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**The Devalued, Demoralized and Disappearing Teacher: The
Nature and Effects of Datafication and Performativity in
Schools**

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Abstract: In this article, we highlight the *specificity* of teachers' practices in an era of increased attention to reified measures of data as evidence of student learning. Drawing upon Kemmis et al.'s (2014) notion of educational practice as characterized by specific 'sayings,' 'doings' and 'relatings,' under particular 'cultural-discursive,' 'material-economic' and 'socio-political' conditions, we analyze teachers' work practices in two public schools in south-east Queensland. We reveal granular details about how teachers' engagement with reified forms of student evaluation data under broader neoliberal policy conditions influenced their personal and professional identity as teachers. We argue that engagement

with such data processes under these conditions leads to not only their demoralization but also the devaluing of teachers' work, and ultimately, what we claim to be the very 'disappearance' of the teacher – the expunging of relational, educative interactions that enable genuine student engagement and learning. The consequence is an eviscerated form of schooling that may jeopardize students' long-term academic and social development.

Keywords: teachers; data; datafication; performativity; education; professionalism; practices

El maestro devaluado, desmoralizado y desaparecido: La naturaleza y los efectos de la datificación y la performatividad en las escuelas

Resumen: En este artículo, destacamos la especificidad de las prácticas de los docentes en una era de mayor atención a las medidas cosificadas de datos como evidencia del aprendizaje de los estudiantes. Basándose en la noción de práctica educativa de Kemmis et al. (2014) caracterizada por 'dichos', 'haceres' y 'relaciones' específicos, condiciones particulares 'culturales-discursivas', 'materiales-económicas' y 'sociopolíticas', analizamos las prácticas laborales de los docentes en dos escuelas públicas en el sureste de Queensland. Revelamos detalles granulares sobre cómo el compromiso de los docentes con formas cosificadas de datos de evaluación de estudiantes bajo condiciones de políticas neoliberales más amplias influyó en su identidad personal y profesional como docentes. Argumentamos que el compromiso con dichos procesos de datos en estas condiciones conduce no solo a su desmoralización sino también a la devaluación del trabajo de los docentes y, en última instancia, a lo que afirmamos que es la "desaparición" misma del docente: la eliminación de las interacciones relacionales y educativas que permitan una participación y un aprendizaje genuinos de los estudiantes. La consecuencia es una forma de escolarización destripada que puede poner en peligro el desarrollo académico y social a largo plazo de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: docentes; fecha; datificación; performatividad; educación; profesionalismo; prácticas

O professor desvalorizado, desmoralizado e desaparecido: A natureza e os efeitos da datificação e da performatividade nas escolas

Resumo: Neste artigo, destacamos a especificidade das práticas dos professores em uma era de maior atenção às medidas reificadas de dados como evidência da aprendizagem dos alunos. Baseando-se na noção de Kemmis et al. (2014) de prática educacional como caracterizada por 'dizeres', 'fazeres' e 'relações' específicos, sob particular 'cultural-discursivo', 'material-econômico' e 'sócio-político' condições, analisamos as práticas de trabalho dos professores em duas escolas públicas no sudeste de Queensland. Revelamos detalhes granulares sobre como o envolvimento dos professores com formas reificadas de dados de avaliação de alunos sob condições políticas neoliberais mais amplas influenciou sua identidade pessoal e profissional como professores. Argumentamos que o envolvimento com esses processos de dados nessas condições leva não apenas à sua desmoralização, mas também à desvalorização do trabalho dos professores e, em última análise, ao que afirmamos ser o próprio 'desaparecimento' do professor - o expurgo das interações relacionais e educacionais que permitem o envolvimento e o aprendizado genuínos dos alunos. A consequência é uma forma eviscerada de escolarização que pode comprometer o desenvolvimento acadêmico e social de longo prazo dos alunos.

Palavras-chave: professores; dados; datificação; performatividade; educação; profissionalismo; práticas

The Devalued, Demoralized and Disappearing Teacher: The Nature and Effects of Datafication and Performativity in Schools

In *Demoralized: Why teachers leave the profession they love and how they can stay*, Doris Santoro (2018) argues against commonly held beliefs about teacher attrition as due simply to individual burnout and dissatisfaction. In an impassioned expression of concern about disillusionment due to unfair systems of accountability and evaluation, Santoro lays bare the stories of teachers who fear the loss of their profession through an erosion of the very values that underpin much of the good work they aspire to do. Santoro (2018) explains that such ‘demoralization’ is ‘rooted in discouragement and despair borne out of ongoing value conflicts with pedagogical policies, reform mandates, and school practices’ (p. 3). Drawing on over a decade of research and experience in both impoverished and well-funded school and community contexts, Santoro argues that teachers who leave the profession due to demoralization are ‘conscientious objectors’ and not teachers who failed. That is to say, they objected to the assault on their moral and ethical values as teaching professionals. These teachers’ experiences and perspectives date back to 2006, and much of their dissent was with the policies and mandates in relation to high-stakes testing and merit pay in the United States. Now, in many national contexts around the world, teachers’ work is even more influenced by the neoliberal ideologies that continue to reshape education policy and practice, gearing national educational systems towards increasingly data-centric practices and accountabilities.

Almost two decades ago, Stephen Ball (2003) wrote his ground-breaking paper about the processes and effects of performativity on the substance of teachers’ work and their very subjectivity. He asked, ‘If the identity produced by [performativity] is socially “empty,” how does the actor recognize him/herself and others?’ (Ball, 2003, p. 222). Ball (2003) wrote about the struggle over the teacher’s soul as a result of education reforms that changed ‘our subjective existence and our relations with one another’ (p. 217). Holloway and Brass (2018) applied Ball’s conceptual framework to teacher interview data in the United States, drawing out rationalities and technologies of markets, management, and performativity in that context. What stands out in both this earlier and later work is what Holloway and Brass (2018) described as the ‘naturalization’ of accountability discourses and performativity processes over time. While sweeping education reforms, marked by various modes of ‘performativity,’ ‘accountability’ and ‘governance,’ have reorganized and reoriented teachers’ roles and their personal and professional identities, the opposition to such processes has seemingly dissolved. The result is that teachers now assume their roles as increasingly ‘marketized, managed, and performative teachers’ (Holloway & Brass, 2018, p. 378).

At the heart of this contention lies processes of datafication. Such processes involve phenomena of data production and dataveillance (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018) which in turn cultivate a hyper-accountability culture (Keddie, 2014). Under these circumstances, teachers collect and analyze a proliferating volume, velocity, and variety of data (Ozga, 2009; Selwyn, 2016) to make themselves and their work visible. As such processes govern teachers’ practices (Hardy, 2019), they re-make the image of the teacher, through data (Lewis & Holloway, 2019). In this way, teachers are not only ‘subject to’ governance through data (Lupton & Williamson, 2017) but are also becoming ‘subjects of’ such processes (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018).

While ‘data-driven evaluations and decision-making’ are ‘replacing embodied forms of professional knowledge’ and have been for several decades (Sellar & Gulson, 2021, p. 310), much of the research now affirms that the teaching profession is being made and re-made in the image of data (Lewis & Holloway, 2019), recognized as producing a ‘quantifiable version of the teaching self’ (Buchanan & McPherson, 2019, p. 28) or the datafied teacher (Lewis & Holloway, 2019). This is the accountable teacher who is also obliged to assume the role of the performative teacher (Holloway &

Brass, 2018). While such naturalization of ‘performative techniques’ are indicative of a ‘post-performative’ era (Frostenson & Englund, 2020, p. 695), the specificity and particularity about how such processes unfold in teachers’ everyday ‘practices’ in schooling sites is an area for further investigation. Beyond this, the moral basis and relational aspects of the core of teaching work, understood as teachers’ attention to students’ learning as their primary focus and stimulus, require greater scrutiny, particularly under conditions that enable and constrain such work.

This paper sheds light on both the specificity of datafication processes and actions, as well as the site-based material-economic, cultural-discursive and socio-political conditions (Kemmis et al., 2014) which make such processes possible. We reveal how datafication processes and actions were operating in two school sites in south-east Queensland, Australia, and how such processes dominated discourses (‘sayings’), actions (‘doings’) and relationships (‘relatings’) in these sites. At the same time, we show how associated cultural-discursive, material-economic and socio-political conditions in the Queensland schooling context associated with such processes were evident in talk from school leaders and teachers about ensuring a strong focus upon improving student learning as measured against typically reductive modes of data, resourcing to this effect, and placing pressure on teachers to achieve outcomes associated with these forms of data.

The issues raised relate to Queensland’s history of poor performance on the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the changing nature of work in relation to the publication of results a decade ago. Such conditions have created a ‘data-obsessed’ (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018) schooling environment which has led to the gradual devaluing of teachers’ professional judgement and a reduction in more educative and diverse teaching and learning practices. We take Queensland as a case, or example, of how datafication and systems of performative accountability are expressed at the school/teacher practice level. As a consequence of such practices and conditions, teachers became increasingly demoralized. Their ‘sayings’ of giving specific data-driven accounts of their work, as well as the unrelenting attention to reductive modes of data, was (re)defining the relational aspects (‘relatings’) of teachers’ work and lives, both in terms of their individual and collective identity as teachers but also in terms of their engagement with their students’ learning. The ‘doing’ of engaging predominantly with students through an evaluative lens, cultivated socio-political conditions that were both reflective and productive of more neoliberal conceptions of schooling. The result was a dispiriting process of upholding datafication processes and the dissolution of the possibility for teachers to imagine their practices otherwise.

The Queensland Context

The tensions in the Queensland context reflect the state’s responsiveness to national policy reforms in education, including attempts to develop a more ‘national’ curriculum, and greater emphasis upon performance measures and outcomes across the country. Queensland’s relatively poor performance on the first NAPLAN test in 2008 resulted in a significant national reform agenda that enabled the creation of a platform of comparison across Australian states on a national website – known as *MySchool*¹. Literacy and numeracy results from NAPLAN became a form of ‘catalyst data’ (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) that sustained an intensifying focus on comparative performance within and across states, as a form of reputational capital. This new and intense ‘scrutiny of educational provision’ in Queensland led to increased test preparation activities and ultimately to an array of data-centric priorities and practices (Hardy, 2021, p. 63). The intensifying dominance of educational data exerted increasing control over schooling and resulted in the collection of extensive

¹ A national website that was launched in 2010 which makes Australian schools and their data public and visible.

numeric and often reductive forms of data at the school system level, and as generated and displayed through the Queensland school management system, *OneSchool*. As a digital data infrastructure, *OneSchool* is a repository for a very wide range of data from NAPLAN, student attendance and behavior, to finance, staffing and school community socio-educational advantage (Clutterbuck, 2020). Consequently, data-centric processes and practices are now normalized in Queensland schools, with pressure to ensure adequate performance on a range of standardized as well as curriculum-related data and evidence of student learning (Hardy, 2015; Spina, 2017).

The Study

This article presents findings from a theoretically informed ethno-case study (Parker-Jenkins, 2018) of two high-performing, middle-class² public schools, Evergreen Public Primary School and Mainview Public Secondary School in a large suburban area of the south-east Queensland conurbation. These schools were chosen because, as ‘successful’ schools on a broad range of measures, and serving a broadly middle-class clientele, they might be expected to be sites in which the more reductive effects of datafication and performativity processes may have less effect. Within the broader project to which this article relates, data were obtained from 58 semi-structured interviews with 27 teachers (including teachers from Prep to Year 9) and seven school leaders from February 2019 to March 2020. The aim of the research was to explore the nature and effects of the datafication of assessment and learning on teachers’ practices in these sites. In the first round of interviews, participants responded to questions regarding the collection and use of forms of data and assessment on student learning. Responses from these initial findings formed the basis of two follow-up interviews with teachers and school leaders who were available and willing to participate. Due to the limitations of a journal article, we are reporting on data from ten of the 27 teachers and seven school leaders whose responses most clearly reflected the themes derived from the analysis of the actions and processes of datafication, which raised questions around the demoralizing and devaluing nature of such processes. The interviews averaged 30 minutes in duration and were all audio recorded and transcribed. Interview data were anonymized and de-identified to adhere to ethical guidelines mandated by the Australian ‘National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research’ (National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)) (2018). The ethical approval number for this project is 2018002390.

Data Analysis

A theoretically informed ethno-case study (Parker-Jenkins, 2018) was employed to help make sense of teachers’ practices within the two school sites. Informed by the Theory of Practice Architectures, the research explored how the specific talk (‘sayings’), actions (‘doings’) and relationships (‘relatings’) ‘hung together’ within the particular cultural-discursive, material-economic and socio-political arrangements that characterized these specific sites (Kemmis et al., 2014). The conceptual resources of the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) allowed for a view of practices as made up of particular sayings, doings and relatings; such sayings, doings and relatings coalesce to form assemblages of practices that are expressed within and as a result of the cultural-discursive, material-economic and socio-political conditions that shape and reshape practices over time. Practices are also ‘always situated’ within the conditions or arrangements of the present and past/history (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). These conditions and arrangements, collectively

² This status is based on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) developed by the Australian government as part of annual reporting processes on students’ literacy and numeracy capacities.

articulated as practice architectures, exist in conjunction with these practices, and ‘hang together’ in a ‘project’ which is *happening* in and during a particular time-space. A ‘project’ is the expression of these bundled together practices and arrangements but is also ‘shaped and reshaped’ by various ‘practice traditions’ (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 31). These traditions are defined by Kemmis et al. (2014) as an encapsulation of ‘the history of the happenings of the practice,’ a history that has been produced and reproduced into the ‘collective memory of the practice’ (p. 31).

The importance of interrogating the practices and practice traditions in relation to teachers as professionals within a datafied schooling environment lies in the understanding that how teachers have come to talk, think, act and relate to one another (in this case, about data and assessment practices) can be seen in plain view ‘under our noses’ as an expression of their daily *practices* within the education project (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 32). Furthermore, the presentation of the subsequent analysis of the specific data in this paper followed a method adapted from Rönnerman et al. (2017, p. 10) which entailed a manageable, repeatable and iterative process that involved defining emerging themes within the qualitative data, and cross-checking these themes in relation to the sayings, doings and relatings that characterized datafication and assessment practices, and that were being enabled, constrained and prefigured by the particular conditions and arrangements (practice architectures) in which these practices were unfolding. Throughout this process we engaged a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Miles et al., 2019), from which themes emerged related to the demoralizing and devaluing of teachers’ experiences and which simultaneously foregrounded processes of datafication. The teacher voices presented in this paper were considered critical in providing insights into the specific nature of the datafication of assessment and learning in relation to these demoralizing effects on teachers’ personal and professional lives, and their subsequent devaluing. In addition, some of their perspectives were reflective of the interrelated themes across the data informing the broader project.

Findings

The analysis process resulted in the identification of two broad themes that provided new insights into the specificity of the nature and effects of the datafication of assessment and learning on teachers’ practices as expressed in these two school sites. These themes related to evidence of what we describe as teaching as a ‘demoralized profession,’ and as a ‘devalued profession.’ The theme of demoralization was associated with specific concerns about: the gap between various policy positions about schooling and the work of teachers; the complexity associated with collecting so much data, and; the way in which students themselves were eviscerated by this focus on data. This demoralization led to a sense of teaching as devalued, particularly in relation to teachers’ professional judgement. The effects of these processes of demoralization and devaluing are summarized in the conclusion, where we make the case for what we describe as the very ‘disappearance’ of the teacher.

A Demoralized Profession: ‘Education is Heading in the Wrong Direction’

Demoralization, with its emphasis upon ‘discouragement and despair’ as a result of ‘ongoing value conflicts with pedagogical policies, reform mandates, and school practices’ (Santoro, 2018, p. 12) effectively captured teachers’ concerns at the two schools. This was often expressed in some teachers’ concerns about the specific conditions of their work and how this led to significant stress in their roles:

We have created an incredibly stressed workforce, because I would say without a doubt in the [past decades] that’s what I’ve seen massive change in. We’ve got really

stressed teachers who are leaving in droves. They're not staying past five years because it's not a nice profession, people are working hours you know! We have people burning out, good teachers, good people who are dedicated, who went in for the right reasons. (Jane, Secondary Teacher)

Concern for the progressively stressed workforce included a lack of recognition of the many additional hours that teachers were having to work – a notable material-economic constraint. Taking the view of burn out as reflective of demoralization within the profession more broadly (and beyond the individual), Jane's *sayings* indicated that teachers came to the profession for the right reasons. However, these dedicated, 'good teachers, good people' were leaving 'in droves,' revealing a values conflict as an expression of the ethics and morality of their role in relation to the education project. Such observations and experiences were expressed by teachers beyond school sites more broadly, including through their *sayings* about the nature of the profession, and in their *relatings* with others:

I've got kids and I've said to them, "Do not do teaching!" It's just not a career that I would choose to do anymore, because I think it's really – it's lost. (Jane, Secondary Teacher)

Teachers' interpersonal *relatings* reveal much about their experience of the teaching profession. Even as Jane had been an educator for many years, the warning she gave to her own children revealed the stark reality of the toll of the work of teaching upon teachers. There is a deeply affective nature to these sayings as the professional experience of teaching in schools coalesce around the personal and social practices of teachers in their homes and in their community. This is made more salient given the often negative public and media narratives about teachers (Baroutsis, 2016; Mockler, 2013, 2020), including as a result of broader data-driven logics or pressures (Hardy, 2014), conditions of marketization (Connell, 2013) as well as the complex tensions of the expansion of parental choice in schooling (Hogan, 2021). Consequently, there was a deep sense of embodied concern and apprehension in regard to teaching as a career and disillusionment in relation to education more broadly and this was exacerbated by concerns that those making decisions about education were unaware of the actual work of teachers, with deeply problematic effects upon the future workforce and profession more broadly:

I think education is heading in the wrong direction because the people in the ivory tower, the education ministers for the portfolio, are delusional; they're not in the right place. Spend a bit of time in the schools and see what's happening because you'd certainly change... My concern is, all the young people are saying, "Five years will do me in this job, I'm not working hard – I'm not working this hard for this much money!" So, they'll all leave. I think it will be a very transient job, unfortunately. (Harriet, Upper Primary Teacher)

There are indications here of the socio-political cost of the intensified conditions in schools. A challenge was declared to education ministers to experience schooling in its current state – in an ontological sense, as it is happening or unfolding in practice – the 'happeningness of practice' (Kemmis et al., 2014). There was also a sense that a view of the practices as they unfolded in the school and classroom could shed new light on how policy mandates were changing the work of teachers in a micro sense and in turn changing the broader nature of teaching as a profession – into a now transient job that could only be endured for much shorter periods of time.

Notions of data were at the center of these concerns:

To the ignorant people. And those people who haven't been in the classroom for twenty-five years... They wouldn't have a clue. Wouldn't have a clue of the pressure people are under. Data for data's sake is what is killing education and killing the learning process. (Harriet, Upper Primary Teacher)

This concern about 'data for data's sake' further contextualizes why some teachers wanted those in decision making positions to pay attention to how the broader policy conditions played out in their schools – through the everyday practices that were enabled and constrained by the decisions made beyond the school sites. This reveals that teachers were acutely aware that what they can say, do and how they related to one another in their daily work was made possible by the conditions in the site, even as those conditions were often developed and imposed at a policy level. In many ways, frustration about data collection was expressed in a material-economic sense about time taken, time lost, and time needed – all of which contributed to increasing pressure on teachers. However, the struggle was much more than a matter of materiality. There was a clear frustration with the doing of data collection that was void of authentic purpose or value. This is the heart of the issue – socio-political tensions were expressed through teachers' turmoil between the practices they were asked to engage in, and the actual benefit or value of such practices.

Demoralizing Datafied Practices: 'It's So Complicated and So Convolved and So Crippling'

Within the broader socio-political context of audit (Power, 1997), accountability (Lingard et al., 2016) and datafication (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018), teachers' practices in schools involved an intensifying amount of testing and data collection. Whether it was during daily classroom happenings, or scheduled pre- and post- testing events, teachers were heavily attuned to the need to collect data as evidence of student learning and achievement. This dominated their practices, leading to concerns about the purposes of such data:

I think there's an over emphasis on it [data]. I think it's become our god that we have to bow down and show all the time the data that we're collecting, and therefore the purpose of it has become a bit muddy. (Jane, Secondary Teacher)

In a socio-political sense, the 'deification of data' (Hardy & Lewis, 2017, p. 676) was apparent and constituted teachers' datafied practices without always proving meaningful for the primary task of teaching students. This turmoil is indicative of what Lyotard (1984) calls 'the laws of contradiction' – the inconsistencies in systems of control and performance. Ball (2003) describes this as an 'increase in the volume of first order activities [...] required by the demands of performativity and the 'costs' in terms of time and energy of second order activities, that is the work of performance monitoring and management' (p. 221). Engaging in such performative work took up so much time and energy, causing demoralization through forms of psychological distress and sadness:

It [testing] takes so much teaching time. I'm sad about it. I would like more time teaching and revising than blimmin' testing all the time. Testing, testing, testing to see where they are!... Why do we need so much data? ...I can understand the need for it in one way, but a big part of me says, "I'm so sad that I have to spend so much time testing when I can be teaching more or revising this thing more." More time teaching, less on Excel data sheets, which drive me insane anyway. (Cheyenne, Early Primary Teacher)

Here, the 'personal and psychological cost' (Ball, 2003, p. 221) of an intensified testing regime was evidenced through Cheyenne's expression of sadness. The proliferating *doing* of testing constrained

her teaching, and whilst that made her feel ‘sad,’ new data *doings*, such as input on ‘excel data sheets,’ were driving her ‘insane.’ Such new activities and excessive testing prompted an aggravated, interrogative position as she asked, ‘Why do we need so much data?’ Embedded here is a tension between what she believed to be true of her work as a teacher (to teach children), and her disillusionment over the architecture of testing that had constrained the meaningful work of teaching she so yearned to do. Evidence of demoralization was also revealed through the *doing* of performative practices that were constraining teachers’ more authentic and educative classroom practices as they were busied with myriad forms of data collection. The result was stress and anxiety:

How it [data collection] affects me as a teacher is, it puts a lot of stress on me, I’ll be very honest, very, very stressed. To the point where I’ve actually considered not being a teacher, because the workload is just ridiculous. ...I get the migraines, I get whopping headaches, especially around report card time, because it’s, you got to get all this assessment done. (Lisa, Upper Primary Teacher)

As this teacher illustrated the ways in which her physical and mental health were impacted due to the intensifying workload in relation to data and assessment practices, we argue that this moves beyond traditional notions of ‘burnout’ that often discursively characterize teacher concern and dissatisfaction. As Santoro (2018) describes, through the lens of burnout, the teacher as an individual can resolve their issues and concerns. That is to say, the experience of stress, exhaustion and the like, are due to the teacher’s own lack of personal affordances and resources. However, demoralization (Santoro, 2018) reflects the influence of broader conditions. The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) enables revelation of the broader cultural-discursive, material-economic and socio-political conditions that contribute to such concerns. The large volume of data to be collected reflected the material-economic conditions, while the constant focus upon the data reflected the cultural-discursive arrangements. At all times, the pressure to collect such data, and the sense that it felt high-stakes, reflected the socio-political conditions that foregrounded the collection of particular kinds of data, and how this was a high-stakes, complex activity:

It feels high-stakes. [...] I feel like it’s so complicated and so convoluted, and it’s so crippling that people are just crippled with anxiety and just exhaustion. [...] I think that all of these things start off with the best intentions, but they don’t think about the human impact on all their decisions. So, somebody in an office says, “We need to prove that kids are doing what the teachers say they’re doing, so we need to have some assessment to show that.” And then that trickles down. (Jane, Secondary Teacher)

Here we see the effects of accountability systems in the form of data and assessment zeroing in on teachers, having ‘broken the classroom door, forcing teachers to respond in ways they had not previously’ (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2013, p. 4). As broader education policy discourses are now predominantly centred around ‘increased measurement of learning’ (Hardy, 2017, p. 194) as well as reliance on data to inform educational reform and practice (Hardy & Lewis, 2017), teachers’ practices were pressured in varied ways. Not only was there a material-economic burden of ‘complicated... convoluted and... crippling’ assessment *doings* (with a powerful affective impression), but there was also mounting socio-political pressure on teachers to ‘prove’ their work and that of the students. Teachers were subject to ongoing accountability concerns in ‘high-stakes’ conditions, all of which caused anxiety and low morale and reduced some teachers’ desire to take on additional tasks:

And you wonder why teachers are burning out, having no enthusiasm and morale is down. So, people who are usually willing to take on things have been saying no and certain activities haven't been happening because those people are just going, "I don't have time." (Kian, Secondary Teacher)

Such anxiety and resistance reflect demoralization more generally. Teachers were not 'burning out' on an individual basis; rather, teachers, collectively, were instead 'disturbed not to be contributing to education in the ways that they had hoped' (Berliner, 2018, p. xi). As teachers were engaged in the specific data *doings* within their intensifying workloads, the nature of teachers' *relatings* were reconstituted. In one exchange with an early career teacher, this was evident in how this teacher was concerned about how focusing on data, and constant talk around data, were affecting the way she related with her students. This also affected her *sayings* and *relatings* with colleagues and her principal:

I think it makes my job ten times more stressful, because I'm doing all this work, and I'm stressed. The stress just comes from the top. I'm stressed, I probably put it onto the kids because I want them to do really well, and then they're stressed. I'm stressed because I want to look good in the PLC³, and the principals want to look good when they go to their meeting. And the stress just gets pushed down and then it's too much. [...] Oh my gosh, there is not enough time in the day! There's just too much. If we just did learning experiences and less pressure on nailing these assessments, I think everyone would be a lot happier. Personally, I would be a lot happier. (Emily, Lower Primary Teacher)

The increasing pressure to perform played out as increased data *doings*. Specifically, demoralization due to performativity was revealed in the mounting doing of (re)presenting student academic performance data in PLC meetings to ensure the teacher 'looks good.' The interrelated nature of practices was evident here in that the doing of the student 'nailing' the assessment made the teacher 'look good' in the sayings of the PLC, and in turn, this helped in the socio-political process of making the principal 'look good.' However, this was occurring while more educative learning experiences were side-lined.

Such practices reveal the specificity within, for example, Holloway et al.'s (2017) argument that 'good education' is now primarily defined through 'measurable outcomes' (p. 5). Furthermore, it highlights the cultural-discursive shift from 'teaching quality' to 'teacher quality' that ensure narrow and more reductive measures of teachers' work (Mockler, 2013, p. 37). As noted by Mockler (2013), such simplified representations of teachers' work create the conditions through which teachers are blamed when students 'fail to measure up' (p. 37), or as Emily put it, when students don't 'nail' the assessment. In a socio-political sense, the *relatings* between Emily and the primary leadership team had a similar composition (pressure to perform, perceived or otherwise) to the relationship between members of school leadership teams and those to whom they were answerable – in the Queensland context, Assistant Regional Directors in various regional offices located around the state. The demoralizing nature of the trickle-down pressure to perform is an important indication of how policy discourse and conditions play out in schools, not only through the material and affective impacts on teachers, but also on students. Datafied practices demoralized teachers through increasing stress and pressure to perform while constraining their ability to engage students in more educative learning experiences.

³ Professional Learning Community.

Demoralization and Eviscerated Schooling: 'Education Is Not about the Whole Child Anymore'

Current systems of accountability in education focus extensively upon data, with significant implications for reform, resources, and responsibilities within national educational systems (Holloway et al., 2017). Data is also being used as a way for policy makers, schools, the media, and the general public to monitor how schools are performing and how they can improve in the name of transparency and accountability (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). Indeed, the quality of education and learning are almost entirely associated with the increasing spread of measurement and testing, and as schools push to improve educational standards and 'mask failure' (Spina, 2017), teachers are experiencing increasing 'professional tensions' (Dreher, 2012). These tensions are often centred around the increasing quantification of their work (Hardy, 2019), related stress (Spina, 2017), increasing workloads and the lack of time for quality teaching and learning (Wyn et al., 2014). Teachers also expressed a greater sense of demoralization over concerns about the treatment of children in this more quantified, reified environment:

Now we are teaching for data purposes – to improve data. It's all data driven. And that's, that's not education. That's not what it should be about. It's about the kids, because on the data, the child who wouldn't write, couldn't write, but has started writing is still coming out as a D on the data. So, the emotional attachment for the progression is not witnessed in the data. It's purely clinical, it's very clinical ABCD move them up to a C. Some children neurologically will never be a C. But they need to be acknowledged for improving at the rate that they are succeeding at. And that's nowhere to be seen; perhaps the report card, when you write a comment about their progress, or you have the parents to go and say, "They couldn't do this now they are doing is." There's not enough human contact with data. (Harriet, Upper Primary Teacher)

Mechanisms of performativity are not only getting in the way of the 'educative work' of teachers, but they are also reconstituting what 'real' school work is (Ball, 2016, p. 1054), cultivating a deep sense of dissonance for teachers as they grapple with the datafied practices that make up so much of their work and displace their professional values and knowledge. As noted by Clutterbuck et al. (2021), processes of data collection 'do not capture the complexity and multifaceted nature of students' activities, practices, and personhood' (p. 1). The specificity of this is described by Harriet as a lack of 'emotional attachment' and 'human contact with the data' which, in cultural-discursive terms, means that teachers are unable to capture and represent student learning through more student-centred and holistic means, with implications for the affective characteristics of teacher-student *relatings*. This is because of broader socio-political conditions that foreground more performative conceptions of data, rather than more authentic accountabilities (Hardy, 2021). This has significant impacts on material-economic conditions, and the associated *doing* of assessment which is now a more clinical process. Despite this, there was still a sense of willingness to use data in practice and a general acceptance that engagement with data had become a pertinent and persistent part of teachers' work, even as teachers expressed their frustrations with the limitations of datafied practices to educate the whole child. While this is indicative of the 'post-performative turn' that sees the normalization of such processes, through which teachers 'reconcile' with 'performative techniques' (Frostenson & Englund, 2020, p. 708), we argue that this 'reconciliation' was only evident when the practice conditions still enabled a sense of educative and authentic teaching and assessment practices. Writing on the datafication in primary and early years education, Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2018) found that despite significant discomfort amongst educators in relation to the use of data, they continued to engage in such work. While this was often done with a sense of

'begrudging acceptance and compliance' (Selwyn, 2018, p. 736), teachers and leaders also worked to 'limit the damage' of testing culture through careful, strategic selection of assessment baselines and policy/practice mandates (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018, p. 99).

Teachers in our study also demonstrated similar autonomy and 'appropriation' (Hardy, 2013) of the logics of enumeration/quantification of their work (Hardy, 2014; Spina, 2017) while also expressing concern with their professional expertise being marginalized in lieu of reductive data and assessment technologies; indeed, such tensions continue to be apparent, even as these were identified in earlier research (Hardy, 2013, 2014). At its core, this is a critique of the socio-political and subsequent cultural-discursive conditions that are constraining teachers' ability to capture more authentic student learning. This reveals what Braun and Maguire (2018) call a 'value-based rejection' (p. 441) of such performative practice conditions.

Nevertheless, while teachers often contested the impact of datafied practices on more authentic and meaningful teaching and learning practices, they continued to work within such conditions. Santoro (2018) argues that demoralization is the outcome of frustration on the part of teachers when they cannot enact the values that serve as a motivation for their work. This was particularly true of the dissonance in relation to the necessary, holistic learning and well-being of students:

Education is not about the whole child anymore. It's data-driven, so the kids who are good at drama and the kids who are good at speaking are only given a window of opportunity to show their skill. Just a little window. And it's a shame. (Harriet, Upper Primary Teacher)

This more eviscerated conception of learning was in contrast to more holistic approaches that these teachers argued should characterize students' learning:

What's education about? Teaching the child as a whole, so emotionally, socially, academically. [...] I want the kids to feel safe. I want them to be risk takers. I want them to feel like having a go! "If you flop, don't care honey. Just have a go. Just have a go to see what you can do!" ... [But I can't do that]. No, not with the data. Because you're pushing. Pushing. [...] And I'm drowning. And I'm an efficient teacher but I am drowning in what we have to do... just to cover. We're skimming. ...And you're sending kids up to the next year level with superficial learning. (Harriet, Upper Primary Teacher)

A complex web of new and shared data-led *sayings* (forms of thinking and understanding), *doings* (modes of action) and *relatings* (ways of relating) emerged, constraining teachers' ability to teach in more educative and morally oriented ways in a broader context of a culture of care, particularly for the most marginalized (Lynch et al., 2009). Concern was raised about the doing of 'superficial' learning - 'skimming the top' as a result of intensifying and reductive data and assessment practices. The 'data' were constraining the ability to teach the 'child as a whole - emotionally, socially and academically.' This included in relation to the limited capacity to afford risk taking on the part of the students. This speaks to ideas of 'risk mitigation' at the macro level, whereby the goal of policy makers and education reformers is increasingly to support an education system that is secure, strong and predictable through means of risk reduction (Biesta, 2016) and through 'vigilance and considerable intervention' (Hardy, 2013, p. 375). Furthermore, reducing the risk in education means creating conditions that result in the best possible 'input-output' equation in relation to student, teacher and school performance (Lingard, 2011). Such broader policy conditions are playing out in a micro sense in teacher and student classroom practices as teachers' and students' ability and freedom

to take risks with their teaching and learning are constrained in favour of more rigid, datafied practices – where sayings are focused upon what can be explicitly taught (input) and doings emphasize what can be carefully measured and (re)presented (output). This is indicative of how broader policy conditions and practices are mirrored at the micro/classroom level. There is also a very real stifling of the learning process and progress of students, and the professional expertise and discretion of teachers - a reality that also dims the joy of teaching, and acts against the sorts of ‘reculturing’ necessary to bring back the joy of education for both students and teachers (cf. Hibbert et al., 2018):

I think a lot of the joy and the fun of teaching has gone... to me it feels like we’re grinding them [students], you know? Drawing down deeper and deeper and deeper into something and then “Right let’s move on, let’s move on.” Which when I think back to about how I used to teach... there was a lot more fun content and I think we just assumed kids would learn regardless, and that it wasn’t a big deal... so we didn’t need to keep this huge data mill going all the time. [...] And it’s, I think it’s taken away the joy of teaching and the joy of learning, because it’s so boring and dull, and it’s so overdone. [...] And I think the ones who’ve been the biggest losers are the kids. (Jane, Secondary Teacher)

Jane’s reflections upon ‘drawing down deeper and deeper’ illustrates intense data practices – foregrounding the acquisition of specific skills and knowledge for testing, which in essence are transient and fast-paced. This was evident in both Evergreen Primary and Mainview Secondary where strategies for teaching practices reflected sayings that indicated narrow and reductive doings, which also impacted staff and student relatings through constraining fun, and joyful learning experiences. Examples of such sayings and doings included ‘demand writing,’ ‘five-minute frenzy,’ ‘building writing stamina,’ ‘quick steps,’ ‘daily maths mental,’ ‘drilling down,’ ‘revising the basics’ to name a few. There is now an entirely new lexicon that speaks to the material-economic need for fast, quick, focused and intensive teaching and learning practices as a result of the pressure to ‘bump up’ student academic performance data:

I had staff use the data available on *OneSchool* about their students, their class rather, results on NAPLAN on their previous quiz and I asked them to find the first 20ish questions which are the easier ones, identify three mathematical concepts that the whole class struggled with, look at the concepts and then over the term, teach that. I thought if we could get ‘plus three’ for each kid, that’ll actually make a big bump in the data. (Stan, Secondary Leadership Team)

Furthermore, the demoralizing effects of maintaining a ‘huge data mill’ are evident in the stifling of subsequent, more joyful learning with educative and fun content that engages students in authentic and meaningful ways. Teachers’ ‘conscientious objections’ were ultimately in relation to the impacts their changed practices had on students’ learning experience. That is to say, demoralization was felt most when witnessing the impacts on the students - ‘the biggest losers’ in datafied school environments.

Embedded in this discussion of demoralization in datafied environments, is the notion of ‘structural and individual schizophrenia of values and purposes’ (Ball, 2003, p. 223), a struggle that challenges the ‘inauthenticity’ or ‘meaninglessness’ in the everyday sayings, doings and relatings of teachers, within datafied and performative policy conditions where ‘beliefs are no longer important – it is output that counts’ (Ball, 2003, p. 223). Teachers’ responses to the way in which students’ learning was reduced to measurable outcomes and levels revealed an awareness of these changing

conditions as they expressed frustration with increasingly competitive and comparative logics that came to characterize the sayings amongst members of school leadership teams:

We were reprimanded by one of the people in the leadership team because they said, “Oh, how many kids have you moved from Ds to Cs?” And we said “None. Because they’re Ds.” [...] And we were received with, “Oh well, the other year levels have done better than you!” Which just annihilates your entire morale. Like, “Well you haven’t been working hard enough, have you?” (Harriet, Upper Primary Teacher)

As the socio-political pressures, material-economic conditions and cultural-discursive resources shift in response to the processes and priorities of datafication, the work of teaching is transformed, with detrimental effects upon teacher morale. And this transformation is different from earlier times. In 1932, Willard Waller wrote *The Sociology of Teaching*, in which he affirmed the school as a social world. Waller understood that human beings in schools are entangled in interrelated webs. Such a view speaks to ideas around the ‘ecologies of practices’ (Kemmis et al., 2014), whereby the human and non-human exist in the site of practice, together with their sayings, doings and relatings within the cultural-discursive, material-economic and socio-political conditions; no practice can occur in isolation and every practice leads to new practices. In this way, the social situations/conditions that teachers find themselves in, impose onto them practices that make up their work; the work of being a teacher. When Waller (1932) wrote that ‘teaching does something to those who teach’ (p. 375), he was calling for considered reflection on what teaching did to teachers. His stance that ‘teaching makes the teacher’ reveals a deep sense of the embodied nature of teaching as a practice. At the same time, Waller (1932) also argued that ‘introspective teachers know of the changes that have taken place in themselves’ (p. 375). The teachers presented in this paper, were well aware of how their practices were changing in relation to what was expected of them and their students, and how those changes in practice were changing what was construed as possible in the name of education as understood in schooling settings. The teachers reported here seemed to be introspectively aware that change was also taking place within them, as evident in the affective impact of changing practices; this included clear signs of demoralization. Despite this, there was a sense that even in light of such professional and personal tension in the face of intensifying datafication, their professional responsibility remained.

Devaluing Teachers’ Professional Judgements of Student Learning and Achievement

Even as teachers maintained a sense of integrity in this context of increasing demoralization, there is little doubt that sweeping education reform marked by various modes of performativity, accountability and governance, were reorganizing and reorienting teachers’ roles and their personal and professional identities. Brass and Holloway (2021) argue that ‘profession-orientated values in education’ are being replaced with ‘commercial, market and managerial values,’ the result of which is a shift in the ‘professional authority’ afforded to educators (p. 519). Within this landscape and given reliance on the purported ‘objectivity’ of ‘enumerable’ data from new data-driven technologies (Williamson & Piattoeva, 2019), teachers’ professional judgements on student learning and achievement are being devalued. In recent decades, the intensifying move towards ‘evidence-based practice’ has also been considered to ‘demean practice’ due to the ‘resolute focus on measurable outcomes or outputs at the expense of many of the other features of practices’ (Kemmis, 2010, p. 159). Importantly, Kemmis warns that through its ‘zeal for measuring practice’ the ‘evidence-based view makes practice almost unrecognizable from the perspective of professional practitioners whose intentions, values and commitments are crucial in the conduct of their work’ (Kemmis, 2010, p. 159). This teacher-as-technician view is now prevailing within the current social and political discourse.

Within such socio-political conditions, Biesta (2015) argues that the view of a teacher as a ‘factor’ plays into the dominant discourse that school performance can be improved if this ‘factor’ is made more ‘effective’ and ‘efficient.’ Importantly, Biesta (2015) reminds us that this ‘factor’ is actually a human being and an educational professional – a professional that has ‘scope for judgement and discretion [that] is all too often forgotten’ (Biesta, 2015, p. 75). Such pressures have exerted and continue to exert influence.

Within Evergreen Primary and Mainview Secondary, specific conditions that devalue teachers’ work were evident in the *sayings*/talk from the school leadership teams and regional office about ensuring a strong focus upon improving student learning against measurable benchmarks. Teachers were often explicit in the denigration of their own understanding and judgement of student learning and achievement, particularly in comparison with various modes of ‘hard evidence’ from more standardized forms of data and assessment (Daliri-Ngametua et al., 2021, p. 3). A devaluing of teachers’ professional judgement was evident in what were considered disparities between teachers’ assessment of students’ classroom work and NAPLAN data – data derived from a series of standardized tests to ascertain students’ literacy and numeracy capacities at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in the Australian context:

Our A to E data does not match our NAPLAN data; we get told that all the time. They want us to be more and more lenient [...] It’s devaluing... it devalues all of us because we have to argue. (Marg, Upper Primary Teacher)

The questioning that arose in this contested space devalued the professional judgement of teachers, even when such standardized test data were considered invalid and unreliable (such as when students guessed multiple-choice questions). Essentially, when inconsistencies were found, teachers’ local formative and summative assessments were scrutinized, regardless of other influences at play. With this came new *relatings* that included forms of self-defence and self-doubt as well as the expectation that teachers would need to justify their choices with further evidence or concede to counter-evidence in the form of standardized (NAPLAN) results:

I’ve seen principals in the past go, “Well, why are you giving this kid a C when they got the equivalent of a B in NAPLAN?” (Mark, Upper Primary Teacher)

Then we started looking at the junior students and ...we were just being asked to look at NAPLAN data. And they were saying, “Oh the child got a band 5 in numeracy; why are they failing maths?” (John, Senior Leadership Team)

The teachers here were always getting hammered for A to E data not matching our NAPLAN data. We get asked, “Why isn’t our A to E data matching?” We have been asked to change grades to say they are “working in.” And if we wanted to give someone an E, we have to ask permission; we have to take our E students to the office and get permission to give them an E. D students, we have to kind of really show it and really argue it, because they don’t like that either. (Marg, Upper Primary Teacher)

Such value placed on standardized (NAPLAN) data raised doubts in relation to teachers’ professional judgements. This doubt constrained *relatings* between teachers and members of the leadership team as teachers’ autonomy and discretion were openly challenged. The *doing* of taking any ‘E’ grades to the leadership team to request permission to give a grade of E, devalued teachers’ agency to make expert decisions on the learning outcomes of their students. The way in which teachers were also asked to change students’ grades, potentially as a way to inflate student

achievement to match the NAPLAN data, was a particularly explicit rendering of this challenge to teachers' judgements. In the PLC meetings at Evergreen Primary, the notion of considering what grade a student is 'working in' was presented in terms of student potential and as a challenge to deficit modes of thinking. Even as members of the primary leadership team were encouraging teachers to always consider the highest standards-criterion descriptors possible in an effort to motivate the students, within performative, datafied contexts, this was perceived as a form of bolstering performance. While research has illustrated the pressures that school staff are under to 'manipulate the data' in relation to NAPLAN itself (Thompson & Cook, 2014, p. 138), this study found that teachers' primary concern was true and accurate local data, resulting in significant frustration at comparisons with NAPLAN data that were considered less rigorous.

Alongside these socio-political tensions, teachers found ways to protect their professional integrity against the questioning that arose in relation to NAPLAN data. For example, one teacher engaged in the *doing* of observational data collection during NAPLAN testing to collect evidence to support the final grades she gave to her students:

I take notes because I get parents coming up to me saying, "Excuse me but you've given my child a D in English but... in the grammar one and the comprehension for reading [on NAPLAN], they've gotten a band 5 or 6." "Well, that's because it's multiple choice purely and they finished it in 15 minutes when it's a 50 [minute] to an hour test!" [...] I always make notes to say, "This child finished in ten minutes; this child was up to question 12 at the last 5-minute mark and then guessed the rest of the answers to 35." So, I definitely take notes. (Marg, Upper Primary Teacher)

Such conditions of answerability are moving beyond the somewhat reasonable expectations of teachers needing to provide accounts and justification for their teaching and students' learning, toward a more reductive accountability regime that has become embedded into teachers' very dispositions and ongoing practices; such practices exist beyond a specific, one-off 'event' (such as an annual performance appraisal meeting) (Ranson, 2003).

Teachers' professional discretion was also at risk given that such questioning was not limited to comparisons with NAPLAN data. Teachers' ongoing assessment of student learning was often constrained due to the cultural-discursive and material-economic limitations of the assessment/grading tools that positioned the locus of authority within the technologies of the assessment tool and not the discretion of the teacher:

Even if I think that kid is worth an A, but they only produce a B at the end of the day, that data, that B data is what you mark them on. Not whether I think they can produce an A and they know it. ...I really think that if they have done a better 're-tell' [for example] from week 1 to 7, then I should be able to mark that retell and go, "Okay that's what they're getting." Because I mean some of these kids, when they get to week 7, they're buggered; they don't produce their best work... but technically you have to use that assessment. (Emily, Lower Primary Teacher)

At times, the calibration of formative and summative grades against achievement standards devalued teachers' expertise and judgement. This is an example of how teachers' 'capacity to exercise professional discretion' (Holloway, 2021, p. 27) can be constrained. Specifically, in material-economic terms, the *doing* of assessment was always in relation to a certain period of time. Essentially, there was a time to teach and time to assess, and this was uniform across the school. As Emily explained, her ability to capture student learning and achievement was constrained by the material-economic stipulation to report on only the week seven assessment that the student

produced, even as she knew the student had produced better quality work at other points. In this case, not only was the student assessment arguably invalid and unfair but given such material-economic conditions, the teacher was unable to use her own discretion. In favoring seemingly 'factual' information without complementing it with teachers' value judgements (Biesta, 2010), measurable data and assessment can become void of meaning – as can the role of the teacher:

To some degree we have to make a judgement call. For example, I had a student, I gave her a C in her last report card, because at that point in time, she was a C. She was going to get to the standard⁴ by the end of the year and I felt that what she produced was a C. Now, she hasn't moved but I had to use my judgement and now they're saying, "Oh well you really should've given her a D" but I said at that time, professionally, I felt she was a C... I think there is this fear if you give them a C in the middle of the year, and then at the end of the year they're now a D, "Oh why are they going backwards?" I mean it was borderline, but I made a call. (Emily, Lower Primary Teacher)

In this scenario, Emily used her professional judgement as a teacher to 'make a call' using the information and tools she had at the time; however, this judgement was brought to account several months later by members of the school leadership team. This teacher's ability to assess student work fairly and effectively was constrained by the limitations of the cultural-discursive A to E grading tools as well as the material-economic constraint of time (when to assess and report). The arbitrary nature of such judgements means that these scenarios occur often, particularly given that A to E scores do not provide effective or 'good' information on the educational achievement of students (O'Neill, 2013). In order to achieve effective assessment and communication of student learning and achievement, teachers must be enabled to use their expertise and professional judgement to provide the necessary value and reason, and to qualify and validate the use of such data and assessment tools. Instead, teacher judgement was devalued, leading to what was considered an invalid representation of data and the depiction that the student was 'going backwards' in their learning. This begs Biesta's (2010) critical question, on 'whether we are measuring what we intend to measure' (p. 13) and if not, how can valuing teacher judgement enrich these processes? Within such conditions, conceptions of quality education are replaced with or 'mistaken for' the supposed indicators of quality – a process that has been occurring for some time (cf. Biesta, 2010, p. 13), letting the latter speak for the former and in the process marginalizing teachers' own value judgements:

So, if you do really badly on a test, but I say to my head of department, "Yeah, I know they didn't do so well but in class they're amazing" and what have you, they will say, "Hmmm that's good, but we need to base this on this piece of assessment." And they will tell you, "No, you can use your own judgement." But it is never allowed to be used; you have to justify everything. (Jane, Secondary Teacher)

The socio-political power and authority evident in the *relatings* between teachers and school leaders within more performative contexts can be considered as devaluing teacher judgement while placing greater confidence in the evidence from the assessment piece. Moreover, within the dimension of semantic space, the communication and understanding of student achievement can be constrained to that which can be said about the specific assessment evidence. Without the rich analysis and application of data by teachers in context, the data can only 'say' so much and can only be of limited use. It is also problematic to *say* to teachers that they can and should use their professional

⁴ Student achievement standards for key learning areas describe the expected learning of students at each year level as indicated within the Australian Curriculum.

judgement, when the cultural-discursive resources, material-economic stipulations and the power imbalances and mistrust of teachers act as socio-political constraints to limit the realization of teachers' agency in context.

It was clear in many interviews with the teachers that perspectives and practices in relation to teacher professional judgement were complex and nuanced. While some teachers expressed the devaluing of their professional judgement, there was also evidence to suggest that teachers were carving out ways in which their professional judgement was invaluable – even as this was sometimes construed as in 'support' of the evidence provided by more formalized forms of data and summative assessment:

Data is valuable because it backs your professional judgement up. So, I like to give a professional judgement first, and then make sure it's backed up... (Melissa, Upper Primary Teacher)

This is also indicative of the specific ways in which forms of data are central to steering decision making (Hartong, 2019), through the assemblage of the human and non-human (Hartong, 2018).

Conclusion: The Disappearing Teacher

Our findings bring to light the detrimental effects of datafication on teachers' work in the Queensland context, their physical and emotional well-being, as well as their discretion and professional judgement in relation to student learning and achievement. This paper highlighted the material-economic, cultural-discursive and socio-political conditions of datafication that have emerged from a period of significant educational reform and tumult in Queensland in the context of criticisms arising from results in 2008 in the original NAPLAN tests. This was particularly evident in the more performative and reductive conceptions of data in the sites where schooling occurred, and the 'sayings', 'doings' and 'relatings' that are both reflective and productive of these conditions. We argue that within datafied and performative conditions the work of teachers is being redefined and increasingly disciplined, resulting in an increasingly demoralized and devalued profession. Arguably, through such processes, and as a result of this demoralization and devaluing, teachers themselves as active, agentic position-takers in relation to their own work and their students' learning are also potentially 'disappearing' from the educational landscape that should give their practice purpose and meaning. Through the constant, eviscerating focus upon various modes of performative data and datafication processes more broadly, the pedagogical relationship of teaching is at risk of becoming 'socially emptied' as teachers attempt to work and exist within realms of significant professional and personal cognitive dissonance. In the research presented here, teachers' palpable discomfort and 'conscientious objections' (Santoro, 2018) were often expressed alongside a general sense of 'acquiescence' (Braun & Maguire, 2018) as they experienced great tension between their beliefs and practices. Such struggle over the teachers' very soul (Ball, 2003) was undermining teacher autonomy and professionalism (Holloway & Brass, 2018). Teachers also engaged with datafied practices even when they did not believe in their value. Braun and Maguire (2018) call this a form of 'doing without believing' (p. 440) and, we would argue, this personal and professional dissonance comes at a very real and practical cost. Such dissonance was only ever tolerable to the extent to which the students and their learning felt protected – and this was not always possible. We have argued that the limited 'value' afforded to reductive datafied practices was often in relation to the stringent and imposed material-economic conditions, cultural-discursive resources and socio-political restraints that took teachers from teaching, and teaching from *education* (Biesta, 2012). Thus, under these circumstances, the understanding of teaching as *educational*, and what it means to be a teacher as an educator, is

disappearing from the schooling landscape and instead being replaced by notions of outcomes, data and evidence void of context – without an educational telos, ‘a sense of purpose’ (Biesta, 2012, p. 36). As Biesta (2012) argues, it is this sense of purpose in education which relies on the person of the teacher as a professional ‘to make judgements about what is desirable in relation to the different purposes that frame their practice’ (p. 36). At present, there is a ‘collapse’ of the ‘distance between teachers and the accountability apparatus (Holloway & Brass, 2018, p. 380), a collapse which burdens the ‘structural and individual schizophrenia of values and purposes,’ increasing ‘inauthenticity and meaninglessness’ (Ball, 2003, p. 223) in teachers’ everyday experiences. The ‘virtuosity’ of teachers is subsequently undermined, their professionalism is devalued, and their personal and professional identity demoralized. Without such personhood, arguably, we are left with not only a demoralized and devalued profession more broadly, but with the very disappearance of the teacher.

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