Resistance to Self-Regulated Learning Pedagogy in an Urban Classroom: A Critique of Neoliberalism

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Abstract

It is often taken for granted that teaching self-regulated learning pedagogy supports student empowerment and individual human agency. As a result, researchers are almost exclusively focused on improving self-regulated learning pedagogical interventions. There is little consideration of the ethical and ideological implications of such instruction. For one year, I worked with a secondary English teacher who taught in an urban school that served 100% African American students from an economically disadvantaged community. I conducted interviews and observations with the teacher-participant in order to strategically suggest ways to integrate self-regulated learning pedagogy in her classroom. The teacher-participant rejected suggestions to integrate such instruction because it aligned with the logic of efficiency and productivity, was based on normative processes, and precluded her from developing meaningful relationships with her students—all of which she aligned directly with a neoliberal rationality or the effects of neoliberalism in schools. This case study invites reflections on how neoliberalism can be tied to a seemingly unproblematic pedagogical commitment.

Keywords: neoliberalism; self-regulated learning; teaching; pedagogy; urban classroom

Introduction

Self-regulated learning (SRL) can be defined as a self-steering process whereby individuals target their own cognitions, feelings, and actions, as well as features of the environment in the modulation of their own learning goals (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006). SRL is pervasively associated with academic success, as well humanistic processes and outcomes, such as responsibility, empowerment, freedom, and choice. As a result, researchers are united by their commitments to improve the administration of SRL pedagogical interventions. In addition to developing pedagogical models in this effort, researchers are concerned with identifying and mitigating technical obstacles and challenges that preclude teachers from integrating and practicing SRL pedagogy. These obstacles include inadequate teacher preparation (Perry, Phillips & Hutchinson, 2006), teachers' own learning experiences (Dembo, 2001; Lombaerts, Engels & Van Braak, 2009), challenges with SRL instruction (Hilden & Pressley, 2007), teachers' beliefs about student development (Lombaerts, Engels & Van Braak, 2009), pedagogical experiences (Lombaerts, Engels & Van Braak, 2009), curriculum constraints (Miller, Heafner & Massey, 2009), and teachers' expectations for students (Miller, Heafner & Massey, 2009). While attention is paid to some of the technical challenges related to implementing SRL pedagogy, there is little consideration of the ethical, philosophical, and ideological complexities with such pedagogy (cf. Martin & McLellan, 2008; Vassallo, 2011).

Neoliberalism is an economic philosophy underpinned by the logic that a free market best supports economic prosperity and well-being. Researchers argue that in order for the free market to function properly subjectivities must be constituted in ways that legitimize neoliberal relations (Apple, 2006; Fitzsimons, 2011). That is, the subject must be (re)defined in terms of human capital and self-management, and must be guided by an imperative to pursue a kind of self-improvement that is aligned with an economic rationality. This kind of self has been referred to as an "entrepreneurial self" (Rose, 1998) and a "managerial self" (Fitzimmons, 2011). Here, it will be referred to as the "neoliberal self." Critics of neoliberalism argue that the view of self and personhood that underpins this rationality is limited because it produces a false sense of autonomy, construes self in economic terms, privileges Enlightenment rationality, fosters an imperative of consumption, and isolates personhood from social and historical contexts (Apple, 2006; Fitzsimons, 2011; Hursh, 2000; Matusov, 2011).

While many scholars raise concerns about the neoliberal self, few question the value of SRL. At the same time, there is an absence of scholarship that explicitly links SRL and neoliberalism. Despite this, as this case study demonstrates, a teacher rejected SRL pedagogy on the grounds that it aligned with neoliberalism. Observations and interviews were conducted over the course of an academic year with an urban secondary English teacher who was well versed in critical discourse. As such, she was a staunch critic of neoliberalism. The purpose of the study was to generate conversations around the possibilities for supporting the teacher-participant's integration of SRL pedagogy. To generate a range of pedagogical considerations, several strategies, models, and approaches were discussed. Despite those efforts, the teacher-participant consistently

rejected the notion of SRL, in general, and resisted suggestions to integrate SRL pedagogy, in particular. She reasoned that SRL pedagogy was aligned with the logic of efficiency and productivity, based on normative processes, and would have precluded her from developing meaningful relationships with her students. The teacher-participant's resistance helps to move beyond technical challenges related to SRL pedagogy, illuminate a subtle way in which neoliberalism in endorsed by the discourse of SRL, and invite possibilities for resisting neoliberalism.

Background on SRL

Conceptualization and Value

Researchers tend to agree that individuals engaged in SRL are agentic beings who implement strategies to strive toward goals, and who monitor, evaluate, and experiment in the service of achieving those goals. Such engagement requires the use of internal and external feedback to inform cognitive, affective, and environmental adaptations during a learning event. Scholars tend to agree that SRL is universal human characteristic, and that all learners have the capability and capacity to regulate their learning (Winne, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). Variations in SRL are not thought about in terms of deficits, but rather qualitative and quantitative differences (Greene & Azevedo, 2007). To capture these differences, researchers use terms such as adaptive/maladaptive (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005), naïve/expert (Zimmerman, 1998), and effective/ineffective (Zimmerman, 2000). The mark of effective and adaptive self-regulating learners is that they adapt in the face of learning challenges. Rather than adopting a habit or a routine set of skills or strategies, effective self-regulating learners respond to learning challenges in productive ways by

consciously and metacognitively activating and harnessing personal processes to achieve academic success.

Researchers suggest that adapting to challenging tasks is important for both the contemporary educational climate and engaging productively in life outside of schools (Järvelä, 2011; Zimmerman, 2002). Järvelä (2011), an authority on SRL, states (all emphases are added):

> As we progress into the 21st century the importance of *learning competence* is growing. At school and in their free time students are surrounded by *competing demands for their attention*. In their working life adults experience increasingly *strong pressure to innovate and solve problems*. What, then, enables us to meet these demands? Both students at school and adults at work have to *make appropriate choices, prioritise and plan their work and lives strategically*. They need to *focus and adapt* their behaviours and actions to fit each situation's demands. Improving academic, *professional and personal efficiency* requires repeated efforts. Successful students regulate their learning. They use a repertoire of strategies – cognitive, behavioural and motivational – to guide and *enhance* their learning process toward completing academic tasks. (Järvelä, 2011, p. 297)

Järvelä clearly identifies SRL as essential for thriving in the 21st century, as she associates SRL with innovation, problem solving, self-management, attentional control, and choice-making. Zimmerman (2002), a prolific SRL researcher, agrees with these assumptions about the value and need for SRL. With a focus on schooling, Zimmerman argues that SRL can mitigate the distracting effects of certain technologies, compensate for large class sizes and diverse student populations, and enable individuals to overcome limitations in their own cognitive processing and sociocultural conditions. The assumption is that educators can cultivate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable

students to exercise cognitive and behavioral control in ways that enable them to adapt themselves to effectively meet educational, social, and economic demands.

SRL Pedagogy

Researchers agree that formal educational contexts are key spaces to shape students' effective and adaptive SRL (Greene & Azevedo, 2007; Greene, Bolick & Robertson, 2010; Hubner, Nuckles & Renkl, 2010; Kistner et al., 2010; Santangelo, Harris & Graham, 2008; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Zimmerman, 1998). Therefore, researchers focus on developing pedagogical models and suggestions for classroom practice (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004; Graham, Harris and Troia, 1998; Kitsantas, Reiser & Doster, 2004; Perels et al., 2009; Perry, VandeKamp, Mercer, & Nordby, 2002; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). These models and suggestions include three distinct, yet complementary, formats: modeling (e.g., Dembo 2001; Martinez-Pons, 2002; Zimmerman, 1989), direct instruction (e.g., Graham, Harris and Troia, 1998; Miller, Heafner & Massey, 2009) and facilitation (e.g., Perry, Phillips & Dowler, 2004). Though researchers emphasize different formats, many pedagogical models include all three. Regardless of the format, researchers agree that teaching SRL requires explicit attention to fostering particular knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Martinez-Pons, 2002; Miller, Heafner & Massey, 2009).

Researchers recognize the importance of teaching SRL by setting up pedagogical environments that support its enactment. Specifically, providing students with opportunities for choice, control, influence over assessments, and peer collaboration has been shown to invite student SRL

(Perry et al., 2002). Miller, Heafner and Massey (2009) argue that it is difficult for students to learn to regulate if the contextual conditions are not conducive to that form of engagement. Shanker (2010) contends that group or student-centered activities in which students have the space to express their emotions and choose their activities are more likely to invite SRL by tempering counter-productive emotions, sustaining alertness, producing calmness, and engendering deep engagement. While direct instruction and modeling are important components of teaching SRL, researchers recognize the importance of constructing certain kinds of learning environments.

Regardless of the pedagogical format, a key goal of SRL pedagogy is to support the techniques of self-study, which includes developing an awareness of thought processes, monitoring mechanisms, a repertoire of learning strategies, and environmental contingencies. In addition, interventions may include a focus on shaping perceptions, attitudes, and dispositions. To study and the self, researchers have integrated the use of journals (Du Bois & Staley, 1997), graphs (Kitsantis & Zimmerman, 2006), logs (Zimmerman, Bonner & Kovach, 1996), and computer databases (Azevedo, Johnson, Chauncey & Graesser, 2011). Pedagogical suggestions related to the development of self-knowledge are undergirded by the assumption that certain kinds of cognitive awareness, perceptions, and technical skills are necessary to control learning.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism originated as economic philosophy and was undergirded by the belief that all economic and social arrangements are best left to the operation of the free market (Harvey, 2007). Proponents of neoliberalism

suggest that a wholesale shift toward laissez-faire capitalist economic policy is needed to produce economic prosperity. According to Hursh (2000), this logic shapes much contemporary educational policy and practice in the United States. The contemporary logic of accountability, as measured through standardized test scores and standardized teacher evaluations, is aligned with the goals to privatize public education and generate corporatized State control over education (Hursh, 2000; Lakes & Carter, 2011). Such seemingly objective, scientific measurements can also be viewed as generating the kinds of knowledge that can enable parents to make "informed" choices about the educational products their children are consuming. Espousing the benefits of market competition in education, schools have begun to function as businesses, placing families and students as consumers of education. In addition, the acceleration towards meeting student benchmarks, the emphasis on efficiency, and acquisition of credentials are tied to the effects of neoliberalism in schools. Lakes and Carter (2011) provide a cogent summary of the effects of neoliberalism on schools:

> …the ultimate goal of neoliberal reformers is to convert educational systems into markets…[through] publicly-supported vouchers for private school tuition, high-stakes standardized testing, public and private charters, single-sex schooling, scripted curricula, the deskilling of teachers, alternative teacher training, outsourcing of tutoring, the elimination of teachers unions, and in general, the underfunding of public education (p. 108)

Scholars argue that in order for neoliberalism to work certain subjectivities must be (re)inscribed. Apple (2006) writes, neoliberalism "involves radically changing how we think of ourselves…" (p. 23). Explaining that change, Apple writes:

> …the educational task here is to change people's understanding of themselves as members of collective groups. Instead, to support a market economy we need to encourage everyone to think of themselves as individuals who always act in ways that maximise their own interests. (p. 23)

In particular, in order for the free market to function properly subjectivities must be (re)defined in terms of human capital whereby self-management is an imperative and economic rationality is the basis for such management. According to neoliberal logic, individuals are expected to experience themselves as acting rationally, autonomously, and in pursuit of maximizing their own self-interest. In the pursuit of self-interest the neoliberal self is productive, consumptive, and entrepreneurial. According to Fitzsimons (2011), neoliberalism views each human being as an entrepreneur, guided by an ethic that causes them to choose social connections and life activities that will maximize their status with future employers. Within this logic, there is an assumption that if individuals are provided with enough information through new and ever-changing technology, they can maximize their advantages in an environment of business de-regulation and privatization.

Scholars express concern related to the dangers of neoliberalism in schools. The scientific management of standardized assessments is viewed as part of a neoliberal plan for homogenization, control, and governance (Harvey, 2004; McDermott, 2007). In addition, the emphasis on high stakes standardized assessments is linked to pedagogical arrangements that invite rote learning, regurgitation, and low-level cognitive processing (e.g., Gorlewski, 2011). Hursh (2000) draws a parallel between these kinds of engagement with the logic of scientific management and social efficiency. He notes that scientific management

requires breaking down tasks into meaningless, repetitive operations that could be performed at such speed as to maximize output and profits. Further, Hursh (2000) posits that standardized testing is a means to socialize workers for participation in factory and service work.

Scholars also raise concern about the neoliberal self. For example, the neoliberal self has been described as misaligned with democratic ideals as individuals are encouraged to pursue self-interest (construed and evaluated based in terms of economic rationalization) as a moral imperative rather than a socially oriented citizenship (Matusov, 2011). Inscribing a neoliberal self to legitimize neoliberalism has a number of moral, social, and ethical consequences that deviate from visions of a democratic society. In addition, the neoliberal self is argued to produce a false sense of autonomy, privilege Enlightenment rationality, foster an imperative of consumption, and isolate personhood from social and historical contexts (Fitzsimons, 2011).

Method

Participant

Background

At the time of the research study, Ms. Hall[i] had been a secondary English teacher for over six years in a number of different settings that reflected a variety of student demographics: affluent and White, rural and White, and racially mixed and urban. After five years in the profession, Ms. Hall received her National Board Certification. At the time of the research study, Ms. Hall was pursuing a graduate degree in anthropology at a nearby university; she was well versed in critical theory, and influenced by Paulo Freire, Pierre Bourdieu, Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and

Michele Foucault. Ms. Hall was well informed of the political, economic, cultural, and historical complexities related to education at large and contemporary reform efforts in particular. Her background in critical theory seems to connect to her resistance to neoliberal school reform-based practices and policies. I had known Ms. Hall prior to the research study and had asked that she participate because of her strong commitment to teaching, the context of her classroom, and her critical commitments. As my work is dedicated to integrating critical perspectives within educational psychology, I wanted to know how Ms. Hall thought about SRL pedagogy. Prior to this research study, I did not associate SRL with neoliberalism. In fact, at the time of the research study my understanding of neoliberalism was limited.

Ms. Hall was consistently vocal about many aspects of schooling and frequently engaged in conversations with a variety of education stakeholders. During staff meetings and professional development training, she often voiced her dissent. Ms. Hall frequently interacted with high-level district administrators, school personnel, education reporters, and policy makers in order to discuss educational policy and practice. Recognized as an active faculty member, Ms. Hall was nominated to be the teachers' union representative in her school. Her engagement in dialogue was surpassed only by her commitment to students and their families. Ms. Hall maintained consistent and constant communication with her students and their families, and made herself available to them in a variety of capacities. For example, early in the academic year, one of Ms. Hall's students was shot in the face. She provided transit services to and from the hospital for the students' family (they did not have a car), stayed for hours in the hospital with them, and helped them move out of the area (for their protection). Outside school hours, Ms. Hall frequently

exchanged phone calls, text messages, and emails with her students and their families. Ms. Hall did not put conditions on her availability, and did not develop relationships with students and families as a disciplinary strategy.

Teaching Philosophy

Ms. Hall did not think about her teaching philosophy in a conventional way. Teachers are often expected to articulate a "coherent" teaching philosophy that serves to rationalize and guide pedagogical decision-making. Ms. Hall did not document or articulate a well-rehearsed teaching philosophy because she rejected the technical logic undergirding this activity, especially the way it was used in this "urban" context (see section titled School Climate). Ms. Hall's primary interest was developing relationships with students, not as means to promote compliance but as an end in itself. Ms. Hall was committed to forming trusting and caring relationships, not ones that were harmful and oppressive. Consequently, she viewed critical engagement and analysis of her own teaching, curriculum standards, and school policy as key pedagogical practices that supported relationship building. Through this critical engagement, Ms. Hall was able to identify contradictions and asymmetries in power that were potentially channeled through her teaching and her compliance to school policy. She believed that her students were able to detect when pedagogical practices were contradictory and oppressive. This critical interrogation provided Ms. Hall with the awareness to resist, reject, and transform practices that competed with her goal to form caring and trusting relationships. In addition, Ms. Hall believed that such critical interrogation was necessary for modeling critical engagement for her students. She stated to her

principal, “We can't expect our students to think critically if we don't critically think about what we are teaching them. That's all I'm trying to do.”

Ms. Hall understood critical engagement as involving the awareness and mitigation of inequitable educational arrangements, as well as recognizing the value of culture, narratives, emotions, and identity—all things she associated with being human. In her syllabus, Ms. Hall captures this commitment:

> Together, this year, we will explore the world through text. You might think English is just about reading and writing, but it is also about laughter, love, jealousy, greed, good vs. evil, happiness, sadness, and so much more. If you have ever wondered what life is all about, whether your problems and passions are crazy or normal, then you will love this class. Through text, we will get to learn about people and communities with lives and stories that are both eerily similar and wildly different than our own. We will also learn how to share our own stories and ideas through writing and reading, speaking and performing, and we will discover that the Words we read, write, and speak have the power to change the world in which we live. Get ready for the best English class of your life!

Aside from her clear commitment to expanding the understanding of what counts as a text, what could be read and written, and what is reading and writing, Ms. Hall was committed to embedding content in the community in order to encourage students to embrace, use, and center their experience, knowledge, and community as the starting point and foundation for education. In an interview, she stated:

> Education is not about getting out, and getting ahead, about competition and preparation for the world of work and/or college. I don’t want to teach that. I

> want to teach a critical awareness of those messages, and I also want to teach an awareness of the role community plays in each individual's life and success.

Ms. Hall was concerned that education discourse tends to communicate to students that their communities, ways of thinking, tastes, narratives, and feelings are subordinate, and that students should pursue material wealth to achieve emancipation from their communities and native identities. She expressed concern that such messages were a product of the economic-driven individualism of neoliberalism.

An important element in Ms. Hall's pedagogy relates to a distinction between logico-scientific reasoning and narrative thinking (Bruner, 1986). According to Bruner (1986), narrative thinking is a way to organize and manage our worlds though stories, song, drama, fiction, and theater. Logico-scientific reasoning involves ordering the world in predictable, universal, empirically-proven, and data-driven ways. Bruner argues that a narrative mode is needed to construct an identity and find a place in one's culture, yet such thinking in schools is often subordinate to logico-scientific reasoning. Bruner contends that schools must cultivate and nurture narratives–and cease taking narrative thinking for granted. Though Ms. Hall was unfamiliar with Bruner's cultural psychology, the introduction to her course clearly values narrative thinking over a logico-scientific one. This commitment was also clear in her everyday pedagogical activities and her reflections on her teaching. Ms. Hall wanted to students read and write with the purposes of constructing their own narratives, and to recognize the power in those narratives. Similar to Bruner, Ms. Hall viewed data-driven instruction, especially informed by standardized measures, as competing with narrative thinking—at least the

kind that can generate critical engagement and value in communities and in oneself.

School climate

The year before the research study, the high school had been a traditional public school. The school was nestled in a predominantly African American community. As per a 2010 profile report, the school was comprised of 100% African American students with 85% of them receiving free and reduced lunch. Because of the failure to meet annual yearly progress, the school was "partnered" with a charter school organization. Though the term "partnered" was used, teachers and administrators had different ideas about what that meant. In practice, the relationship between the school and charter organization reflected a top-down order whereby the curriculum, pedagogical practices, and classroom management style were provided for teachers to adopt. From this so-called partnership, the school was restructured into academies. The freshman class (a total of 90 students), to whom Ms. Hall taught English, was the first to enter the academy. Although the academy was structurally attached to the high school, it was separated by a long hallway and operated as an independent school with its own administration.

Clearly reflecting the mission of the charter organization, the academy administrators were committed to a "no excuse" policy, or what others may call "zero tolerance." The principal continuously reminded teachers of the importance of "instruction" and "instructional time," which meant ensuring students learned content standards so they can perform well on standardized assessments. To maximize instructional time, teachers were

expected to follow a script. A statement in a newsletter written by the principal captures this expectation:

> It is critical that each instructional moment be maximized to provide students with clear and meaningful instructional experiences that are rigorous and aligned to standards. Every lesson should be guided by specific objectives and learning outcomes aligned to a content standard. Every instructor should have the following posted on their board and/or in their room every day: Standard(s), Essential Question, Objectives, Do-Now, Lesson Agenda, and Homework Assignment.

All teachers were required to submit weekly lesson plans to the principal that clearly showed "coherence" around content standards. These lesson plans were supposed to include a content standard, a description of how activities aligned with standards, justifications for use of time, rationales for activities, and transitions. School and district administrators evaluated teachers four times each academic year using a standardized observation protocol designed to measure, among other things, adherence to this script.

The charter organization defined and, at times, conducted professional development seminars. One, in particular, involved instructing teachers on how to use Canter and Canter's (2001) Assertive Discipline behavior management model, which emphasizes a great deal of teacher control in defining and firmly upholding rules for acceptable and unacceptable behavior. According to this model, teachers are expected to engage respectfully with students while remaining committed to enforcing rules using reinforcements, punishments, and threats. Ms. Hall resisted this management approach, and was highly critical of the management practices of academy personnel. In the academy, the discourse of

management was heavily weighted towards behaviorism: students were frequently suspended, target behaviors were rewarded through a token economy (the accumulation of academy currency), and verbal punishments were administered for undesirable behaviors, such as failure to tuck-in shirts. In addition, students had to "earn" attendance to a school dance by improving uniform compliance, increasing attendance, submitting homework, and decreasing tardiness. Administrators believed this type of management ensured maximized instructional time, which was supposed to lead to improved test scores and college preparation. The policies and procedures were justified based on their efficacy to prepare leaders. One of the administrator's email sign-off quotations, interestingly enough, was from Jonathan Kozol. It read: "Some children in America's schools are trained to be governors while others are trained to be governed." Ms. Hall pointed out the hypocrisy in this email sign-off, as she contended that such a management model was about fostering student obedience to prescribed rules and doubted that mutually respectful relationships could have been developed by adopting this model.

Data Collection and Analysis

Observations

During the course of an academic school year, observations occurred 1-3 times a week for 1-2 hours each visits, and were recorded using field notes. During observations, there were no attempts to participate in classroom activities as I attempted to assume the role of observer (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). As SRL instruction may not be part of everyday pedagogical activities, multiple and consecutive observations

were conducted in order to invite nuanced possibilities for integrating SRL pedagogy. I paid attention to the degree to which Ms. Hall implicitly structured her pedagogy around the goal of SRL. More important, observations focused on discerning moments when SRL could have been integrated in Ms. Hall's instruction. The purpose of the observations was not to suggest ways for Ms. Hall to have revamped her teaching. Instead, the observations involved understanding the flow and interconnectivity of her lessons in order suggest ways that SRL pedagogy could complement her instruction. For example, Ms. Hall allocated 15 minutes each class period for students' independent reading. The possibility of Ms. Hall modeling or providing direct instruction for reading comprehension, self-monitoring and self-questioning techniques was discussed. These observations and pedagogical possibilities framed most of the planned and unplanned interviews.

Interviews

I had a number of interactions with Ms. Hall. Some of them resembled a conventional interviewing format with typical interviewer and interviewee positions. These interviews were both planned and unplanned, and structured and semi-structured (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Three structured, planned interviews, each lasting between 45-60 minutes were conducted: one in the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end of the research of period. The beginning interview served several purposes: (1) introduce SRL; (2) discuss Ms. Hall's teaching; and (3) discuss the research study. The following two interviews were conducted in order to focus comprehensively on Ms. Hall's understanding of SRL, discuss possible

ways of understanding this notion, share preliminary analyses, and provide Ms. Hall with the opportunities to ask questions.

There were 22 semi-structured interviews, which were both planned and unplanned. These interviews lasted between 5-20 minutes. During these interviews, I used a modified script for stimulated recall (Gass and Mackey, 2000) in order to generate reflections on Ms. Hall's pedagogical decision making, in general, and to discuss ways SRL instruction could have been integrated into her teaching. For example, an event was recalled and Ms. Hall was asked questions such as: (1) what were you thinking at that point; (2) you said and did [inserted specific behavior to be explained], can you tell me why you did that; and (3) can you remember what you were thinking when [insert student name] performed [insert specific student behavior here]? Following Ms. Hall's reflections, I responded, "I noticed you did [insert action] and rationalized your pedagogical decision based on [insert pedagogical rationality]. If you did [insert pedagogical suggestion], then it was possible to encourage student self-regulated learning. What do you think? Is that something you might consider doing in the future?"

In addition to these structured and semi-structured interviews, Ms. Hall and I had a number of Internet chats. These chats did not have a guiding or guided agenda, and they occurred organically. That is, they were not scheduled, and were variably initiated by both the researcher and participant. Though we did not have a guided agenda, reflections on teaching, students, policy issues, and pedagogical philosophy were often the foci of these interactions. Throughout the year we had 56 chats. The length of the chats ranged from 50-200 lines per chat (each line has approximately 4-6 words). There were also a few instances of stimulated

recall in these exchanges. However, these discussions often served as a forum for Ms. Hall to express positive teaching moments and frustrations with students, school policies, and her own teaching. Through these chats, I maintained consistent communication with Ms. Hall and developed a strong relationship with her.

All interview transcripts and Internet-based discussions were input into hyperRESEARCH. The transcripts were carefully read and were encoded using two categories: (1) receptivity and integration of SRL pedagogy; and (2) resistance and rejection to SRL pedagogy. As Ms. Hall consistently resisted SRL, the focus was on further dividing the resistance-encoded data into different rationalization for such resistance. These patterns emerged in the data, and tentative codes were used to interpret and make sense of the data. Through my interactions with Ms. Hall, these codes became grounded in the context of neoliberalism.

Artifacts

A number of artifacts were collected. These artifacts included emails and letters that were both sent and not sent to school administrators and teachers, correspondence with education reporters, and her personal teaching journal, which was over twenty pages long of single-spaced typed text. In addition, the course syllabus, lesson plans (on the rare occasion they were written), course readings, and activity sheets (rarely used) were also collected. Ms. Hall also shared email correspondence from administrators, policy documents, and her teacher evaluations. All artifacts were collected and were encoded in terms of pedagogical commitments, school policies and procedures, receptivity to SRL, and points of reflection for the integration of SRL instruction.

Analysis: Resistance to SRL

Ms. Hall resisted any possibility of integrating formal SRL instruction in her class because she believed it: (1) was a means to promote efficiency and social reproduction; (2); was a normalized form of thought; and (3) competed with relationship building. Her rejection of SRL was not about high or low expectations (cf. Miller, Heafner & Massey, 2009). Ms. Hall's resistance to SRL pedagogy was rationalized as rejection to neoliberal educational policies, and her effort to avoid affirming the legitimacy of such policies. Ms. Hall was a critic of neoliberalism in education, which she described as "corporatized State control over teaching and learning." In an interview, Ms. Hall expressed concern that neoliberal policies and practices "increased individualization, encouraged a breakdown in social solidarity, increased alienation from the learning process, and eroded critical awareness, empathetic citizenship, and democratic participation." Therefore, she made an explicit effort to resist, reject, and deflect any policy or practice that she identified as aligned with a neoliberal rationality. These commitments were rationalized as protection for her students, their communities, and her pedagogical integrity.

Early in the research study, Ms. Hall associated SRL pedagogy with neoliberalism. This association produced an oppositional orientation to suggestions to integrate SRL instruction. Notwithstanding, Ms. Hall and I continued to engage in discussions about different ways of thinking about SRL pedagogy and how it might fit into her commitment to resist neoliberal educational policy. The driving question was: could Ms. Hall envisage ways that SRL pedagogy could serve her teaching goals? This question speaks to a broader one related to the general ideas about self

and personhood in education. That question is: can there be a conception of SRL that is not aligned with a neoliberal rationality? Though this question is important for considering the ethics of neoliberalism, self, and education, a comprehensive response is not explored here. Rather, the focus is on how one teacher rationalized her rejection of SRL pedagogy because she aligned it with the validation and legitimation of neoliberalism, which was fundamentally at odds with her own pedagogical commitments.

Before analyzing Ms. Hall's rationalizations for associating SRL with neoliberalism , it is important to understand her conception of SRL. Researchers suggest that few educators are familiar with the notion of SRL (Winne, 2005; Zimmerman, 2002). That possibility coupled with the fact there are a number of conceptual variations may render the notion elusive to some practitioners, and even some researchers. Prior to the research study Ms. Hall did not recall encountering the notion of SRL. Though she had related ideas about student control, I worked to ensure she understood the nuances of SRL as depicted in the research literature. I presented various conceptions of SRL to ensure she had the tools to broadly consider what it meant. From our discussions, Ms. Hall demonstrated an understanding of SRL that reflected contemporary conceptualizations. In an interview that took place one month after the start of the research period, she stated:

> I understand self-regulated learning to involve students' taking control…evaluating their own learning and behavior. From what I understand self-regulated learners establish goals and standards for their own performance, plan a course of action for a learning task, control and monitor their cognitive processes and progress during a learning task, monitor and try to control their own motivation and emotions, seek assistance and support

> when they need it, evaluate the final outcomes of their efforts, and impose consequences for their performance.

Ms. Hall also demonstrated awareness of the different pedagogical formats associated with SRL.

> To teach self-regulated learning…to me that may involve teaching learning strategies, possibly showing and telling them [students] ways to complete tasks. I also understand that it may require students having opportunities to practice using learning strategies…. From our conversations, it also seems that some value a student-centered classroom, in which students engage independently and can choose curricula materials.

It was important that Ms. Hall understand nuances of SRL and different pedagogical possibilities. As best I could, I wanted to ensure her engagement with SRL pedagogy was not informed by narrow interpretations. For example, if SRL pedagogy was presented as only involving direct instruction, Ms. Hall could have rejected it based on pedagogical incompatibility. Despite the fact that conceptual nuances and pedagogical differences were frequently discussed and used to suggest pedagogical interventions, Ms. Hall continued to resist the possibility of actively integrating SRL pedagogy into her teaching. Such resistance was not because she did not understand the concept, purported value, and ways of teaching SRL. Ms. Hall continuously argued that teaching SRL was aligned with the logic of efficiency, normalization, and individualism—logic that she believed was directed at producing student compliance to unjust pedagogical arrangements.

The End of SRL: Efficiency and Reproduction

Ms. Hall reasoned that the neoliberal emphasis on accountability and efficiency served as the rationality for the schools' administration to script the teaching and learning process. On most occasions, Ms. Hall refused to turn in lesson plans and only over time began to include some of the elements of the aforementioned pedagogical script. In her journal, she wrote:

> I have taught for 6 years, and have not had to turn in lesson plans since my first few months of my first year of teaching. This request, more than anything else, demonstrates a disdain for experience and a lack of trust in us. I'm not sure I'm going to follow through with this request.

The scripting of teaching was rationalized in terms of maximizing instructional time, improving measureable objectives (i.e. performance on standardized test scores), and reaching certain benchmarks. Ms. Hall did not dispute the importance of ensuring that "instructional time" was not dedicated to addressing "off-task" behavior. She objected to the level of control and surveillance to which she was subjected, the legitimacy given to written lesson plans, the reduction of learning to "knowledge" transmission, the automation of technical aspects of teaching and learning, and the language of maximization.

Ms. Hall's rejection of teaching and learning scripts aligned with her rejection of the pursuit of measureable learning objectives and outcomes. Her aversion to measurable objectives was rationalized in terms of her rejection of the idea that: (1) knowledge is static; (2) learning has fixed points; and (3) the goal of teaching is to transmit knowledge. In addition,

she suggested that the scripting of teaching and learning served a reproductive role. In an interview, Ms. Hall stated:

> Good teachers are creative and unique, daring to take risks and bringing passion in to the classroom. Think back to your very best teacher. He or she didn't teach you because they posted measurable objectives on the board and paced their lessons just so. They inspired you! They got you interested in things you never thought you were, and taught you to love ideas. You learned the power of knowledge and learning and *that* [emphasis in the communication] is what you remember. You don't remember your score on the test. These are the kinds of teachers who teach Malia and Sasha Obama, and the children of any of the other powerful elite in the world. These are the teachers who show that books and writing and learning are not only the means to get into college, but the true sources of power.

The concern that schools serve a reproductive role, especially in a neoliberal climate, is not new (e.g. see Journell, 2011). Individuals who attend schools serving students from economically disadvantaged and working class backgrounds may be encouraged to regulate themselves to follow orders, adapt to structural demands, and efficiently learn basic skills (Anyon, 1981; Gorlewski, 2011). On the other hand, schools serving students from middle and upper class backgrounds may learn to regulate themselves to solve problems, pursue task-mastery, and shape their realities (Vassallo, 2011). Labeled the correspondence principle (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), these differences in curricula have been implicated in the logic of social efficiency, which is a major concern for critics of neoliberal policy (e.g. see Journell, 2011; Hursh, 2000).

Ms. Hall's rationalizations are distinct in that SRL pedagogy was implicated in the logic of efficiency and the reproduction of the status

quo. She states:

> I just can't see how self-regulated learning can be separated from the goal of improving test scores. I know my teaching has to reflect teaching standards, preparing for standardized tests, but I don't want to teach thinking skills that make that goal more efficient. Teaching and learning does not always have to be controlled and rational. (*pause*) We encourage control for the purposes of efficiency, otherwise why teach that.

Ms. Hall's interpretation of SRL pedagogy varied from the interpretations discussed in a study by Miller, Heafner and Massey (2009). Miller et al. worked in an urban school to support teachers' integration of SRL pedagogy. They suggest that the conditions in the urban school where they conducted their research competed with efforts to support teachers' integration of SRL instruction. For example, linking student standardized test performance to teaching evaluations and employment decisions encouraged teachers to adopt teacher-directed approaches focused on basic skills and test-defined content knowledge. They argue that these environments limit "students' ability to become self-regulated learners because basic skills curricula offer minimal opportunities, if any, to acquire such abilities" (p. 123). Miller et al. see SRL pedagogy as a mark of high expectations and movement beyond basic skills pedagogy. However, Ms. Hall treated SRL pedagogy as indicative of low expectations by making basic skills pedagogy efficient by harnessing students' regulatory capacities that support academic success, which narrowly counts as test performance.

Normalizing the Form of Thought

It was clear that Ms. Hall was concerned about the ends towards which

SRL was directed.

She expressed concern that, in a neoliberal climate, SRL made the transmission of knowledge efficient and involved harnessing students' cognitive capacity in order to improve performance on standardized tests. These concerns speak to the complexity of goal pursuit in institutional settings. Moreover, for Ms. Hall, these concerns were not mitigated by suggestions that SRL could have been used towards different ends. Ms. Hall suggested that it is not just the ends towards which SRL was of concern. She also suggested that the form of thinking privileged by SRL to be problematic. In her journal, Ms. Hall wrote:

> I don't think students necessarily need to go to college. Instead they should fight alongside me…fighting hegemony. Markus is an organic intellectual who is fighting. When giving awards out after the first week of class, Markus voiced dissent and saw the [expletive] with that. Markus has potential (this is the [expletive] teacher part of me), the potential is different (not college potential, or potential to make money, but to see through [expletive] and do something about it—it is possible that he will get locked up because he is so resistant. He is labeled learning disabled. He has resisted reading and writing. *I want to teach him to channel that resistance because that will help him not get locked up*.

Ms. Hall continuously expressed a commitment to channel students' resistance. The key question I wanted to address was if SRL could play a role in achieving that goal. In an interview, she stated:

> My concern is the scripted nature of SRL and its emphasis on pursuing predetermined goals. I do not pretend to know what resistance will look like, or whether or not students should at all times remain committed to that goal, and work on themselves to achieve that goal. Yes…of course he [referring to

> Markus] will need to be reflective about what he is doing, but developing a set way of evaluating his resistance makes it seem like I am promoting psychological surveillance only for purposes I find valuable.

Despite Ms. Hall's resistance, I continued to ask questions about the role of SRL pedagogy in channeling student resistance and recognizing the power of texts. At one point, I read a quotation by Duncan-Andrade (2010), who associates studying with revolutionary duty.

> A text to be read is a text to be studied. A text to be studied is a text to be interpreted. We cannot interpret a text if we read it without paying attention, without curiosity; if we stop reading at the first difficulty….If a text is difficult, you insist on understanding it….To study demands discipline. To study is not easy, because to study is to create and re-create and not to repeat what others say. To study is a revolutionary duty.

Though Duncan-Andrade does not use the language of SRL, the emphasis on discipline and persistence in the face of challenge mirrors conceptions of what it means to effectively self-regulate. Following the reading of this quotation, I mentioned a particular teaching unit. Ms. Hall produced a documentary on a local yacht club comprised mainly of working class African American men. The club was situated within the community and members were not from the economic elite. Ms. Hall had students watch the documentary and read articles about the club. In addition, she invited the president of the club to be a guest speaker in her classroom. This unit clearly reflected her commitment to use local texts, foster value in community, and support community engagement.

Upon reading the quotation and recalling her yacht club teaching events, Ms. Hall was asked if SRL could support revolutionary duty, the

realization of the power of text, community engagement, and challenge economic reproduction. Ms. Hall did not disagree with Duncan-Andrade's (2010) quotation. However, she was concerned about her own positioning in relation to SRL pedagogy. She asked:

> If I teach students to self-regulate, aren't I really just teaching them to follow orders without having to tell them to follow orders? Even if I wanted them to regulate learning to oppose oppression…aren't I creating a relationship of dependence…students relying on me to tell them how to think and act?

In this quotation, there are three critical points to consider. First, Ms. Hall suggested that teaching students to regulate learning was internalized surveillance whereby control over student behavior was enacted through the activation and development of psychological monitoring mechanisms. Second, teaching students to regulate learning had the potential to produce relationships of dependence whereby students gain power by learning how to think and act her way. Third, the form of SRL, as opposed its ends (e.g. efficiently learning content or resisting school policies), was implicated in oppression. Overall, Ms. Hall saw a paradox in SRL instruction: Can SRL be unequivocally considered autonomous and empowering if students were dependent on her to learn ways of thinking and acting that enabled them to perform particular learning functions?

Another paradox to which Ms. Hall alluded related to homogenization. Explicitly referring to the yacht club lessons, she stated:

> I am not sure how I want them to engage with the texts. I do know I don't want them to engage in the same way, with the same goals, contribute the same thing. To some extent, it seems that including self-regulated learning

> pedagogy is an effort to homogenize engagement and homogenize goals. I want them to have an experience with the text, one that is organic.

Though SRL pedagogy is considered to involve variations in terms of students' goals, thought processes, and behaviors, Ms. Hall suggests that the form of the thought is homogenizing. That is, the content of regulatory efforts might vary, but she believed students would be uniformly restricted by a particular way of engaging with academic tasks, one that Ms. Hall did not see as organic. Ms. Hall expressed concern that normalizing thought process was tied to an effort to produce efficient students.

Selves, Relationships, and Community

> …it [teaching] is more about my learning who my students were and helping them become who they wanted to be, whatever that is. (Interview with Ms. Hall)

Though Ms. Hall resisted forming a well-defined organizing pedagogical logic, she always remained explicit about her efforts to develop relationships with students and people in their communities. In an interview, she stated:

> I never set out, before the school year, and determine what types of messages and what types of teaching methods I would use. I wasn't sure how I was going to do what I wanted to do, but I did know that forming strong relationships was key.

One area on which Ms. Hall consistently received positive evaluations related to her relationships with students; other teachers also recognized

the strength of Ms. Hall's relationships with her students. Her representation of a good teacher was defined by this commitment. In an interview, Ms. Hall stated, "Good teachers are not motivated by numbers, but by relationships and people." Ms. Hall strongly believed that if she failed to deflect neoliberal policy and practices the relationships with her students would have been undermined.

Ms. Hall contended that neoliberalism narrowly shapes what is possible and important to know about students. She attributed the form and commitment to developing a certain kind of knowledge of students to neoliberal "data-driven" reform efforts. Ms. Hall was skeptical of the mandate to "know" students, especially in narrow ways. In an interview she stated:

> Good teachers will resist data that defines their students. They are not reluctant to change or critique [standardized measures that produce student data], but they will not limit their vision of their students to mere numbers generated from a particular time, based on arbitrary protocols. They will know if a student of theirs did not show or demonstrate or perform what they are capable of…the test generator, scorer, and evaluator will not.

In this quotation Ms. Hall alludes to a number of complexities related to what it means to know students. First, she rejected the idea that students can be understood as and reduced to data points. Ms. Hall believed that such data was dehumanizing. It was not only the form of the data that was a problem. Ms. Hall suggested that any efforts to define students in order to fix them in a time and place, and were based on what she called "arbitrary" assessments, ignored both the complexity of human growth and the power dynamic inherent in declaring something "truthful" about students. As is clear in the quotation, the narrowness of standardized test

data was not the only issue, though Ms. Hall was especially concerned about student data generated from standardized measures.

Though Ms. Hall was aware of the limitations regarding what can be known about others, she rationalized some of her pedagogical decisions as driven by this goal to learn about her students. One activity involved assembling bookshelves. There were no bookshelves in the classroom, so Ms. Hall purchased ones that needed to be assembled. Each class had a bookshelf project. To start, she put the box of parts in the middle of the floor alongside a video camera and asked the students to assemble the shelves and record the process. That was her only statement. Her reasoning was that she wanted to produce an organic situation within the boundaries of the school walls in order to observe the roles students took, how they related to each other, and the how the activity evolved. From this she started to develop profiles of students, grounded in the understanding that student identities evolve and are dynamic. In addition, her efforts were not guided by the goal to use student knowledge to achieve institutionally-mandated curricula outcomes. Knowledge of students was an end in itself, not something used to inform pedagogical decisions that would render the transmission of knowledge effective.

Ms. Hall was concerned that producing and relying on certain forms of data to inform pedagogical decision making would impede her ability to form relationships with students. She used this concern to rationalize her rejection of SRL pedagogy. An important component of SRL pedagogy involves supporting students' knowledge of themselves. There is particular emphasis on working with students to develop their understanding of which strategies work for them in relation to given tasks. In addition, there is emphasis on supporting the deliberation over

personal beliefs and how they play a role in learning behaviors and academic success. She neither focused on this dimension of self and personhood, nor expected students to engage in this production of self.

Ms. Hall believed that SRL pedagogy communicated a sense of individual responsibility for academic outcomes. Ms. Hall believed that teaching students to regulate learning was underpinned by a view of society as meritocratic. She believed that the hypocrisy of such a view was transparent to her students. As a result, Ms. Hall argued that messages of individual responsibility only served to undermine trust in her relationships with them. In an interview, she stated:

> My students are not dumb, they see, experience, and live inequality, inequality that is beyond their control. If I communicate to them that their actions, thought processes, and goals are responsible for their success, my integrity will be in question. I don't even buy into meritocracy, which is why it is [expletive] that my teaching evaluations require that I communicate that idea. There is so much more to success. It is not just the success is multifaceted, communities are important for constructing ideas about what counts as success and what is needed to attain it.

Related to this point, Ms. Hall argued that SRL instruction also promoted individual accountability, an ideology that she strongly connected to neoliberalism.

> It seems that the logic of self-regulated learning aligns with the idea that one's outcome is a matter of one's choosing…it seems caring about social and historical relations seems unnecessary and irrelevant to one's fulfillment….the individual is a fabrication that ignores these things.

Discussion

Ms. Hall's engagement with SRL illuminates subtle ways in which neoliberalism can gain legitimacy through pedagogy designed to support students' academic self-regulation, which is often promoted under guise of empowerment and responsibility. She reasoned that such pedagogy had the danger of promoting an ethic of efficiency, normalization, and a breakdown in relationships—all effects that she understood as part of a neoliberal agenda. Ms. Hall viewed SRL as misaligned with agency, freedom, and empowerment because of its connection to the improvement of standardized test performance, individualization, and self-surveillance. Fostering SRL was viewed as competing with her pedagogical goal to foster critical engagement and student empowerment. Other teachers may not necessarily articulate Mrs. Hall's reasoning, sensitivities, and pedagogical commitments. However, many may feel similar aversions to neoliberal policies and be sensitive to the contradictions in its policy and practice (e.g. see Gorlewski, 2011). This research study can provide the language and conceptualization to couch discussions related to SRL in a neoliberal ideological, political, and economic context. With a growing emphasis on the importance of SRL in research, policy, and practice, Ms. Hall's reflections provide a timely and necessary starting point for critically engaging with neoliberalism and SRL.

Resisting neoliberal practices and policies in schools can be a challenging task; its ubiquity and variability can conceal its operation, even in our own behaviors, beliefs, and interactions. Although my research is focused on critiques of SRL, until this research study I have never raised concerns in terms of neoliberalism. In moving forward with our critique of neoliberalism, researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners must

remain aware of the neoliberal influence in the various inscriptions of individualism, the normalization of life trajectories (especially as framed in economic terms), the assignment of value related to information about students, and the production of a community and cultural hierarchy. Although all of these areas of reflection are critical for resisting neoliberalism, a pressing concern relates to the psychologization of students and its alignment with neoliberalism and SRL.

Although Ms. Hall did not frame her concerns with neoliberalism as a critique of psychology, her rationalizations reflect concerns that critical psychologists raise about the promotion of personhood in education (e.g., Martin, 2004). Martin (2004) writes:

> …conceptions of personhood that flow from psychology into education and other areas of contemporary North American culture are frequently narrowly individualistic, highly simplified, and impossibly unproblematic. In particular, such conceptions of personhood are highly self-expressive, instrumental, regimented, and manipulative in ways that I believe contribute significantly to the commodification and commercialization of education. (p. 188)

Martin's concerns are targeted towards conceptions of the neoliberal self and the self of SRL. He suggests that a self to be known and studied for the purposes of pursuing self-betterment renders individuals in constant need of consumption and competes with the promotion of civic virtue. Critics of neoliberalism implicate psychology in the production of this brand of personhood. Rose (1998) argues that psychological discourse builds and props up an existing framework of an autonomous, bounded and freely choosing personhood. He argues that neoliberal doctrine modifies this framework of an autonomous individual who is obliged to be free to one who experiences his or her freedom through appropriating

and exercising self-management techniques. Aside from the paradox of autonomy, Martin questions the value of the kind of personhood valued and validated in SRL. Ms. Hall was clearly sensitive to these ethical and philosophical complexities, and resisted SRL because she believed it aligned with the production of a brand of personhood that was characterized by individualism, efficiency, productivity, and social isolation.

As this brand of personhood is endorsed by psychologists, especially SRL researchers, and psychological discourse is deeply embedded in education, it will be essential that practitioners critically consider ways in which school policy, classroom instruction, and interactions are underpinned by a brand of psychology that constructs persons in ways that align with neoliberalism. In addition to paying attention to the effects of psychological discourse on endorsing a neoliberal self, Ms. Hall points to the need to pay attention to messages about the values of communities and the purposes of schooling.

Notes

[1] The teacher-participant's name has been changed to protect privacy.

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