 1994, p. 189) so often encountered in secondary mathematics classrooms:

A lot of the tasks are investigative and allow the students to discover relationships themselves, but all of them help foster deeper understanding of why things are happening. ... I have a deep affection for [the *Smile* resources] because their complete focus on teaching for understanding is something that is really important to me. ... I can get [the students] to explore an area of mathematics themselves and discover something. (personal communication)

In Rosie's school, there was "a very strange mix": teaching for understanding was encouraged yet "testing and setting and the 'best method'" were also relentlessly pursued. In the context of what Rosie described as "an uneasy truce," there were contradictory spaces within which she could teach more democratically (personal communication).

*Acknowledging Collaborative Teacher Professionalism*

It is also the case Rosie knew that the *Smile* resources were created *by* teachers rather than *for* them and that these teachers worked together and with a sense of professional authority. She used this knowledge to see her current experiences from *outside* the currently taken-for-granted in schooling:

I think of *Smile* with a mixture of fondness and sadness; it reminds me that there are ways to include more engaging and investigative work in our maths lessons, but it also highlights just how limiting our current curriculum and testing system is. ... It saddens me to know that all that time ago, teachers figured that this is a good way to teach children mathematics and yet there is still no room for it in most schools. It does give me hope though, because I know that my teaching is better as a result of my knowledge of *Smile*. (personal communication)

Through the stories she had heard from her past *Smile* teaching tutors, Rosie was able to see the community of *Smile* teachers as having had “a rationale for practice, [an] account of themselves in relationship to the meaningfulness of what they [did]” (Ball, 2003, p. 222). Therefore, they offered an alternative identity to that of performing the neoliberal self.

## Discussion

There is a long tradition that asserts that it is *who the teacher is* rather than simply what she does or what she knows that fundamentally shapes the educational experience (see, for example, Dewey, 1957). The neoliberal project also takes seriously the need to shape the “soul” of the teacher. It redefines teachers as education technicians to bring about a change in how teachers experience their professional selves, to reform and regulate subjectivities so that teachers work intensively on the self and come to perform an individualised, enterprising identity (Ball, 2003). The moral landscape of autonomy and professional judgement, of trust and co-operation (Stronach et al., 2002, p. 130) is undermined by the new ethic of performance where everyone must strive to be above average and, indeed, all must become outstanding (see, for example, Matthews, 2009).

We have no doubt of the productive power (that is, the power to make things happen) of neoliberal discourse to colonise teacher identity; nor of the regime of truth which normalises that discourse. Teachers are surrounded by ever increasing demands upon their time and by “meticulous, often minute, techniques” (Foucault, 1979, p. 139) of surveillance. Disciplinary coercion is exercised not directly but by requiring attention to petty minutiae, “a political anatomy of detail” (Foucault, 1979, p. 139) with the ever-present threat of “underperformance”: “the micro-disciplinary techniques of hierarchical observation, normalising judgements and examinations” (Hall & Noyes, 2009, p. 851) are used to classify, hierarchise, and

individualise. These minutiae dominate teachers' lives as never before, leading them in turn to see their students as "data walking around, they no longer [seem] human" (Lightfoot, 2016, para. 19). It is through the disciplinary techniques and the micro self-surveillance they are designed to provoke that the desired teacher identity under neoliberalism is "carefully fabricated" (Foucault, 1979, p. 217).

Nevertheless, it is remarkable the extent to which teachers are able to resist the "combinatory and relentless effects" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 528) of the technology of performativity and the fabrication of neoliberal selves, as the account in this public story illustrates. Although based on the experiences of only one person, we offer evidence in this story that excavating the past for oppositional narratives can be a productive support for building teacher professional identities that challenge the current regimes of truth. We hope this public story, and the website of historic digitised archive material and current remembering that we are creating, will prove to have catalytic validity (Lather, 1986, p. 78); that is, to have value because of its capacity to re-orientate and energise in order to bring about change.

Rosie has kept in touch with her past *Smile* university tutors and is able to use the currently circulating counter-hegemonic discourses (that is, those that seek to critique and dismantle the dominant discourses which legitimate and preserve the *status quo*) to re-story her current experiences and her understanding of how things might be:

Such is the power of performativity that, even after three years on the job, I still find it hard to acknowledge even to myself that I am a good teacher. I still have to justify every decision I make by demonstrating that it has led to progress. I still have to sneak out of the house at 6am to make sure I get all the tests marked and data sent in on time before I teach that day. ... But I am slowly learning to trust my own judgement, especially when deciding how to "present" mathematics to students. On those lessons where I do choose *Smile* inspired activities and I see the sense of achievement in students' faces as they connect key ideas together for themselves, I know how they feel. That's how *Smile* made me feel when I discovered how much fun learning maths can be. (personal communication)

In understanding these writings from Rosie, it is important to keep in mind that, not only did she sometimes teach mathematics using *Smile* resources but also she met people from the original collective. Her historical engagement with the project was thus personal and embodied. A major challenge for our current endeavour is to find ways to use digital media to make similar possibilities for resistance to dominant discourses available to a wider group of teachers through the excavated history of *Smile*.

At this early stage in our historical enterprise, these reflections from Rosie give us courage to continue. Different regimes of truth hold sway at different times and in different places (Hall & Noyes, 2009). Rosie's story shows that it is possible to live in the shadow of neoliberalism but nevertheless reject the impetus to think

economically rather than morally; and we know that “the subject who thinks morally, rather than economically, can powerfully undermine neoliberal subjectivities in generative ways” (Verdouw, 2016, p. 526).

### Concluding Remarks

As with most dominant ideologies, it is part of the neoliberal project to cut us adrift from our past and to de-historicise our lived experience of the present. Berger (2016) uses the metaphor of *no-fixed-abode* to capture the absence of a sense of history:

Any sense of history, linking past and future, has been marginalised if not eliminated. People are suffering a sense of historical loneliness. (para. 9)

It is the intention of our endeavour, of which telling Rosie’s re-storying is a part, to challenge the subordination of the social (Giroux, 2015) and to use a small part of the history of mathematics education in England as a meeting place (Berger, 2016) from whence to understand, interrogate, and oppose the dominant discourses currently shaping society.

The task before us as we continue with our historical endeavour is challenging. It is to find ways to make contemporary media—in this case a website—perform for others a role comparable to that of Rosie’s personal experience. Working within a radical history tradition (Samuel, 1980), we assert that “history is about the present” (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003, p. 1) and argue that to look backward is not backward-looking but forward-looking. Our use of history in this endeavour is “present-minded” (Samuel, 1980, p. 168). We have used documentary material, evocative stories, and aphoristic fragments (Morson, 2003) to try to give an account of the recent past of *Smile* and to do so in ways that can speak to the both the present and the future.

We have argued that the currently dominant neoliberal discourses in education, the inspectorial judgments and assessments, and the auditing processes that the discourses endorse and the techniques of micro self-surveillance that they engender are indeed leading to a struggle over the teacher’s soul (Ball, 2003). The pressure is most acutely felt in schools working in sites of systematic disadvantage, such sites being over represented in urban contexts. Furthermore, we have noted that these discourses cut us off from our past. We come to suffer from “a profound sort of amnesia, where we can no longer quite remember how things became like this, or why, or whether anything was ever any different” (Jardine, 2012, p. 97); and when we cannot remember what has been done to us, we also lose any sense of what the perpetrating causes might be. This not remembering has the effect of making the

present inevitable and timeless—we are at what has been called the “end of history.” It also, therefore, cuts us off from imagining a different future.

This social amnesia matters for all young people but most especially for those who are poor and marginalised. It also matters for their teachers. We have described one way in which we might re-activate an engagement with the past and have offered the story of a single teacher who is struggling to resist the performativity agenda. Amongst the strategies she has adopted is a mobilisation of stories from the past that allows her more clearly to see the current regime of truth as historically contingent and therefore subject to change.

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