Countering Commonsense: Non-normative Strategies for Social Justice

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In an extensive review of research relating to education for social justice, Hytten (2006) argues that in order "to bring more attention to alternative democratic, social justice–oriented visions for schooling, we need a more powerful and strident discourse coming from the educational left, one that can help us to coalesce diverse movements for social justice, as well as provide impetus and vision (theory and practice) for progressive educational change" (p. 224).

The articles in this issue of JCACS respond to this call for more "powerful and strident discourse" that is both critical and visionary. Poststructuralist notions of power as both the means and will to act are evident in many of the arguments, and reports on research employing a variety of 'ethno-methods' (ethnodrama, autoethnography, critical narrative research) and counter-normative theoretical lenses (critical, cultural and complex) shape a common desire to understand what social justice as equity in opportunity means, and might yet mean, for education.

In the context of these papers, social justice is promoted by questioning normative (taken-for-granted/commonsense) educational

structures and practices, a counter-move that characterizes what Kumashiro (2004) calls "anti-oppressive" education. As he puts it: "Common sense is not what should shape educational reform or curriculum design; it is what needs to be examined and challenged" (xxiv). In a broad sense, the desire to counter commonsense is what binds the authors in this issue, and in some cases, is made explicit in the counter-normative strategies they use to represent their research.

Diane Conrad's essay *"Justice for Youth Versus a Curriculum of Conformity in Schools and Prisons"* explores the possibilities for youth justice by interrogating the institutionalized "curriculum of conformity" that insidiously characterizes practices and power relations common to both schools and prisons. Theoretically, she draws on Foucault's (1991) notion of *governmentality* and Scott's (1990) conception of "infrapolitics" to mount a critique of existing relations of power that shape, and ultimately misrepresent, the resistant behavior of youth. The performative (ethnodramatic) vignettes she shares were the result of a participatory arts-based method of "performative ethnography" which uses popular theatre to engage youth in a critical examination of both the explicit and hidden aspects of institutional structures that shape their life experiences. For Conrad, the over-arching concern is how to promote justice for, and ethical behavior from, youth; particularly in institutional contexts where inequitable distributions of power inevitably engender resistance. Seeking to avoid perpetuating the notion of "disposable youth in the age of zero tolerance", (Giroux, 2003) Conrad argues that the acts of performative resistance represented in her research signal the need for continued research into youths' perceptions of institutionalized practices in schools and prisons. For Conrad, justice for youth is recognizable only by first identifying the prevailing injustices that undergird the organizations and institutions that serve them.

In *"Learning to 'Do Family' Differently: Towards More Complex Notions of Family Culture and Schooling"* Linda Laidlaw brings an autoethnographic orientation to her analysis of data emerging from research with parents from transracial families. Exploring what it means to 'do family' in counternormative ways, Laidlaw offers several examples of the (mis) representation of transracial families in popular media, interrogates the modernist 'genetic ideology' (Rothman, 2005) that constructs popular notions of adoption, and, finally, considers how

'adoption' itself may be used as a conceptual framework to interrupt the 'normative narratives' that prevail in popular conceptions of family. Laidlaw suggests that in acknowledging this counterpoint position, adoptive families become sites of perturbation and public interrogation which may serve to alter perception and interrupt prevailing understandings of family relations.

Following Laidlaw's counter-normative critique of 'doing family' is Luigi Iannacci's essay *"Learning To 'Do' School: Procedural Display and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Students in Canadian Early Childhood Education (ECE)"*. He uses Critical Narrative Research (CNR) to represent data collected during a year-long ethnography of four early years classrooms in two different schools. The four narratives provided here are linked by a broader concern with the extent to which CLD students are required to participate in procedural display; that is, activities that heighten a learner's preoccupation with the "need to pass" and often lead to the unquestioning adoption of normative responses and behaviors. Procedural display was most evident in "context-reduced" (rather than context-embedded) literacy activities where students missed out on opportunities to negotiate meaning using interpersonal and situational cues. Iannacci suggests that building students' communicative competence requires attention to context-embedded communication where learners are encouraged to "discover the properties" of language in use, and negotiate meaning in situations where the "normal response" is no longer privileged.

The collaborative essay *"Writing Co-Respondents: Teacher-educators reflect on orienting new students"* is a poetic representation of the intersecting experiences (and counter-normative inclinations) of teacher educators and colleagues Susan Brigham, Michelle Forrest, Valda Leightheizer, and Susan Walsh. Foregrounding a shared concern with the normalizing structures of the teacher education program they were aiming to reform, the collaborative technique employed to represent their conversations is one which uses "aleatory operations" (the imposition of chance) to disrupt the illusion of static subject positions. They offer 11 mesostics (poems) to represent their experiences as "co-respondents", a term which refers both to their collaborative roles and "alludes homonymically" to the source of their writing. (i.e. e-mails). In

sharing both the process and product of their collaborative efforts, the authors invite readers to "write" in the spaces announced by the poems.

In their theoretical piece entitled *"Currere to the rescue? Teachers as 'amateur intellectuals' in a knowledge society"*, Yatta Kanu and Mark Glor address the complex conditions of teaching in a knowledge society where teachers are required to play a tripartite role as catalysts of opportunity, counterpoints of threat, and casualties of standardization. (Hargreaves, 2003). As announced by the title, Said's (1996) notion of the 'amateur intellectual' as skeptical knower is considered as a potential product of Pinar's (1974) autobiographical method of *currere*. Along the way, the authors survey a breadth of sources in considering the key concepts that inform their understanding of *currere* as autobiographical and biographical text including narrative, voice, and collaborative dialogue among others. From Bruner and Sartre, to Britzman and Dewey, the overriding intent is to trace the theoretical underpinnings that support a conception of preservice teacher education as an autobiographical opportunity for disrupting taken-for-granted notions of teaching, and thus transforming teachers into 'amateur intellectuals.'

The sixth article, in French, "*La collaboration au sein d'une équipe pédagogique, une compétence à développer au cours des stages*" by Liliane Portelance and Nicolas Durand, explores the learning atmosphere that (can) exist in a teaching practicum situation between the supervising teacher and its supervisee. Approaching it by specific case studies, the authors demonstrate that even if both supervisor and supervisee come to the practicum with different orientations and expectations, both parties can learn from the other in a dyadic learning dynamic.

The final paper in this issue, *"Consciousness, Collectivity and Culture: Experiences of Intimacy in Mathematics Learning"* by Helena Miranda, Mary Beisiegel, and Dennis Sumara, explores the intimacy that may be recognized or articulated between the mathematics doer and mathematics as a subject. The claim here is that the way mathematics is taught must have an effect not only with the disciplinary knowledge, but on relationships that arise within that knowledge. Teachers engaged in a study of mathematics for teaching were asked to share their experiences of this professional development project, and emerging from the interactions of the teachers' responses is the notion of 'being intimate with mathematics.' Echoing this issue's thematic concern with

countering commonsense, it may be argued that such moments of intimacy—with one another, with mathematics, and within mathematics—can and should be the mainstay, not the exception, of school mathematical experience.

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