The Power of Affect: Teacher Activism as Resistance to Neoliberalism in Saskatchewan

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With prevailing global neoliberal ideology, teachers and teacher unions must respond to market-driven governmental policies intended to undermine public education. In Saskatchewan, Canada, teacher activists feel compelled to both counter neoliberal discourses and proactively advocate for equitable, high-quality public education. To explore acts of resistance, semi-structured interviews with four teacher activists were employed to understand how teachers enact advocacy within their union and through grassroots activism. Harding et al.'s (2018) framework of alliances, assemblages, and affects informed data analysis, which included the creation of narrative vignettes characterizing teacher voice. This paper specifically discusses findings which suggest that affect, or how emotions do things, presented teachers with new potentialities for shaping educational policy.

Face à l'idéologie néolibérale mondiale dominante, les enseignants et les syndicats d'enseignants doivent répondre aux politiques gouvernementales axées sur le marché et destinées à saper l'éducation publique. En Saskatchewan, au Canada, les enseignants militants se sentent obligés de contrer les discours néolibéraux et de défendre de manière proactive une éducation publique équitable et de qualité. Des entretiens semi-structurés avec quatre enseignants militants ont été utilisés pour explorer les actes de résistance et comprendre comment les enseignants défendent leurs intérêts au sein de leur syndicat et par le biais du militantisme de base. Le cadre d'alliances, d'agencements et d'affects de Harding et al. (2018) a guidé l'analyse des données, qui comprenait la création de vignettes narratives caractérisant la voix des enseignants. Cet article traite spécifiquement des résultats qui suggèrent que l'affect, ou la façon dont les émotions font les choses, a présenté aux enseignants de nouvelles potentialités pour façonner la politique éducative.

As d'Agnese (2020) explained, neoliberal agendas have negatively impacted education practices globally with respect to curriculum, public perceptions, and teachers' professionalism. According to Apple (2012), "challenging these economic, social, cultural/ideological, and affective structures and relations asks us to work on many levels and in many sites. We all have roles to play in this process" (p. 166). In this manner, multipronged activism has become necessary with teacher activists working both within professional organizations and through grassroots efforts to resist neoliberal reforms.

Although there is extensive literature on teacher activism within teacher unions in Canada (e.g., Bascia, 2001; Bascia & Osmond-Johnson, 2013; Osmond-Johnson, 2018; Rottmann, 2013), there is a paucity of research exploring grassroots teacher activism or teacher activism envisioned

within poststructural frameworks. Furthermore, according to White (2020), "teacher activism is rarely explored as a nuanced and varied phenomenon with multiple meanings, actors, and aims" (p. 299). Therefore, this research—drawing upon Harding et al.'s (2018) framework of alliances, assemblages, and affects—sought to explore how teacher activists in Saskatchewan, Canada, intra-act with and as part of a political assemblage imbued with affect allowing for circuitries of newness always becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). To explore these multifaceted forces of teacher activism, the study considered the following question: "What causes teacher activists to enact educational advocacy through various networks and what benefits and challenges of their activism do they perceive?"

In order to situate the proliferation of teacher activism in Saskatchewan, the paper begins by exploring four dominant themes related to teacher advocacy: varied conceptualizations of teacher identities, the importance of teacher voice, teachers' unions as sites of teacher advocacy, and teachers' involvement in grassroots teacher activism. Next, the paper outlines the propagation of neoliberal ideology within Saskatchewan's educational context followed by descriptions of the study's conceptual framework, research methods, data collection, and data analysis. Lastly, findings are illustrated through narrative vignettes as representations of teachers' collective voice, accompanied by a discussion, and concluding thoughts.

A Proviso: Broadening the Discourse of Union

First, the authors would like to clarify their use of the term *union* in this study. In Saskatchewan, as legislated by the Teachers' Federation Act (Government of Saskatchewan, 2006), the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) is the professional organization of the province's public-school teachers. Its primary roles are to bargain collectively on behalf of members, promote teacher professionalism, and advocate for tenets of public education (STF, 2021b). When referencing specific organizations such as the STF, terminology is used to respect each organization's historical foundations. However, the authors primarily use the term union throughout this paper for two reasons: first, to achieve consistency with the larger body of literature; and second, as Osmond-Johnson (2015) posited, to intentionally challenge neoliberal discourses around teacher unionism and broaden understandings of professional unionism.

Study Background: Contextualizing the Policy Assemblage

Varied Conceptualizations of Teacher Identities

In this study, notions around *activist teacher identities* and discourses of *teacher professionalism* are particularly relevant. Democratic professionalism emphasizes collaborative action between teachers and educational stakeholders and suggests that teachers have a professional and social responsibility to contribute within and beyond the classroom advocating for the teaching profession on substantive issues of educational reform (Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Sachs, 2000). Stevenson and Gilliland (2015) additionally posited new *democratic professionalism* specifically urging union-active teachers to form alliances with diverse community groups as a wider movement to counter neoliberalism. In direct contrast to democratic identities, *managerial teacher professionalism* adopts a neoliberal point of view claiming that effective management can solve any problem and that private sector solutions are applicable to the public sector (Sachs, 2000).

Sachs (2000) further insisted upon exploring the potential of the activist professional identity in transforming the political and professional roles of teachers. Activist teacher identities require risk-taking and willingness to work collectively and strategically with others (Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Sachs, 2000). Drawing and expanding upon Sachs' concept of the activist professional, Anderson and Cohen (2015)—inspired by social movements in the United States—theorized an *advocacy teacher professionalism* seeking to deconstruct dominant neoliberal discourses by critically examining policies and practices through social movement unionism, shared governance/community involvement, and political action for social justice. Additionally, Cohen and Anderson stressed the importance of "build[ing] new alliances of educators, students, parents, and communities" (p. 8); above all, advocacy professionalism is only realizable when grassroots activists first build internal capacity then form alliances within the local community.

The Importance of Teacher Voice

Teacher voice is considered integral for individual and collective agency in policy-making discussions (Bangs & Frost, 2012; Gozali et al., 2017; Osmond-Johnson, 2018). Navarro (1992) explicitly theorized teacher voice as a continuum comprising three stages ranging from "voice as personal/private development" to "representative action" to "collectively critical" (p. 5), whereas structural transformation through political action is only possible with a collectively critical voice. *Collectively* refers to a group of people developing a common understanding of their oppression, setting common goals, and sharing an expression of their political position. *Critical* describes how people consciously critique the world and their positionality within it; they embrace their power and try to change the world. For teachers, a collectively critical voice involves attaining the right to use their stories in policy debates to challenge the authority of stakeholders such as government officials, businesspeople, and school trustees (Gitlin, 1990, as cited in Navarro, 1992). In this manner, Navarro provided a valuable continuum model for the development of teacher voice as teachers try to not only find ways to make their voices heard, but also listened to.

Teacher Unions as Sites of Teacher Advocacy

As teachers have increasingly become the object of neoliberal reform efforts, teacher unions—as stable forces with institutional power (Weiner, 2012)—are called upon to advocate on their behalf (Bascia & Osmond-Johnson, 2013; Sachs, 2000; Swalwell, 2014). Consequently, despite negative frames as self-interested roadblocks (Moe, 2007), unions play an important role in supporting activist teachers in achieving their goals, both individually and collectively (Bangs & MacBeath, 2012; Bascia, 2001; Bascia & Osmond-Johnson, 2012, 2013; Bascia & Stevenson, 2017; Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Rottmann, 2013).

In particular, Bascia and Stevenson (2017) highlighted the importance of *teacher union renewal*—the long-term sustainable development of union capacity—and "'unionateness'—an alignment of teachers' professional identity and union membership such that the two are indivisible" (p. 1). Rottmann (2013) proposed a similar model known as *union vitality*, incorporating both internal and external considerations: "Union vitality = relevance (internal & external) + engagement" (p. 75). When teachers engage with their unions, "vilifying rhetoric" (Rottmann, 2013, p. 76) propagated by government is difficult to sustain since teachers are then further removed from neoliberal values themselves and empowered to hold union leadership accountable. But engaging teachers comes with challenges; for instance, Bascia and Stevenson

(2017) suggested that work intensification serves as an impediment to union involvement as teachers attempt to balance personal and professional priorities. Nevertheless, an active, engaged membership strengthens teacher unions in providing beneficial services at the same time as shaping public opinion and, in turn, educational policymaking.

Teachers' Involvement in Grassroots Teacher Activism

A large body of literature has chronicled social movements among caring professions, including doctors (e.g., Hart et al., 2021; Loomis, 2015), nurses (e.g., Florell, 2021; Lingel et al., 2022; Zauderer et al., 2008), social workers (e.g., Greenslade et al., 2015; Mendes, 2007; Wallace & Pease, 2011), and non-profit social service workers (e.g., Baines, 2011). In recent years, new, more fluid spaces have also begun to provide teachers with dynamic ways to engage in political advocacy—either individually or collectively—independent of traditional teacher unions (Bascia & Stevenson, 2017; Maton, 2016, 2018; Picower, 2012; Rottmann, 2011). Individual efforts have seen teachers write educational blogs (Shiller, 2015), develop professional networks on social media (Brickner, 2016), or even publish books and articles on critical issues related to educational reform (Osmond-Johnson, 2015).

In addition to individual efforts, teachers have also collectively established grassroots organizations known as teacher caucuses or teacher activist groups either in response to an emergent policy or as a form of professional learning community (Jones et al., 2017; Maton, 2016; Niesz & D'Amato, 2021; Picower, 2012). For example, in 2008, members of the Chicago Teacher Union formed the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) beginning with a small group of teacher activists that eventually grew into a powerful force through shared goals and organized efforts to "improve the education and lives of the children they teach" (Ashby & Bruno, 2016, p. 23). After the Chicago teacher strikes of 2012, similar teacher caucuses began to pop up across the United States including the Philadelphia Caucus of Working Educators (WE). According to Maton (2018), WE initially responded to market-based reform efforts such as school closures and privatization measures but evolved to also focus on issues of racial injustice. As Picower (2012) explained, teachers who participate in activist movements make the following commitments: reconciling their own vision of social justice with their local context, enacting principles of critical pedagogy, and advocating collectively against oppression.

Even though teacher activists' enactments through various networks offer innovative ways for educational advocacy, Horn (2014) posed a valid question: "Are these *moments* of teacher resistance or the beginning of a *movement* of teacher resistance to neoliberal school reform?" (p. 277). According to Horn, to transform moments into a movement, teachers need to find new and engaging ways to build alliances starting at the grassroots level.

Situating the Study

Resistance to Neoliberal Ideology in Saskatchewan

Although some of the more radical neoliberal reforms—including an attempt to implement broad-based K–12 standardized testing (Spooner & Orlowski, 2013)—have been successfully resisted, austerity budgets (White-Crummey, 2020) and policy decisions (Graham, 2018; Latimer, 2017; STF, 2021a) have gradually and deliberately changed the complexion of public education in the province (Orlowski, 2015). The prevailing neoliberal doctrine has perniciously demanded teacher

accountability and deregulated private enterprise thus promoting a distorted public narrative that private business is trustworthy, but public employees such as teachers are not (Orlowski, 2015). Orlowski (2015) urged teachers to "wak[e] up to the fact that public services and assets are not to be taken for granted" (p. 242) and that "where there is power, there is also resistance" (p. 242); it is within this resistance that hope resides.

For the most part, Saskatchewan teachers have advocated against neoliberal reforms within the auspices of the STF amidst contentious contract negotiations. For example, in 2011, following cuts to education during a time of economic prosperity, Saskatchewan teachers went on strike for the first time ever as a province-wide collective (Graham, 2011). Then, in 2014, after the government had unilaterally increased teachers' work hours (French, 2013; STF, 2015), teachers rejected two consecutive contract offers (Prairie South Schools, 2014), citing work intensification and class size as main issues (paNOW, 2014). Most recently, in March 2020, teachers voted 90% in favour of imposing sanctions in response to the government's refusal to address class size and complexity in collective bargaining talks (STF, 2020b). In conjunction with negotiations, the STF encouraged teachers to participate in political actions such as "Tell Them Tuesday" where members wrote letters to government telling real stories to humanize the educational experience (STF, 2020a) as well as "Pick a Premier" where members joined political parties to vote for new party leaders (STF, 2017).

Some Saskatchewan teachers have also advocated beyond the STF through grassroots advocacy. Groups have included the "Sask Teachers United" Facebook page created during the 2011 teachers' strike (Sask Teachers United II, 2021) and the "Stop Bill-63" Facebook page formed in 2017 to counter education legislation seeking to increase government power and reduce accountability (Safe Schools Saskatchewan, 2017). Most recently, the "Safe Schools Saskatchewan" (2021b) Facebook group (the Stop Bill-63 page rebranded) was developed in response to the government's return-to-school plan during the COVID-19 pandemic (Djuric, 2021). In 2021, it had nearly 12,000 members including teachers and parents (Djuric, 2021). The group has utilized various strategies such as rallies (Maxwell, 2020), phone/email blitzes (Safe Schools Saskatchewan, 2021a), and informational town halls (Canales-Lavigne, 2021; Djuric, 2021) to collectively advocate for science-informed educational policymaking (Safe Schools Saskatchewan, 2021b).

Conceptual Framework

To better understand social movements performed by teacher activists in Saskatchewan, this study was informed by Harding et al.'s (2018) framework of alliances, assemblages, and affects. We provide a brief introduction to this framework below. Aligning with the purposes of this paper, however, we pay particular attention to the intersection of affect and teacher activism.

Alliances: A Network Theory of (new) Social Movements

Alliances, envisioned through Diani's network theory of (new) social movements, are systems of relations that "cut across established social and political cleavages" (2000, p. 387). A *political cleavage* refers to existing political bodies with differing ideologies (e.g., the STF, the Saskatchewan Party) in which imagined concentric social circles exist. New social movements or alliances cut across established cleavages by creating intersecting (rather than concentric) circles representative of new potentially transformative connections. Diani's theory can be imagined as

collectives stuck in an ideological rut and it takes great effort to move social groups to a new space with more equitable arrangements. Social change is more easily achieved outside of traditional political cleavages through grassroots activism; nevertheless, formal teacher organizations can also draw upon these ideas to consider how they might function otherwise.

Assemblage Theory

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Harding et al. (2018) defined *assemblages* as "the process of arranging, organizing, and fitting together parts" (p. 9). Assemblages examine meanings and actions moving beyond individual or human participants (e.g., teachers, government officials, school division personnel) to include non-human entities (e.g., actions, institutions, policies). Within an assemblage, parts intra-act with each other as actants affect and are reciprocally affected upon. Harding et al. (2018) stated that "*Affect* helps us to consider the enthusiasm and passion that moves bodies but is otherwise unarticulated" (p. 16). It is this aspect of the Harding et al.'s (2018) framework that is the primary focus of this paper.

The Potential of Affect in Teacher Activism

According to Rice (2008), the field of critical affect studies complicates public sphere theory and its assumption that reasoning alone informs judgment; believing that "Public participants get something from deliberation *beyond* deliberation" (p. 211). Like Rice, Eyerman (2006) recognized the emotive or affective as integral to how social movements move. That is, social movements move as an intersection of cognitive problem framing and an almost transcendent solidarity in which participants experience enigmatic emotional bridges with others (Eyerman, 2006). In other words, "Group solidarity is an emotional as well as cognitive experience" (Eyerman, 2006, p. 208). Therefore, exploring affect in addition to cognitive engagement in the context of teacher activism is both necessary and valuable.

Varied approaches towards affect exist in the literature. For instance, Massumi (1995) delineated between emotion and affect by explaining that emotions occur in response to interactions and are personal and identifiable. Conversely, affect is pre-personal and continuously deeply embedded consciously and subconsciously. *Pre-personal* refers to pre-existing bodily or spatial dispositions that influence a response to stimuli; *consciously* and *subconsciously* allude to affect as a knowable or unknowable passion: affect is intangible and unrestrained.

Feminist orientations, however, view affect as capable of producing accumulative affective values (e.g., social norms), rejecting distinct interpretations of affect and emotion. To that end, this study draws primarily upon Ahmed's (2015) conceptualization of affect as "emotions as *doing things*" (p. 208) with emotions subsuming human and non-human entities that shape both social and bodily spaces. In Ahmed's view, normative understandings (e.g., gender, race, or sex) come before the subject and how bodies generate and receive affects differs dependent upon cultural or social contexts (Åhäll, 2018; Ahmed, 2015). Ahmed (2015) analogized affect as forming impressions where

> An impression can be an effect on the subject's feelings ('she made an impression'). It can be a belief ('to be under an impression'). It can be an imitation or image ('to create an impression'). Or it can be a mark on the surface ('to leave an impression'). (p. 6)

In other words, in conducting this study, researchers and participants impressed upon each other and, in doing so, impress upon others including readers of this paper who then, in turn, do likewise.

To understand how normative understandings are derived, Ahmed (2015) proposed *affective economies* in which "emotions *do* things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 119). Specifically, affective economies are an accumulation of affective value whereby emotions can shape subjects and objects, yet emotions do not reside within bodies; rather, affect circulates and accumulates through repetition. In the study, examples of accumulated affective value are the additive value of any human or non-human entities (e.g., words, actions, ideas) that reinforce neoliberal ideology or, alternatively, an affective economy might be an assemblage of teachers' collective feelings which shape their mutual identity. The repetition of intra-actions within an assemblage subsequently results in adherence (the sticking of object, ideas, or people together) and coherence (a collective body exhibiting normative understandings; Ahmed, 2015). *Affective economies* (i.e., summative normative understandings) either move individuals or collectives closer or further away from other bodies, ideas, or objects. As such, the power of affect can be found within these affective economies or the accumulative effect of circulating forces that produce normative tendencies (Ahmed, 2015; Gould et al., 2019).

Another way to envision affective accumulation is through Gould's (2009) emotional habitus. Drawing upon Bourdieu, Gould described the *emotional habitus* of a social movement as "members' embodied, axiomatic inclinations toward certain feelings and ways of emoting" (p. 100) which primarily operates at a nonconscious level. Exploring notions of emotional habitus and affective economies can support understandings of how social movements move—in addition to cognitive comprehension—as well as encourage exploration of potentialities found within the power of affect.

Research Design and Methods

Narrative Inquiry

Qualitative narrative inquiry was utilized to fully understand the valuable perspectives of union-active teachers who also engage in grassroots advocacy. Drawing primarily on the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1990) this study situated narrative inquiry as "the study of ways humans experience the world" (p. 2); that is, "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (p. 2). To encourage openness, a trusting, collaborative participant-researcher relationship is a critical feature of narrative inquiry; this mutuality allows for powerful narratives to emerge. In this study, the first author's positionality (described below in the Study Participants section) provided established trusting relationships with participants which lent itself well to this aspect. Moreover, the study employed interviews forming an initial collection of narratives which were transformed into interwoven storylines, thereby observing Connelly and Clandinin's call for an ongoing "narrative record" (p. 5). That said, this paper diverged from Connelly and Clandinin's more rigid writing guidelines involving a structured setting and plot. Instead, it prioritized teacher voice by putting participants' words at the forefront like Glesne (1997) and Byrne (2017) who have exclusively used participant voices in poetry as representations of study findings. Byrne explained this choice as follows:

> Conceivably we have to write 'messy' texts if we are to have a hope of understanding the messiness of human life. We also need to explore the ways in which we can represent data and the voices of others that are honest, authentic and meaningful. (p. 49)

Essentially, narrative vignettes in this paper are a form of messy text that sought to represent data as genuinely as possible (recognizing that weaving together others' ideas is always a subjective interpretation) to communicate and emphasize affective states (Byrne, 2017).

Certain limitations to narrative inquiry have been suggested in related literature such as its reliance on the skills and integrity of the researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), the time commitment required limiting numbers of participants, and researchers imposing their own meanings upon participants' experiences (Bell, 2002). Although Connelly and Clandinin (1990) advised narrative researchers to heed critic's concerns, Denzin (2013) challenged dominant hegemonic politics questioning data validity in qualitative research. Like Denzin, Byrne suggested that the notion of authenticity in narrative inquiry is problematic because of its implication that a single truth exists. Accordingly, concerns around integrity and trust were addressed by strictly observing ethics protocols which included conducting member checking (i.e., participants reviewed interview transcripts and narrative vignettes), performing meticulous data analysis, and respecting researcher-participant relationships throughout.

Data Sources

Study Participants

The study's first author is a doctoral student and secondary teacher passionate about advocating for teachers, teacher professionalism, and equitable, high-quality public education. At the time of this study, she was a member of the STF and had been active within the organization as an elected representative for ten years. Additionally, she advocated both individually and collectively through grassroots advocacy efforts primarily on social media. It was through these experiences and connections that the first author was able to directly recruit four known teacher activists and invite them to come to this research. Initial contact was made by calling participants and communicating pertinent information. All potential participants agreed to be a part of the study and emailed the first author to arrange for an interview time. The study was approved by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board and participant confidentiality has been prioritized. Although general attributes of participants are provided, participants chose their own pseudonyms to honor teachers' unique identities (Allen & Wiles, 2016). Specific names of school divisions and grassroots advocacy groups have also been excluded as participants viewed risks associated with their involvement in the study in two ways: first, they perceived risks related to their grassroots advocacy; and second, they were concerned about personal or professional consequences for speaking openly about the Saskatchewan education system.

Description of Participants. The participants—of which two identified as female, Violet and Amanda, and two as male, Dwayne and Leo—were full-time teachers and members of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Participants' federation involvement ranged from 10–15 years of service in various roles such as local association representative, local executive member, provincial councillor, special subject council executive, and provincial and federal committee member. All participants were experienced teachers: three of the four had just over 20 years of

teaching experience, while the fourth had been teaching for around 15 years. Except for a couple months of rural teaching experience for two participants, all teachers had worked in urban centres for most of their careers. Lastly, with respect to grassroots involvement, three of the four were members of grassroots advocacy groups and one participant advocated primarily through personal political connections.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews featuring open-ended questions provided for "rich, full and complex accounts" (Magnusson & Maracek, 2015, p. 47) of participant experiences, lending itself well to the subjective and transactional nature of this research. The first author conducted semi-structured interviews individually with each of the four participants. Interviews were conducted via Zoom video conferencing and ranged in length from 75 to 115 minutes, averaging about 90 minutes each. The first interview, conducted in November 2020, served as a pilot project for three additional interviews which took place a few months later in June 2021. The data set encompassed all four interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis, informed by Saldana (2021), involved the meticulous implementation of four iterations of coding. In first iteration coding, data was first categorized using pilot interview coding methods comprising of *versus coding* to identify conflicts, *emotions coding* to acknowledge participants' emotions, and *in vivo coding* to honor teacher voice (Saldana, 2021). Saldana referred to the dichotomies found within versus coding as moieties which exhibit power imbalances, creating "a duality that manifests itself as an X vs. Y code (e.g., TEACHERS VS PARENTS ...)" (p. 174). Emotions coding recognized participants' feelings like frustration, satisfaction, or fear, and in vivo coding such as "it felt good to do important work" was utilized within all coding types to prioritize participants' voices. Finally, perceiving affect in an empirical study does not go without its challenges due to its intangible nature (Åhäll, 2018; Wetherell & Beer, 2014), but Gould et al. (2019) argued that there is a need for researchers to experiment with different ways of conveying affect.

Accordingly, emotions coding was expanded to affective coding as an intra-action of emotions codes with values codes (*values* subsuming attitudes, values, and beliefs; Saldana, 2021). Despite identifying dozens of affective codes, discerning affect required probing beyond initial characterizations. Massumi (1995) explained that emotion occurs in response to meanings or symbolic interactions and is personal and identifiable; affect, on the other hand, is continuously deeply embedded consciously and subconsciously. Therefore, to advance understanding of affect, pertinent participant quotes regarding impetus, commitment, and identity were also highlighted and categorized. In many ways, data analysis unfolded in a way that epitomized Czetkovich's (2012) conceptualization of affect as a more generic "category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways (whether as distinct specific emotions or as a generic category often contrasted with reason)" (p. 4). Considering affect as a broader classification (in contrast to intellectual reason) provided a useful way to further discussions of affect in the context of the study.

In the second iteration of coding, Saldana's code mapping was utilized to sort 643 codes into 12 initial categories such as "Grassroots Educational Activism," "Political Ideologies," and

"Values." Code landscaping was applied concurrently to provide an integrated representation of visual and textual elements (Saldana, 2021); even though benefits of code landscaping were limited because of the variety of codes inherent to eclectic coding, it proved valuable for identifying prevalent themes. Interviews were also reviewed at this stage to thematize pertinent passages linking to theories of affect (Ahmed, 2004; Gould, 2009; Rice, 2008). Next, in the third iteration of coding, the 12 categories were narrowed to four major categories including: "Human and Non-Human Conflicts—The Opponents"; "Consequences of Conflicts—The Underdogs"; "The Power of Affect—The Imbued Impetus"; and "Resistance to Conflicts—The Ninjas." These major categories—which serve to situate findings—are presented fully in the following section.

Finally, utilizing Saldana's (2021) codeweaving, the first author generated narrative vignettes by integrating categories and codes to form textual representations as new ways of knowing. Richardson referred to unique writings as *evocative representations* or "writing [that] touches us where we live, in our bodies" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2000, p. 931) and reveals the humanity in social science. Inspired by the notion of evocative representations, each narrative vignette, including perspectives from all participants, was woven together to generate vivid narratives of how teachers experienced activism. Through these writings, teachers' affective states were derived and, in turn, affect readers who experience unique interpretations (Gould et al., 2019). Williams (2014) additionally explained that "Style in poststructural works is deliberately resistant to perfect understanding and deliberately demanding of different reactions depending on perspective" (p. 14). In this vein, readers are invited to intra-act with the narrative vignettes—as poststructural textual assemblages intended to push the boundaries of traditional academic writing—noting that each denotes a moment in time as thinking and writing is always processual. In each passage, bolded words represent coding categories, italicized words indicate researcher-identified codes, words bolded and in quotation marks reveal teacher voice (i.e., participant quotes), and unformatted text links ideas.

Findings

Study findings are expressed by introducing each of the major categories with a narrative vignette followed by commentary and commensurate data.

Category #1: Human and Non-Human Conflicts—The Opponents

Emotions Inspiring **Grassroots Teacher Activism**
Teachers experience **emotions** of *frustration*, *anger*, and *desperation* when
"waiting for supportive messaging"
but are met with
"**STF silence**."
"Teachers want to know someone's going to stand up for them"
and
"do something."
Participants believed that
"somebody else should be doing this work"
but
"nobody else was going to pick up the torch"
and they

"would have felt rotten if [they had] not tried"
to *push back against government inaction* and a *lack of funding*.
They felt *demoralized* and *defeated* because
"setbacks were dramatic"
and
"wins weren't quite as satisfying"
particularly when they
"brought issues forward",
but
"it didn't make a difference."
Teachers
"need[ed] the public on board"
because
"there isn't an appetite for change if the public doesn't want it"
so they
"need[ed] to build empathy with the public."
Advocacy was *mentally taxing* and *exhausting*.
One teacher explained that
"it was not how I planned to spend my summer"
but
"it felt good to do important work."
"I think it was fairly successful"
as
"it was shaping the discussion for a while."
For example,
"One day, CBC was running five stories on the hour …
four stories were ones that we had been involved in directly."
At government press conferences,
We **"directly [contacted] the people asking the questions"**
since
"we had the depth of knowledge"
and
"couldn't expect reporters to."
Though *more funding* was
"not just because of us,"
we initiated *discussions* around
"what [was] happening in the schools to the wider public"
and *good decisions* were made that *might not have been made without advocacy*.
Having *more successes* than *failures* was *rewarding and empowering*.
Advocating with other
"teachers willing to take the same risks"
is *enjoyable* and *fulfilling* with *friendships*,
"interchange of ideas,"
personal connections, *smart perspectives*, and reciprocally
"filling the well."

Conflicts within the political assemblage, both human (e.g., teachers, members of the public, school division superintendents, government officials) and non-human (e.g., local associations, the STF, the government, the media, policy, political ideologies) were evident in the data and contributed to a collective sense of frustration, anger, and even desperation among participants. Perceiving inaction from the government, school divisions, and the STF, participants felt compelled to do something themselves to influence positive change which involved engaging members of the public via various media. Through ongoing efforts, they experienced failures and successes that, over time, shaped a new space of collective empowerment. For participants, this new space not only facilitated intellectual discussions around political issues, but it also served as a kind of personal support group. Amanda spoke to how a collective can support each other through difficult times:

> You feel like, why are we doing this? We're wasting our time. And so, it's good to have a group that you can keep each other going. And so, you know, as people are like, going up and down on the ride, sometimes someone else's up when you're down and then you can support each other.

Leo described his involvement as a member of a grassroots activist group in the following way:

> It's often that idea from me of a collective intelligence that works together and that creates these ideas that creates the actions in order to make the change. I'm sure there's sometimes certain leaders or whatever, but I think it's so much more impactful when there's a movement towards something like as a group so … I appreciate the groups that I've been part of.

Category #2: "Consequences of Conflicts—The Underdogs"

Emotions Influencing **Union Activism** and **Policy**
Teacher activists sometimes felt like they were the
"only one to speak out"
though colleagues would privately say they were
"100% behind [them]"
putting participants in the difficult position of
"being the lone objector"
rather than *having support*.
Teachers
"encourage people to speak up"
but
"nobody ever does"
because
"people are scared to say something"
and
"don't want to make waves."
Likewise, participants wondered if the STF has inadvertently established
a *culture of silence*
as teachers experience *uncertainty* regarding policies such as
the *code of ethics* and *code of collective interests*.
Teachers assume the *code of ethics* means that they

"can't make criticisms of anything"
so the *STF's ability to inspire advocacy* is limited by
"a pretty good sense that very few teachers are willing to speak up."
Another teacher spoke to the *STF's political potential*
and how they operate compared to *other unions*.
That is, the STF *wants strong councillors* yet has reservations about *political teachers*
and
"[wants] people who will say yes ma'am, yes sir."

Study participants understood the STF's need to manage risks, but sometimes felt unsupported because of what they perceived as a more conservative approach to advocacy. In this sense, participants viewed teachers and the STF as somewhat being underdogs with unrealized potential. Dwayne expressed his understanding of the STF's dilemma in balancing responsibilities:

> I've come to appreciate that a lot of times when I've thought, well, why didn't the STF do something? Or why didn't the STF do something on our behalf? I'm a lot more empathetic now to the reasons behind that because I get now that there are times when they can't do that. Even though sometimes I think it would be satisfying to hear them say, 'We have the backs of teachers at any cost.' They feel that they can't and that 'any cost' is a big deal.

Leo, on the other hand, wondered whose needs the STF was meeting:

> We haven't really heard from the STF very much about what they're, you know, advocating on behalf of teachers, so are they meeting the needs of the teachers themselves? Or are they meeting the needs of the government or and, you know, trying to keep a relationship so they don't want to be openly critical? Yet it feels to us like we're being deflated possibly as teachers in the classroom, so I think on being clear on what can be communicated and what they're not going to communicate for certain reasons.

In feeling unsupported, teachers experienced persistent feelings of frustration and helplessness.
Leo explained his frustration in various contexts:

> There's frustration and anger as well, like seeing, you know, certain things happening in the province, or in the country, in the world where it's like, 'That's not right. That shouldn't be happening.' But that compels me to then take more action to learn more about a certain topic or whatever.

Amanda spoke to teachers' feelings of desperation:

> I think teachers right now feel desperate for support. I really do. I think that, and then we can be supporting each other at the very least. You have to get to a point where we're as teachers wanting to support each other and then empower each other.

Even though participants recognized the STF's need to maintain respectful relationships with government, above all, they expected the STF to fight for issues of importance. This was especially pertinent when teacher colleagues felt uncertain or afraid to speak out themselves. Leo explained: "There's a fear because we've been told, so many times that we have to let the STF speak on our

behalf and so we're scared to say things ourselves in public like, is this okay to say"? Amanda believed that "teachers are their own worst enemies by not speaking up; by having a union that's not speaking up for them." Dwayne further characterized teachers' detachment as "not necessarily against their employer, not necessarily against the government, but even advocating for themselves in any kind of public way."

Category #3: "The Power of Affect—The Imbued Impetus"

The Power of Affect in **Teacher Activism**
When activism is *overwhelming*,
teacher activists *empathize* and *share the load* so if they feel *alone* and *helpless*,
there are *other people to help*.
This is important because
"our voice alone"
"doesn't get a lot of traction"
so there is *fulfilment* from
"finding and connecting to other people who have similar views."
Furthermore, it is
"dangerous for one person to stand out" vs. **"thousands of us"**
with
"a collective voice."
Often, teachers
"don't have those discussions"
about political matters but it is *enjoyable* to
"shar[e] ideas ... [and] new understandings."
This creates a
"collective intelligence"
and despite having
"certain leaders",
it is not
"an echo chamber"
with
"a more rounded group of people doing this."
Participants were committed to
"looking out for the best interests of teachers"
as they *cared about helping solve problems for colleagues*, *mentoring younger teachers*, and
believed that
"ignoring isn't satisfying"
because
"I love leaving something that is functioning."
They believed that
"we need teachers who *get* teachers who can be the voice for these other people."
Despite feelings of *exhaustion*, *fear*, *discomfort*, *uncertainty*,
disappointment, *defeat*, and *demoralization*,
teachers maintained that
"[advocacy] had to be done"

because
"it was important work and I think I'd do it again."

A major theme in this narrative vignette is a collectivity that speaks to the power of affect as accumulative affective values move teachers towards experiencing and exhibiting characteristics consistent with the advocacy teacher professionalism identity.

Leo explained the dynamics within relationships that foster productive political discussions:

If we don't have those discussions, people will perhaps just keep certain positions, myself included, but in sharing ideas or positions, you know, we might come to new understandings. Not to my side or to their side, but you know something new, maybe it is to my side, maybe it is to their side. So I think perhaps that is also a victory in a way that we are having those discussions that we might not have otherwise.

Amanda explained the importance of connections to cope with setbacks:

You've got to find people that will help you do that and help you carry that load and also because it's demoralizing some days; you feel defeated. You're advocating for something and then there's another message, another announcement from the government. And it's like, oh, that's the same flipping message from last week. It's nothing.

Category #4: "Resistance to Conflicts—The Ninjas"

The **Emotions** of **Teacher Resistance**
At times, participants viewed
"activism as toxic"
whereas **emotions** of *frustration*, *anger*, and *fear* were most prevalent.
Teachers stated
"I also want to be able to say it's not me"
because
"anonymity can be really important"
since *teacher activism carries risk* and *teachers fear repercussions*.
They observed that other *teachers are scared* but *should stop being afraid all the time* because
the *STF [is] only as strong as [its] membership.*
Teachers must support and empower each other.
When *teachers don't speak up* because
"[they] know that I will,"
participants felt *irritated* because
"being the lone objector"
takes a *personal toll.*
Participants acknowledged that
teacher workload vs. political activism
presented
a *work/life balance* challenge.
However, they regarded *fear* as the main reason colleagues avoided *getting involved*. People are
scared they will compromise
personal *career goals/opportunities* because

"teachers standing up for themselves"
are
"labelled as difficult"
and
"saying things to your boss they don't want hear"
is
"a tough thing to ask a volunteer to do."
Activism poses significant challenges, but participants often framed
"activism as something positive."
Not unexpected for teachers, participants *appreciated the learning* afforded to them, indicated
their *desire to stay current*, and remained *open to learning and change*.
They suggested that we should *never assume people in power know what they're doing* and
that, as activists, it is important to
"know your stuff."
Overall, they valued the
"great learning experiences"
found within activism.
Activism was central to their identity as a teacher and a person.
They believed *teacher voice is important* and they *wanted their voice to be heard* because
"if you have a voice, where people will listen … it ha[s] to be said."
Even though participants stated that they were *exhausted*, *frustrated*, and *angry* at times, they
remained dedicated to *advocacy*.
Despite expressing a need for breaks, a common sentiment was teachers
"don't want to retire [themselves] completely."
Teachers felt a deep sense of *satisfaction* and would encourage colleagues to
"get involved"
because
"amazing things could happen."

Participants were committed to advocacy and handled challenges through exercising patience, determination, and strategic management of perceived risks. They assumed a sort of covert ninja identity in the realm of Saskatchewan politics: accepting costs associated with potential personal and professional sacrifices, they surreptitiously and selflessly persevered to advocate for public education in the province. For instance, Amanda, one of two participants who expressed interest in attaining a leadership position, stated

I really wouldn't mind being in a leadership role in my own division. And I feel like this is put at jeopardy at times and it might have already, right? Like maybe I have already been labeled a troublemaker and even though [activism] is a form of leadership, [it] might not be the leadership they want, right?

Speaking more generally about risks, Dwayne suggested that activism requires a balance:

There are probably things that I wouldn't say on social media that, even though they may be true, even though they might be engaging to an audience, even though they might further a cause, maybe, some risks aren't worth taking.

Despite drawbacks, participants viewed activism as rewarding and an integral part of how they identified as teachers and individuals. As Dwayne went on to explain,

> Well, for the rest of my career, I will—and probably beyond that—I will try and get people on board with public education in some capacity. It's just what I believe in, so I think it will always be doing some stuff around that but I don't have any really immediate plans. This has been pretty central to how I kind of see myself as a teacher, as a person, for a long time, so yeah, it matters to me.

Discussion

Within a framework of alliances, assemblages, and affect, this study asked what causes teacher activists to enact educational advocacy through various networks and what benefits and challenges of their activism they perceived. The reasons why they advocate are two-fold: first, because of their cognitive engagement to counter neoliberalist reforms; and second, because teachers are repeatedly impressed upon through their intra-actions to collectively advocate together in particular ways. Perceived benefits and challenges of teacher activism are essentially affective values (or economies) which will be discussed within the context of theories of affect. To further explore teacher social movements, the discussion situates findings primarily in relation to affect theory then concludes with limitations, recommendations, and potential future research.

The Power of Affect

Affective economies—as accumulated affects generating social norms—move teachers to form alliances within social movements despite risks and challenges. Thus, it is advantageous to consider how affect moves teachers towards (or away from) certain dispositions. Exploring intensities of affect (i.e., deeply embodied feelings of commitment) is worthwhile for understanding how teachers and teacher unions can inspire teachers to adopt more democratic teacher professionalism beliefs. To that end, two primary questions must be explored: "In what ways and to what extent does affect align teachers with teacher activism?" (Ahmed, 2004; Gould, 2009); and "What do teachers get from deliberation beyond deliberation?" (Rice, 2008).

In What Ways and to What Extent Does Affect Align Teachers With Teacher Activism?

Gould et al. (2019) suggested that "a written work derives from affective states and can generate affective states as well" (p. 99). In many ways, the narrative vignettes—as integrated representations of participants' collective voice—convey some of the affects circulating within the realm of teacher activism and, in turn, may also impress upon and affect other bodies, ideologies, or objects. Teachers express collective emotions normally perceived as negative such as anger, frustration or even desperation. Through ongoing activist efforts, these feelings accumulate but are not the only emotions that transpire. For example, many emotions normally considered positive also emerge like satisfaction, empowerment, excitement, and enjoyment. Affect circulates sticking objects (e.g., attitudes, values, beliefs, emotions, ideologies) together which cohere as accumulative affective economies innate to teacher activists' experiences. In the case of emotions specifically, common-sense feelings represent a sort of emotional habitus (Gould, 2009). The naming of an emotional habitus is an affective act as its naming affects; nevertheless, labeling an

emotional habitus has value with acknowledgment that any identification of affective states is merely a partial understanding (Gould, 2009; Gould et al., 2019).

In the context of this study, teachers repeatedly express certain emotions demonstrating how affective values can accumulate into a common-sense understanding of emotions attached to teacher activism (Ahmed, 2004; Gould, 2009). Attempting to understand affect is advantageous; for example, Gould et al. (2019) suggested that when a social movement's emotional habitus is incompatible with its prospective members' dispositions, this incompatibility can undermine efforts to engage members into the political. In this study specifically, teachers' responses seemed to indicate an emotional habitus of frustration or anger. Though difficult to determine, if these feelings are incompatible with inactive teacher colleagues' perceived emotions (e.g., fear, disappointment), a disconnect could result leading to misconstrued apathy.

The findings reveal that affective states like anger or satisfaction can co-exist; thus, extending upon what Gould (2009) has posited regarding an emotional habitus, multiple emotional habitus can occur within a social group dependent on context with some more evident than others. For instance, a common perception of activists is that they are angry and frustrated which is also true for study participants to some extent; however, an emotional habitus of satisfaction rooted in group empowerment is also apparent albeit perhaps less obvious to outsiders.

Operating outside of consciousness, emotional habitus affect teachers which, consequently, serve as a kind of emotional disposition functioning as a "template for what or how to feel under particular circumstances" (Gould et al., 2019, p. 100); it dictates social norms for how teachers express themselves and potentially makes other feeling states unavailable. Teacher activists can inherently draw upon the potentials found within affect through enacting advocacy and by believing in limitless potentialities rather than submitting to social constraints. To realize the power of affect, teachers can attempt (although undoubtedly not an easy feat) to shape their collective emotional habitus through intuitiveness and providing new ways of envisioning the world to reorient teachers to new ways of thinking. Expanding thinking past assumed horizons allows teachers to rearticulate the political assemblage and influence desired political change. Teachers who participate in both their union and grassroots activism expand their immediate circle of familiarity and can take advantage of new ways of furthering their political goals. Thus, activists must continuously consider—and have the capacity to consider—alternatives outside of normative iterations (in any given moment) to effectively harness the power of affect.

What do Teachers get From Deliberation Beyond Deliberation?

Teacher activists benefit from "deliberation *beyond* deliberation" (Rice, 2008, p. 211); that is, though teacher activists appreciate the deliberate cognitive aspects involved in political activism, they are additionally drawn towards activism because of other more tacit deliberations rooted in social and emotional connections. For example, teachers also enjoy networking, travel opportunities, individual and collective learning, mentoring new members, personal learning, and socializing with like-minded, global, social justice-oriented thinkers. Teachers become involved in unions and grassroots movements because they are passionate about political affairs. Yet affective energies create an additional bond that, although difficult to describe or identify, can serve as an affective counter politics to advocate for public education (Massumi, 2015). For teacher unions specifically, affect might be envisioned within Bascia and Stevenson's (2017) "unionateness" as affective intensities always becoming and always ready to resist or advocate. Teacher union renewal factoring in both cognitive engagement and affective energies provides

considerable potential for a stronger union: one with the potential to withstand attacks from the most influential philanthropists as well as others attempting to achieve the neoliberal project (Weiner, 2012).

Conclusion

Through narrative vignettes, this paper highlighted teacher voice and showed how committed teacher activists employ individual and collective approaches to advocate for teachers, students, and an equitable public education system. Alliances (or relationships) form within a complex political environment in which teacher identities are always evolving dependent upon how they are affected or impressed upon. Ideally, teachers' identities shift towards notions of democratic or advocacy teacher professionalism with the potential to disrupt inequitable societal constructions. Exploring affect provides for a novel understanding of what moves teachers to participate in social movements and remain engaged over time. Understanding impetus is critical in ascertaining how teachers come to personify the advocacy teacher professional identity in such a way that

> They are willing to continue the fight even in the face of loss because they are committed to realizing their vision for justice. They recognize that their vision may not be realized in their lifetime, but they commit to pushing back against the forces of oppression, rather than sitting back and doing nothing. (Picower, 2012, pp. 572–573)

This study, however, is by no means an exhaustive examination of how affect might function within teacher activism though it is intended to initiate and expand thinking around how teachers and teacher unions can counter harmful neoliberalist reform efforts by better understanding the affective dimension.

Overall, participants' resistance to neoliberal-informed education decisions within the larger political assemblage serves as an example of the cognitive engagement aspect of social movements. Yet, as Eyerman (2006) posited, and what the authors observed in this study as well, is that social movements move as an intersection of affective energies in addition to cognitive problem framing. Further to this, the study shows how affect is vital to the advocacy teacher professionalism identity (Anderson & Cohen, 2015), going beyond signifiers of public discourse or the intellectual conversations related to political issues (Rice, 2008). That is, teacher activists benefit from intellectual involvement as well as social or emotional benefits or "deliberation beyond deliberation" (Rice, 2008, p. 211). Affective values accumulate to form affective economies that serve as a social group's normative understandings contributing to group coherence (Ahmed, 2004). An intersection of feelings, emotions, and passions comprises an emotional habitus (Gould, 2009) that dictates how a group is affected and can affect. Because a habitus is processual and can evolve over time (like affective economies), social change is not only possible, but also inevitable. As such, exploring affect and the potential found therein is critical for teacher activists seeking to counter neoliberalist reforms and proactively advocate for equitable educational policies.

Some limitations of this study are the small sample size, its non-specificity, and its subjective, transactional orientation. However, despite a smaller sample size, study participants possessed vast knowledge and extensive, diverse experiences within various local, provincial, and federal roles in addition to their grassroots advocacy; they exemplified democratic teacher

professionalism. And despite this study being broader in nature to reflect Saskatchewan's relatively small population where "everyone knows everyone," it provides a unique perspective on how teachers in Saskatchewan, or even Canada, enact activism within and beyond their union. That said, neoliberal ideology is a global phenomenon, and these teachers' experiences, though not generalizable, are certainly relatable transnationally. With respect to potential future research, it would be most useful to draw upon a larger, more diverse group of teacher participants—employing a longitudinal approach—to examine the development of unionateness and identities of democratic teacher professionalism, using an affective lens.

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