
New Capitalism, Risk, and Subjectification in an Early Childhood Classroom

STEVE BIALOSTOK

*Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education,
University of Wyoming, Laramie, USA*

GEORGE KAMBERELIS

University of Wyoming, Laramie, USA

ABSTRACT 'New capitalism' has been characterized as an economic period in which insecurity, flux, and uncertainty exist in the workplace. Capitalism attempts to tame that uncertainty through risk taking. Taking risks has become what one must do with risk. Economic discourses of embracing risk – thoroughly grounded in the ideologies of neoliberalism – are widely distributed into many non-economic areas, including education. Risk taking is now understood as something everyone should valorize, a necessity for freedom and choice. Such discourses are appropriated and recontextualized into different domains, including the everyday interactions between young children and teachers. In this study the authors examine the discourse of a writing lesson taught by one early childhood teacher, focusing on how she used language to promote/produce her students as risk-takers. The authors argue that this teacher's attempt to promote/produce risk-takers belied her commitment to neoliberal ideologies and new modes of capitalism. They also argue that her efforts were dampened by tensions that she also seemed to embody/live – tensions between old and new forms of capitalism, between modernist and postmodernist notions of agency, between safety and risk, and between freedom and control. The outcomes of her work thus seemed to embody tensions in how her students came to understand choice, risk, and freedom.

It is no coincidence that free-market economies, which encourage personal risk taking, have outlived centrally planned ones, which do not. (*The Economist*, 1994)

Steve: A person who takes risks – what kind of person do you think that person is?

Jackie (age 10): A good person.

Introduction

Childhood is, arguably, the most intensively governed sector of personal existence. The health, welfare, rearing, and schooling of children has been linked in thought and practice to the destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state (Rose, 1999). At least since Horace Mann established the Common School in the mid nineteenth century, schools in the United States have thrived as paradigmatic sites of social and cultural reproduction, designed to create minds and bodies suitable for work in a capitalist economy. In Samuel Bowles & Herbert Gintis's (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America*, the authors argued that the education system 'helps integrate youth into the economic system ... through a structural correspondence between its social relations and those of [capitalist] production' (p. 131). Although they overstated the inevitability of a correspondence between social class, curriculum, and pedagogy, Bowles & Gintis's central argument from over 30 years ago

remains correct – schools still function largely to integrate children into the capitalist economic system.

But how does such integration occur in what is described as the ‘new capitalism’ (Sennett, 1998, 2007), where new forms of engagement between workers and employers are characterized by greater insecurity, flux, and precariousness? Uncertainty implies unknown outcomes that cannot be easily determined, and through encouraging risk taking, capitalism attempts to domesticate uncertainty, making it manageable. Moreover, neoliberalism as the cultural system that provides the ideological foundation for new capitalism, posits the free market as the ideal vehicle to distribute wealth, power, and resources, and it celebrates, and thus validates, entrepreneurship and risk taking.

Despite the long tradition in critical educational research that examines the complex relations between capitalism and schooling, the specific relations among the discourses of risk, capitalism, and teaching–learning events in early childhood and childhood settings have yet to be explored. Here, we examine a literacy lesson in a first-grade classroom in a large city in the United States. Through this lesson, we argue, the teacher attempted to produce children as risk-takers, who aspire toward autonomy, who are ‘enterprising selves’ and who strive toward personal fulfillment through acts of choice. These optimized children are the ones who should/will achieve economic and political security, worthy subjects able to act responsibly and ‘maximize their capacities’ (Rose, 1999) in an uncertain world. But the classroom production process of such ‘citizens’ was riddled with tensions between old and new capitalism, humanist and post-humanist notions of agency, risk and safety, and freedom and control.

Conceptual Framework

The articulation of three bodies of theory informed our understandings and interpretations of the classroom interactions and activities around which this report was constructed. These include theories of new capitalism (e.g. Sennett, 2007), theories of risk and a risk society (e.g. Beck, 1992), and theories of subjectification and care of the self (e.g. Foucault (1978, 1986). We address each of these in turn in the next few sections of the article.

New Capitalism

Traditional ‘ideologies’ of capitalism and the nature of work and workplaces under a new (or ‘late’ or ‘mature’) capitalism have dramatically changed since the early 1980s. A global economy, largely unregulated markets, e-commerce making use of new technologies, and privatization have led to, among other changes, shifting organizational structures. The ‘iron-cage’ pyramid-corporate bureaucracies of rationality described by Weber – where people knew their place and could plan their futures – have been replaced by flattened hierarchies, the ‘liberation’ of wage-earners, lean companies, and short-term team projects (Harvey, 1990; Sennett, 1998, 2007). Today’s workforce must bring adaptability and flexibility to jobs that are constantly changing in response to the demands of informational capitalism.

The past several decades, eschewing the so-called culture of dependency and decline of individual responsibility, have opened a niche where deregulated financial markets that emphasize free enterprise have managed to shift many risks onto individuals. As Simon (2002) pointed out, ‘increasingly, a new rationality of government emerged that emphasized the link between risk and the well being of both individuals and society’ (pp. 177-178). Since the 1980s – at least three decades before the international financial collapse in 2008 – looking for and accepting financial risks became quite normal for those who dealt in junk bonds and derivatives, as well as everyday people who began investing in the stock market. Indeed, *embracing* risk seems to have saturated contemporary western culture, creating images that valorize risk taking as the ticket to success that made heroes of extreme-sports athletes and high-tech entrepreneurs alike.[1] As risk becomes more generally understood as necessary for freedom and choice, many people have begun deliberately and routinely taking risks with their careers, financial resources, relationships, and lives.

Risk, Risk Society, and Youth Development

Recent sociological research about youth in a 'risk society', which focuses on multiple effects of radically altered life-course experiences and expectations for youth–adult transitions (Beck & Willms, 2004; Harris, 2004), provides a productive basis for thinking about contemporary youth learning and development. From this theoretical perspective, the passage from childhood to adulthood is seen as fractured, ambiguous, and non-linear, rather than stable and predictable (e.g. Arnett, 2000). In unprecedented ways, young people are required to become flexible learners who will later be able to refashion themselves as workers and citizens within volatile economic conditions. Such research has exposed contradictions intrinsic to neoliberal policies, which position youth as responsible for viable personal and social outcomes despite persistent structural demands that make these outcomes difficult to attain (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

The 'risk society' work of German sociologist Ulrich Beck is particularly relevant here. Perhaps Beck's most important insight is that, in a risk society, an individual's position in a system of production affects her/his subjectivity (possibilities for selfhood) much less than her/his position in relation to the risks (to financial well-being, to material comfort, to safety, to health, and so on) that ever-changing systems of exchange produce. Beck has argued that traditional social categories, which have always been the shaping forces of subjectivity (e.g. class, race, gender, nationality), are being fundamentally transformed, changing the very nature and effects of risk. Such changes, according to Beck, produce possibilities for self and social relations that have never before existed. In post-industrial societies, people are forced to live paradoxes. On the one hand, they have more freedom than ever to construct what they see as meaningful lives. On the other hand, the conditions of a risk society can lead to a kind of rampant individualism that can, in turn, lead to profound situations of social exclusion in which people find themselves increasingly vulnerable to isolation and inequality, dampening the potential positive effects of choice and opportunity.

In a 'risk society', making sense of these largely invisible forces in critical ways is complex, demanding, and often outside an individual's control. Young people must acquire resources that allow them to face unpredictable changes and opportunities available throughout their lives. Institutions need to be structured to mitigate the social problems individuals might confront as they negotiate conditions of uncertainty within frameworks that define each person in terms of how they produce their own personal and social outcomes (Beck & Willms, 2004; Grubb & Lazerson, 2004).

Not surprisingly, risk discourses have become pervasive, finding their way even into self-help books aimed at parents and early childhood and elementary curricula. For example, a recently published book for parents, *Raising Children Who Soar: a guide to healthy risk taking in an uncertain world*, argues:

Why should we learn about supporting our children's risk-taking? The answer is that parents have a fundamental responsibility for understanding the inevitability of risk: It is a fact of our existence. As children grow, they become more and more independent, and they will encounter risk every day of their lives. Risk-taking is essential to child development and is a vital part of parenting. Through teaching, nurturing, and practicing good risk-taking skills, children will be better prepared to meet the challenges of everyday life. (Davis & Eppler-Wolf, 2009, p. 15)

Much of the educational literature on 'best practices' also includes the importance of risk taking. Tina Grotzer (n.d.) writes:

Asking questions involves taking risks. How can you communicate the big message to your students and help them take risks in their learning? ... The environment must support risk-taking in learning. ... Students need opportunities to learn forms of thinking that embody risk-taking and openness.

Similarly, Zemelman et al (1998) argue that 'experiences should be planned that allow children to take risks' (p. 32). Yet they go on to emphasize the importance of creating a 'low risk' classroom environment with opportunities for children to 'take risks ... and be wrong' (pp. 32-33). We might read this as a kind of sugar-coated (or at least paradoxical or ironic) form of new capitalism, a reading that will have importance to our analysis of data in this study.

The first of four elements critical to Block & Morrow's (2008) 'self-determined reading classrooms' is 'an environment that embraces risk taking and student learning' (p. 288). Based on research on writing workshops for children, Salinger (2008) argues that for:

young literacy learners, risk taking and their own critical analysis of both how to apply skills and how to decide upon topics about which to write are intertwined. For example, selecting a topic for drawing is one form of risk: What if it is silly or inappropriate? Actual composition requires even more risks as children think about and coordinate what they know about letter formation, spelling, and the conventions of print ... grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. (p. 330)

Indeed, risk discourses have become commonplace within educational discourses at all levels from early childhood education to doctoral education and workplace training. In fact, the life chances of children, adolescents, and adults are now largely mediated through risk taking. Risk is a central dimension of selfhood, and as such, we need a theory of subjectivity compatible with risk discourses. We believe that such a theory can be found in Foucault's later work on subjectification and care of the self.

Subjectification and Care of the Self

Recent accounts of children's learning have proposed that learning involves both internalizing or constructing certain kinds of representations, and also becoming certain kinds of persons or selves. In a somewhat parallel trajectory, recent work in critical theory has suggested that becoming a self involves the process of ethical 'subjectification' (Foucault, 1988, 1990) within specific socio-cultural sites and their attendant regimes of truth. Ethical subjectification involves recognizing different ways of existing that are established through 'the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself qua subject' (Foucault, 1990, p. 6). Ethical subjectification creates a dimension of subjectivity derived from power and knowledge, without being dependent on them. This dimension is accomplished through interrogating and distancing oneself from 'naturalized' truths and the everyday practices that make them seem incontrovertibly real.

In addition to ethical subjectification, Foucault posited at least two other forms of subjectification that are really modes of objectification. Objectification is the operation of discursive and material forces that render salient and 'natural' some possibilities for discourses and selves, but not others. One form is the production of disciplinary discourses and regimes of truth with their 'naturalized' norms and practices. Foucault called the second objectivizing form 'dividing practices', according to which the world is divided into binaries with marked and unmarked terms: sane/insane, normal/deviant, good student/bad student, master/apprentice, and so on.

The third form of subjectification as mentioned above – ethical subjectification – is 'the self turning itself into a subject'. This third form of subjectification is 'ethical' in the sense that it exercises the freedom inherent in the limited form of agency that characterizes human existence. The individual recognizes that there are different ways of producing one's subjectivity within specific activity settings and takes responsibility for that production process. In doing so, the individual both acknowledges and respects normalizing or objectifying processes but chooses not to be complicit with them. For the most part, this form of subjectification aligns most closely with the notion of the subject embodied in discourses of risk, which is characteristic of new capitalism and its companion cultural system, neoliberalism. Within literacy studies, Foucault's third form of subjectification has largely been taken up in discussions and research conducted under the banners of subject positions and subjectivities. Writing has been viewed as a kind of micro-political activity in which people position themselves in relation to other people and groups in strategic ways. Three specific constructs are useful in understanding how this happens – discourses, subject positions, and subjectivities – all of which are inextricably related. In this regard, writing has been viewed as a kind of micro-political activity in which people position themselves to others in strategic ways.

Discourses make certain subject positions visible and available to us, and they marginalize others. Agency to 'take up' subject positions is limited because the discourses within which they are produced have already constructed some subject positions as more normal and desirable than others. We use the term position-taking strategies to talk about limited agency, and the ways that available subject positions can be occupied, challenged, or resisted.

Finally, *subjectivities* are the sedimented outcomes of the processes of discursive positioning and position-taking strategies through which individuals develop and exist as multiple, complex, and contradictory subjectivities that continually juggle, balance, reconcile, and compartmentalize our daily practices. These ongoing streams of positioning/position-taking practices become part of the set of collective cultural resources that are drawn upon as new texts and thus new, renewed, and newly inflected subjectivities are fashioned.

Method

A critical qualitative case-study design was used to conduct this study (e.g. Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Saukko, 2005). Two research questions guided the data collection and analyses processes. First, how was 'risk' imagined and enacted in the situated literacy practices in one first-grade classroom? Second, what forms of subjectification were constituted in the classroom and with what effects?

Setting and Participants

Steve Bialostok, the first author of this article, collected the data from this study in a first-grade classroom taught by a teacher we will call Kathy. Most of the children in the classroom were white and middle class. At the time of data collection, Kathy was in her early thirties and had been teaching first grade for eight years. However, due to her temperament and disposition, one would imagine that she had taught for much longer. No matter what instructional or behavioral challenges came her way, Kathy remained calm, personable, supportive, straightforward, insightful, and kind. Indeed, Kathy is the kind of teacher who most parents and educators wish every young child could experience.

Data Collection Process

Prior to conducting this study, Steve interviewed many teachers who identified themselves as believing strongly that risk taking was central to their teaching. Based on these teachers' responses, he sought out teachers who seemed to encourage risk taking in the ways described. He then spent between one and three mornings per week over one full school year as a participant observer in Kathy's classroom. He videotaped (and transcribed) all language arts-related interactions in the classroom, taking field notes of all classroom activity, and then further refining these field notes while watching and transcribing the videos. He collected all artifacts produced by students (including those from their writing workshop), and he interviewed Kathy frequently. Many of these interviews were discourse-based interviews (e.g. Odell & Goswami, 1982) during which Steve and Kathy watched video segments, with Kathy then commenting on their content, her learning goals, and how effectively she thought those goals were accomplished.

Data Analysis Strategies

Our analysis examines how the language and ideology of new capitalism and risk discourses were taken up by Kathy and redeployed in her classroom practice. We also explore how Foucault's insights about the productive nature of power as embodied in various forms of subjectification played out in the classroom. Specifically, we are interested in whether and how Kathy's engagement with risk discourses and empowerment was taken up by students and with what effects.

We analyzed data using a strategic combination of thematic coding and analysis (e.g. Strauss, 1987) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (e.g. Fairclough, 1992). We coded the entire data set using grounded theory strategies of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These coding processes were informed by our interest in how discourses of risk, empowerment, and subjectification inhabited the data. Thematic analyses allowed us to construct a fairly comprehensive account of how participants took up and managed the discourse of risk, what

empowerment meant in the classroom, and how classroom interactions afforded different forms of subjectification.

Critical discourse analysis was then used to analyse transcript segments most relevant to discourses of risk and empowerment in Kathy's classroom. CDA allowed us to attend both to specific interactional patterns, their relation to larger discourse practices (e.g. ideologies of risk, discourses of empowerment, rules and conventions of writing workshops), and the social practices in which these are embodied (elementary school classrooms and the institution of US education with their attendant ideologies, politics, and practices). We paid particular attention to factors such as (a) patterns of interactional control (e.g. who initiated topic shifts, who decided which topics were acceptable and which topics were not, who asked and answered questions, whether and how monologic or dialogic the conversations were, etc.), (b) politeness strategies that index positioning strategies, (c) the use of singular and plural first- and second-person pronouns, (d) the use of modal verbs to assert degrees of authority, (e) register shifts that mark solidarity or resistance, (f) key metaphors related to power and authority, and (g) intertextual patterns (i.e. how participants appropriate and use the discourses of the others). Although the findings presented below were drawn from a single interaction, they represent key aspects of findings from the entire data set.

Findings

Kathy first identified herself to Steve as a teacher who believes that taking risks is crucial to children's learning. The orchestration of risk taking is central to her philosophy of teaching, as discussed during the first formal interview:

Steve: What does it mean to be a risk taker?

Kathy: It means that you're empowering them ... to be a participant in their own learning and to have certain habits of mind – thinkers, learners, people who are curious.

Steve: What do you mean by 'empowering them'?

Kathy: That the kids have the power to learn and grow. That when you encourage them – if you set things up so that they are gonna be a participant in their own learning, that's going to empower them to live that way for the rest of their lives.

The underlying logic of embracing risk taking in the classroom is Kathy's desire to encourage children into taking risks for the sake of learning, and to start forming their subjectivities as people who take risks. When asked why she saw 'letting them struggle a little bit' when taking risks is important, she responded:

So they have the chance to solve it on their own. ... That's where the learning is. ... You just keep upping the ante. The more capable, the more they're learning and growing, the more they can hang with more difficult things.

Kathy's particular way of embodying 'risk' in her pedagogy is very well illustrated in a writing workshop, which is divided into three episodes, with the second episode as the crucial one: (a) Kathy's mini-lesson describing the importance of providing details in writing, (b) a demonstration of how to 'tell more' wherein Kathy recruits Jonathan and his ideas as an example, and (c) Kathy's transition out of the lesson and into directing the students toward their independent writing.

Although we have divided the writing workshop lesson into episodes for analytic purposes, it should be considered in its entirety for several reasons. It constitutes an entire mini-lesson from beginning to end. In fact, although its content is different from other mini-lessons, its basic structure is almost identical to all others. This lesson represents what many progressive educators, including us, consider to be excellent teaching. However, it also embodies certain tensions between the ideologies of new capitalism (with their particular takes on risk, empowerment, and subjectivity) and the ideologies of progressive education (with their particular takes on risk, empowerment, and subjectivity).

Episode One

The class sits on the floor in front of the easel where Kathy – sitting on a chair next to the easel – has written in large, block letters at the top of the chart paper, 'Writers tell more'. To the left side

of the paper, written vertically, are three directives: (a) Choose a topic, (b) Tell about the topic, and (c) Tell more! Surrounding these instructions are three examples of writing that Kathy had discussed on previous days. Kathy's own writing provides the first exemplar for the lesson. The second piece of writing displayed on the chart was written (dictated to Kathy) by a child from the classroom, Michelle. The third piece of writing, posted under Michelle's text, was written by children's book author Cynthia Rylant. Both explicitly and implicitly, Kathy encouraged the children to think of these writers as models for their own work.

Kathy: As writers, we are learning about telling more. And we have some great mentors here. So when you're writing, you choose a topic. That's really what we're good at, right? It comes from our head – everything we know, everything we do, everything we're crazy about – in our head, or it comes from our heart. All the things that we love. And we tell about the topic. Like I said, 'Tucker [Kathy's dog] is naughty'. And Michelle wrote [pointing to the writing on the chart], 'Michelle has a cat named Vira'. And Cynthia Rylant wrote, 'Then Henry found Mudge'. Okay? Mudge is Cynthia Rylant's topic. Vira is Michelle's topic. What's my topic? Mark?

Mark: Tucker.

Kathy: Tucker. Yep. And I told you [pointing to no. 2 and reading from the chart], 'Tell about the topic'. Well, I told you Tucker's naughty. And then I have to do this part: Tell more. And I have to tell you more about Tucker. And how naughty he is. Michelle did the same thing about her cat, Vira. She told us that Vira's a baby cat. She told us that Vira is orange with black tiger stripes. She told us that Vira's eyes are green. And she told us that Vira knocks over the trash can and makes a mess. I wonder if Vira knows Tucker. Because Vira knocks the trash over and Tucker too. So your job today as writers is to do this [circles with her finger around the words 'tell more']. We're gonna tell more about whatever our topic is.

Kathy's opening sentence echoes at least one 'master narrative' of school writing: what writers do is to provide detail, to 'tell more'. Her opening sentence positions herself and all of the children within this master narrative. Importantly, though, this identity as writer and expert includes children who are still 'learning' how to write, suggesting that their true writer selves remain emergent. All but two of the elaborations that follow include some version of the inclusive pronoun 'we'. These pronouns are almost immediately followed by a strong modal verb or similar functioning lexical item designed to recruit (position) the students with implicit claims of solidarity, infused with the subjectivity of writers who must turn inward to bare their souls, and who get personal fulfillment through writing. Kathy thus represents herself and the class as a collective characterized by shared values and goals. Such a leveling of hierarchical boundaries can have very powerful effects upon listeners; however, Kathy makes it clear that she wants each child to think of him/herself as an individual writer who will take up his/her tasks in unique ways. In the upcoming independent writing activity, children will engage in three practices: (a) choose their own topics, (b) invest emotionally in their texts, and (c) generate details in the interest of 'telling more'. In other words, the children will fashion themselves as writers. However, they will do so within the constraints of a master narrative involving both self-management and management by Kathy. Kathy both allows and demands the excavation and representation of personal knowledge as central to writing: what we write 'comes from our head ... or ... from our heart'. This practice celebrates the personal knowledge of young writers, simultaneously functioning as a technology that objectifies them within discourses of normalization and dividing practices – good writers versus poor writers, children who are effective in 'telling more' and children who are not.

Kathy then moves on to the next practice of good writers: 'telling more'. Importantly, 'telling more' is less an option than an imperative. Kathy seems to believe that children *want* to tell more and that through telling more they come to recognize their desires and potentials. She also seems to believe that this technology pushes children to transform themselves into subjects who reach a 'state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Simultaneously, however, such a technology of the self 'determine[s] the conduct of individuals and submit[s] them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject' (Foucault, 1988b, p. 18).

With students' identities as writers and experts now established, the semantic relation between Kathy's discourse of inclusivity and her brief summary of the work of the three writers present in her chart seems more than just one of elaboration. Moving from the 'we' of writers and

experts to the topics of each individual author functions to individualize students and establish the importance of autonomy in writing. Her vocal stress on 'Mudge', 'Vira', and 'my' further establishes topic selection as an 'act of choice', an instance of Foucault's third (and most profound) form of subjectification. 'Choice' implies an 'imperative of activity' (Rose, 1999, p. 268), one that steers children away from dependence, and foregrounds 'an active individual in the empire of choices' (Rose, 1999, p. 268).

Kathy reads from the chart: 'Tell more about the topic. ... So your job today as writers is to do this [circles with her finger around the words 'tell more']. We're gonna tell more about whatever our topic is'. Although the lesson seems designed so that students are free to draw from personal experience, the proposition expressed in these clauses conveys the imperative to improve the writing by adding important details. That imperative potentially imposes a heavy burden grounded in the binary *good writers/poor writers*, raising the question of what would happen if a child could not or did not 'tell more?' In Foucault's terms, such 'dividing practices' may mark some children as needing additional 'help' with their writing, as demonstrated when Kathy chooses Jonathan, whom she perceives as a 'good writer', as the child who will provide a lengthy demonstration of 'telling more'. As seen in Kathy's emphasis on the transgressive behavior of *Tucker* and *Vira*, the discussion of animal infractions extends the discussion of personal choice in writing to include pushing the boundaries of appropriateness. Even when a topic such as naughtiness might be acceptable in the classroom, as we will see, 'telling more' about that topic involves taking a risk that might transport one beyond the bounds of propriety and toward certain consequences.

Episode Two

Kathy: Okay. All right, Jonathan, come stand up here. Jonathan's gonna plan out his next book. I know you're not ready for it, but we're gonna do some planning. He actually does have a fish. Remember when we interviewed Jonathan, and he ... he said that he didn't have any pets. Well, wanna tell them?

Jonathan: I have a pet fish.

Kathy: He has a pet fish. So Jonathan's book could start out with, 'I have a pet fish'. [Kathy retrieves from her desk a blank, handmade book made with copy paper stapled between front and back covers made of construction paper.] His first page [Kathy points to blank page and sweeps her hand across the page, miming writing]: 'I have a pet fish'. What's his topic? Hector?

Hector: His fish.

Kathy: His fish is his topic.

During this exchange with Jonathan, additional tensions and contradictions between objectification and subjectification emerge. Kathy first claims that 'Jonathan's gonna plan his next book', presumably as an individual writer and expert. However, Kathy, not Jonathan, initiates the topic of his next book – his fish – and she reminds the class that they had interviewed Jonathan on a previous day to find out information about him. The typical goal of these class interviews was to help children 'find' personal topics to write about. But the classroom interview also provides Kathy and her students with knowledge that constructs Jonathan in a particular way, situating him as having a degree of control over what he would write about and how he would write about it. Thus these interviews are linked to Kathy's philosophy about the importance of knowing her students beyond their lives in the classroom. As she said in a research interview: 'The most important thing that I do – my number one job – is to establish a relationship with a kid. For that I need to know who's in their family; I need to know the names of their dogs; I need to know where they live; I need to know what they love'.

On the one hand, this practice is a dimension of 'best practice' within progressivist writing pedagogy. Jonathan (and all students) can choose their topics based on personal experience and deep emotional investments. On the other hand, Kathy's 'Wanna tell them' elicits a confession, in Foucault's sense, a 'particular type of discourse and particular techniques which supposedly reveal our deepest selves' (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 174). Some context is useful here. Jonathan had previously told the class that he had no pets. Kathy's question is based upon her follow-up conversation with him, assisted by her knowledge of Jonathan's family. Although Jonathan had not originally considered his fish a pet, with Kathy's help (her interpretation) he now possesses a

revised understanding of the category 'pet' and publicly reveals his newly discovered truth. Now the class has 'correct' knowledge about Jonathan that can be recorded in the opening sentence of his new book.

Once the topic and topic sentence have been established, Kathy proceeds with the primary purpose of the lesson.

Kathy: Now he has to tell more about the topic. Tell us about your ... his name is Henry.

Jonathan: He's a fighter fish.

Kathy: [Pointing again to the blank page of Jonathan's 'new book'] 'He's a fire fish.'

Jonathan: Fight-er [emphatically]

Kathy: Fighter fish. What does that mean? I don't know what fighter fish are. Can you tell us more about that?

Jonathan: Yeah. They come together, the two men. They fight. Whichever one dies, the other one lives and gets the mother.

Kathy: Okay.

Jonathan: And he's colorful.

Kathy: And he's colorful. So Jonathan could write on this page, 'I have a fish. His name is Henry. He's a fighter fish.' And then on the next page, Jonathan could tell more. 'A fighter fish fights.' And he could explain about the two males. Two male fish will fight each other until one dies. The one who survives gets the girl fish. He might eat the other fish.

Jonathan: I think he only gets the [indecipherable].

Kathy: Then you could talk about what color is Henry.

Jonathan: Uh, He's red and blue and a little bit of yellow.

Kathy: Henry ...

Jonathan: [Indecipherable] [But as Jonathan talks, he demonstrates dramatically the long fins and other physical attributes of the male Siamese Fighting Fish.]

Kathy: Do you hear how he's telling you more? Henry is a colorful fish. He is red and blue and yellow, and he has beautiful fins.

Jonathan: Big [emphatically].

Kathy: Big fins.

Although Kathy desires to empower students to become writers and experts through 'telling more', this act is also an obligation within a particular regime of truth. This is often communicated linguistically, such as through the deontic modal expression: 'Now he has to tell more about the topic', which indexes both ability and volition. Jonathan's ability to tell more requires his objective knowledge of the situation. But before Jonathan can offer any information, Kathy begins with what *might* have been an open-ended request: 'Tell us about your ...' Presumably, she was initially planning to say 'fish', but she shifted to 'his name is Henry'. Initially, Kathy provides Jonathan the freedom and concomitant risk to express himself, but she then manages his response. What she 'writes' for Jonathan (i.e. 'His name is Henry') functions identically to 'I have a pet fish'. In other words, Kathy develops the second sentence of Jonathan's story (i.e. 'I have a pet fish. His name is Henry.')

But Jonathan resists her authoring activity here, offering the more interesting and unsolicited: 'He's a fighter fish'. Whether or not Kathy really understands what he said or what a fighter fish is remains less important than her uptake of this piece of information for the purpose of reiterating her pedagogical goal – 'Can you tell us *more* about that?' – which positions Jonathan as a free and willing agent.

Jonathan's 'yeah' only begins his enthusiastic explanation, which is less about describing the attributes of his fighter fish and more about his pleasure in discussing their characteristic activity of fighting to death to win the object of their sexual desire. Kathy uses the discourse marker 'Okay' as a 'pre-closing device' (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) to effect a conversational transition, but Jonathan resists this transition and describes his fish as colorful. Kathy acknowledges this additional point of information and includes both Jonathan's description of the fight and of Henry's appearance. She also adds some information Jonathan has not generated – 'He might eat the other fish'. As Kathy is re-articulating Jonathan's developing story, he politely tries to correct her account of why fighter fish fight, but Kathy interrupts him by suggesting to Jonathan that he elaborate on Henry's color.

Importantly, referencing the fish by name is a personification that further softens the story's subtexts of violence and sexuality.

Kathy then begins to 'write' what Jonathan has just said, but Jonathan interrupts and elaborates on the fish's physical characteristics with much detail and animation. Kathy takes up his description, returning to the lesson's main point: 'Do you hear how he's telling you more?' She then re-articulates Jonathan's text, but instead of using his detailed elaboration, she presents a straightforward summary using only some of Jonathan's language, much of which she had prompted in the first place: 'Henry is a colorful fish. He is red and blue and yellow and he has beautiful fins'. Even Jonathan recognizes how Kathy has misquoted him, correcting her use of 'beautiful' with 'big'. Jonathan continues to resist Kathy's more mundane version of the story:

Jonathan: And when he goes in the water, they spread out. And he has a little chin fin here, and when he gets mad, he [indecipherable].

Kathy: He does? Who does he get mad at? Elizabeth [Jonathan's sister]?

Jonathan: Isaac.

Kathy: Isaac. Isaac is Jonathan's little brother. Why is he mad at Isaac?

Jonathan: Isaac sticks his face in Henry's water. And he sticks his face on the bowl. And he, like, his face is huge. And he like [imitating a fish voice], 'Hello fishy'. [Jonathan smacks his mouth like a kiss.] And he kisses the glass. And poor little Henry hides behind the weeds.

Kathy: So Isaac scares Henry. And then Henry gets a little mad at him.

Jonathan: And gets mad at the snail.

Kathy: Why? Doesn't he like the snail?

Jonathan: I don't know, but whenever he gets babies, he eats them.

Kathy: Uh-oh. So this last page could be about, 'Sometimes Henry gets mad. When Isaac put his face up to Henry's bowl and tries to kiss Henry, he gets mad'. And what happens to his chin?

Jonathan: A fin ... [Jonathan's verbal description, mostly unintelligible, is about a chin fin. But he mimes a fin around the fish's chin.]

Kathy: You can tell about his chin fin. [Kathy mimes writing on the next blank page in the book.] 'Henry also gets mad at that snail. When he has babies, he eats them.' We think. Do you see how on each page Jonathan told more? That he's a fighting fish. Detail, detail, detail. The next page, he's a colorful fish. Detail, detail, detail. The next page, sometimes Henry gets mad. Detail, detail, detail.

The interaction unfolds with a variety of tensions that develop from the push and pull of whose story – Jonathan's or Kathy's – will or should be told. Kathy seems to want to allow Jonathan to tell his story in his way and on his terms. This is suggested by the fact that she repeats certain ideas (albeit in a slightly domesticated form) that have the potential to push the boundaries of propriety such as: (a) the two male fish fight to death, (b) the triumphant male gets the girl fish, and (c) when angered, the fighter fish eats the snail's babies. However, she also manages Jonathan's narrations, usually by glossing dangerous topics (the violent and sexual content that Jonathan had shared enthusiastically) and emphasizing or returning to safe topics (e.g. the colors of the fish, the beauty of its fins) when she seems to worry about things going too far. And, in the end, she finesses all of the potentially dangerous content by re-articulating it in the following way: 'Do you see how on each page Jonathan told more? That he's a fighting fish. Detail, detail, detail. The next page, he's a colorful fish. Detail, detail, detail. The next page, sometimes Henry gets mad. Detail, detail, detail'. Indeed, we marveled at how Kathy managed to keep things just within the boundaries of propriety throughout, but we also marveled at the ways in which her activity constantly surfaced tensions between discourses of risk and discourses of safety, discourses of freedom and discourses of control, liberal humanist discourses and post-humanist ones, Jonathan's story and Kathy's story.

Allowing children the freedom to choose the topics of their stories and to elaborate on those topics involves risks for both teachers and students. Jonathan tries to create a text that embodies the mandate to 'tell more', but in doing so he risks running a little too far and too fast with respect to what might be appropriate for the context of communication. Were he allowed to run full speed with some of the topics/ideas he put on the table, it is likely that this whole interaction would have unfolded quite differently, and perhaps with different effects for Jonathan in terms of his positioning in relation to his teacher and peers. Indeed, allowing children to choose and elaborate topics for their writing involves risks for students and teachers alike.

But Kathy manages these risks very carefully. She domesticates them so that they never exceeds the particular forms of propriety (regimes of truth) acceptable in her classroom. Her actions could be judged as 'highly competent' but also as 'good'. However, such actions also have other effects – effects that highlight the tensions embodied in this literacy event, especially when located with the discourse of risk. Whether consciously or not, Kathy's strategic management of the ebb and flow of this literacy event constitutes dividing practices that are both coercive in inducing Jonathan to become a docile body, and productive in producing Jonathan as a classroom member who could not exceed its boundaries of propriety. There is an interesting paradox at work here, in which external control steal authorship and expertise from Jonathan. Yet the control also assists Jonathan (and the other students) in becoming self-governing subjects in ways seen as necessary to the public good.

Episode Three

Kathy: Do you see how Jonathan's telling more? Are you excited to hear more about this fish?

Class: Yeah.

Kathy: Oh, I am too. Do you want to write this book next?

[Jonathan nods.]

Kathy: Okay.

Jonathan: [Jonathan rapidly and enthusiastically talks more about Henry, but what he actually says is mostly indecipherable.]

Kathy: Do you see what's happening? He can't stop telling more, can he?

Class: No!

Kathy: He just keeps going and going. That's what writers do. They tell more, don't they?

Jonathan: [Jonathan volunteers still more information, but what he says is mostly indecipherable.]

S: Okay, who is ready to tell more?

The point of this lesson was (a) to teach the children about adding details to their writing, and (b) to orchestrate their subjectivities to desire to write more. This is accomplished as Kathy shifts into the final part of this lesson, where she uses a series of indirect speech acts that 'prepare the ground' for the 'language of empowerment' as a 'technology of activity' (see Cruikshank, 1999). The 'pragmatic force' of these successive utterances has 'a cumulative effect' that gets the job done. Beginning with, 'Do you see how Jonathan's telling more? Are you excited to hear more about the fish?', Kathy acts as a charismatic leader, building enthusiasm among the students, and the class's response can hardly be anything other than their in-unison, 'Yeah!' In response to Kathy's question to Jonathan – 'Do you want to write this book next?' – Jonathan is positioned to answer in the affirmative. He is caught up in the enthusiasm Kathy has created, and he responds by excitedly 'telling more' about Henry. Kathy does not pick up on Jonathan's content but rather his enthusiasm: 'Do you see what's happening? He just keeps going and going. That's what writers do. They tell more, don't they?' This utterance involves two imperatives. Since the children were constructed as writers and experts at the beginning of the lesson, Kathy's 'they tell more' is the first imperative, which can be read as: *That's what writers do. You are writers. You must tell more.* Kathy's tag question – 'don't they?' – effectively functions as a second imperative, which draws another enthusiastic response from Jonathan, and equally enthusiastic responses from the other children (obvious from the videotape though not from the transcript). Kathy's final indirect speech act – 'who is ready to tell more?' – seems designed to create among the children a voluntary response like: *I want to write more because I am excited, and I want to excite my readers.*

One can also see here how the children have begun to internalize the norms and practices of the classroom. Kathy's teaching practice functions 'to produce individuals who attribute a certain kind of moral subjectivity to themselves' (Rose, 1999, p. 78) and who evaluate and reform according to the classroom norms. This constitutes (or comes the closest to constituting) Foucault's third form of subjectification: the self turning itself into a subject. More importantly, however, this third form of subjectification is always in tension with the other two forms: (a) the production of discourses and regimes of truth (e.g. about what writers do) and dividing practices (e.g. good writers versus poor writers).

Summary and Conclusions

Tensions fill the interactions we have analyzed in this article. The primary tension has to do with the key question: Whose story is being developed – Jonathan’s or Kathy’s? This tension is closely linked to two other tensions: (a) a tension between freedom and control that suffuses the interactions we analyzed and many more that we observed and recorded; and (b) a tension between humanist and post-humanist notions of agency. Kathy’s pedagogical approach produces subject positions for Jonathan and the other children in ways that are at once productive and determining. Indeed, Kathy is also produced in various ways by the various institutional discourses to which she subscribes/submits – discourses grounded in dominant sociocultural understandings of what writers do and what teachers do. These discourses shape Kathy’s desire to think of her students as particular types of writers who can act with agency, albeit in ways constrained by discursive norms. While Kathy genuinely desires to provide opportunities that allow students to derive personal fulfillment through writing, students are nonetheless constrained within certain limits. Jonathan stands in as the self-creating subject afforded by his desire, based upon his (free) capacity to choose a topic and to elaborate on it as he sees fit. However, as he enacts this freedom grounded in the opportunity to take risks, Jonathan flirts with the limits of propriety – of what can and cannot be said in the context of acceptable classroom communication. These tensions are embedded within a larger tension between discourses of risk and discourses of safety, progressivist pedagogies that espouse the creation of safe spaces for children’s voices and emerging pedagogies that presuppose risk as necessary to desired learning outcomes.

With this summary of the complex dynamics embedded in and indexed by the lesson we analyzed here, we can now make connections between the management of subjectivity in the classroom and the management of subjectivity in the workplace of the new capitalism. The new capitalism purports to empower workers to fulfill themselves, to embrace and enact a kind of entrepreneurial agency that requires a certain set of attributes, values, and behaviors – resourcefulness, self-discipline, openness to risk, and a willingness to change – that enable people to succeed in bold and difficult undertakings in circumstances that offer no guarantees for success. Despite Kathy’s pedagogical goals and altruistic desires ‘to empower them [students] to live that way for the rest of their lives’, her investment in progressivist pedagogies leaves her uncomfortable with creating situations that offer no guarantees for success.

Many contemporary workplaces and classrooms use pedagogy as a technology, structuring subject positions through which selves become agentive risk-takers: people who are enterprising and self-managing, and who seek fulfillment in ways that are both professionally/educationally effective and productive. The new capitalism asserts the need for freedom, and it is through risk taking that such agentic dispositions and subjectivities are constructed. Kathy encouraged/allowed Jonathan to explore the possibility of being a self who turns himself into a choosing subject. However, she also managed this process carefully and deftly by invoking Foucault’s other two forms of subjectification when things seemed to be getting a bit too risky. By embracing risk, children in schools – like adults in the marketplace of new capitalism/neoliberalism – can both self-govern and be governed through taking risks. Taking risks – participating in pedagogical activities where one learns, but also where risk taking serves as its own reward – requires children to work on themselves in ways that give them skills to become, as Kathy says, ‘empowered’. But writing that, in Kathy’s terms, ‘comes from the head and the heart’ can operate in tension with pedagogic meanings and struggles, producing effects that never come with guarantees.

Notes

- [1] As risk taking increasingly took on a populist discourse, more and more people sought risk through various recreational markets (e.g. adventure travel, extreme sports). This begat markets for books and necessary sporting equipment.

References

- Arnett, J. (2000) Emerging Adulthood: a theory of development from late teens through the twenties, *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469-480. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>

- Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society: towards a new modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, U. & Willms, J. (2004) *Conversations with Ulrich Beck*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Block, C. & Paris, S. (Eds) (2008) *Comprehension Instruction: research-based best practices* New York: Guilford Press.
- Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America: educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Cruikshank, B. (1999) *The Will to Empower*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Davis, S. & Eppler-Wolff, N. (2009) *Raising Children Who Soar: a guide to healthy risk-taking in an uncertain world*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dreyfus, H.L. & Rabinow, P. (1982) *Michael Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*. Brighton: Harvester.
- Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Foucault, M. (1978) *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1986) *The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Uses of Pleasure*, trans. R. Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1988) Technologies of the Self, in L.H. Martin, H. Gutman & P.H. Hutton (Eds) *Technologies of the Self*, 16-49. London: Tavistock.
- Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality, Volume III: The Care of the Self*, trans. R. Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.
- Furlong, A. & Cartmel, F. (1997) Risk and Uncertainty in Youth Transition, *Young*, 5(1), 3-20.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/110330889700500102>
- Grotzer, T. (n.d.) *The Keys to Inquiry*. <http://hea-www.harvard.edu/ECT/Inquiry/inquiry2text.html> (accessed November 14, 2009).
- Grubb, W.N. & Lazerson, M. (2004) *The Education Gospel: the economic power of schooling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Harris, A. (2004) *Future Girl: young women in the twenty-first century*. New York: Routledge.
- Harvey, D. (1990) *The Condition of Postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. London: Blackwell.
- Kincheloe, J.L. & McLaren, P. (2005) Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research, in N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 303-342. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Odell, L. & Goswami, D. (1982) Writing in a Nonacademic Setting, *Research in the Teaching of English*, 16, 201-223.
- Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: reframing political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Salinger, T. (2008) Critical Thinking in Young Literacy Learners, in C. Collins, C. Collins Block & J. Mangieri (Eds) *Teaching Thinking: an agenda for the twenty-first century*, 319-332. New York: Routledge.
- Saukko, P. (2005) Methodologies for Cultural Studies: an integrative approach, in N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 343-356. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Schegloff, E.A. & Sacks, H. (1973) Opening Up Closings, *Semiotica*, 8, 289-327.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/semi.1973.8.4.289>
- Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character: the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Sennett, R. (2007) *The Culture of the New Capitalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Simon, J. (2002) Taking Risks: extreme sports and the embrace of risk in advanced liberal democracies, in T. Baker & J. Simon (Eds) *Embracing Risk: the changing culture of insurance and responsibility*, 177-208. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Strauss, A. (1987) *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Zemelman, S., Daniels, H. & Hyde, A. (1998) *Best Practice: new standards for teaching and learning in America's schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

STEVE BIALOSTOK is an associate professor of Literacy Education at the University of Wyoming. Professor Bialostok's research and writing has focused on cultural models of literacy,

metaphor analysis, and the language of late modern capitalism. *Correspondence:* Dr Steve Bialostok, College of Education, Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education, University of Wyoming, 1000 E. University Avenue, Laramie, WY 82071-3374, USA (smb@uwyo.edu).

GEORGE KAMBERELIS is a Wyoming Excellence Chair of Literacy Education at the University of Wyoming. Most of Professor Kamberelis's research and writing has focused on children's writing development, discourse and identity, genre studies, and qualitative inquiry. *Correspondence:* George Kamberelis, University of Wyoming, University of Wyoming, 1000 E. University Avenue, Laramie, WY 82071-3374, USA (wakdjunkanga@yahoo.com).