



# “Posts” Perspectives on Anti-Oppressive Education in Social Studies, English, Mathematics, and Science Classrooms

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What could it mean for educators within the “core disciplines” to teach in ways that challenge multiple forms of oppression? This article explores the implications of various “posts” perspectives on anti-oppressive education—especially poststructuralist perspectives—for social studies, English, mathematics, and science classrooms. The author focuses on two main theoretical constructs: unknowability, multiplicity, and looking beyond the known; and resistance, crisis, and resignifying the self. Implications for teacher education conclude the article.

Educational researchers have shed much light on the multiple and contradictory ways different forms of oppression (such as racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism) play out in schools, as well as on the various approaches that educators can use to work against oppression (see Kumashiro, 2000b, for a summary of these approaches). While such insights are helpful for thinking differently about the nature and dynamics of schooling, they do not always lead to changes in practice. In my experiences working with student teachers and practicing teachers in K–12 schools, I commonly hear complaints that research and theory on anti-oppressive education (or, education that works against oppression) are difficult to translate into practice, especially the “posts” (such as postmodernist, poststructuralist, and postcolonialist) research and theories. I also hear complaints that their priority as teachers is to teach their subjects, to meet the required standards within the “core disciplines,” and that the task of changing oppression should not fall on them (Kumashiro, 2000a). Researchers have noted similar complaints within the educational research community, such as complaints that “reconceptualist” curriculum theorizing is “totally irrelevant to practice” (Wright, 2000) or that researchers should engage in research, not activism for social justice (Berliner, 1997).

Clearly, committing to and engaging in anti-oppressive education is an uphill battle for researchers in higher education and practitioners in K–12 schools. Even if we acknowledge that research is always political or always has political effects (Richardson, 1997), and even if we commit to addressing the oppressions that are always and already playing out in schools, what remains is the arduous task of re-thinking our practices based on writings that are often difficult to understand and implement. This should not be

surprising, given that writings within poststructuralist traditions often trouble language as a way to trouble knowledge (re)production (Ellsworth, 1997), and often refuse to name concrete practices as “strategies that work” (Kumashiro, 1999a). Nonetheless, anti-oppressive educational research has produced and continues to produce a wealth of cultural and conceptual resources for educators to use in rethinking their practices and imagining forms of anti-oppressive education that have, until now, been unexplored. The “posts” writings, in particular, offer insightful ways to complicate many approaches to challenging oppression that have already gained popularity among educators committed to change.

In this article, I address the question, “What could it mean for educators within the ‘core disciplines’ to teach in anti-oppressive ways?” While drawing on insights from a range of critical, multicultural, feminist, and queer perspectives on anti-oppressive education, I focus primarily on the “posts” writings as I suggest specific implications for social studies, English, mathematics, and science classrooms. In particular, I explore the usefulness of two main theoretical constructs from the “posts” writings: unknowability, multiplicity, and looking beyond the known; and resistance, crisis, and resignifying the self. Implications for teacher education conclude this article. Given the scope of this analysis and the limitations of space, my discussions of the implications of each theoretical construct for each of the different disciplines are necessarily brief, but I believe they will demonstrate the usefulness of “posts” perspectives to teachers and teacher educators, as well as areas where further research is needed.

I should note, as problematic as is expecting that oppression does not play out in our classrooms is expecting that we now know the effective way to change it. There is no panacea, and even my explorations in this article need to be treated as tools that, while changing our practices, must themselves be constantly reworked. Most notable is perhaps my terminology. I use the term “Other” to refer to those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society, that is, that are *other than* the norm. I believe my analysis extends to many different groups in society, but I illustrate Otherness primarily with groups targeted by racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism. I use the term “queer” to refer to people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersexual, questioning, or in other ways “queer” because of their sexual identity or sexual orientation. I agree that the appropriation of “queer” by many GLBTIQs signifies a rejection of normative sexualities and genders and an act of political significance

(Capper, 1999; Tierney & Dilley, 1998), although I acknowledge that the term continues to invoke a history of bigotry and hatred, even among GLBTIQs. Furthermore, while the term “queer” can highlight the interrelationship among sex, gender, and sexuality (Butler, 1993) and even race (Kumashiro, in press), it can also erase gender differences (Wieringa & Blackwood, 1999) and racial differences (Rosales, 1999). I say this not to dismiss these limitations, but rather to make explicit that every practice makes some changes possible, and others, impossible; they work against some forms of oppression and lie complicit with others. My goal is not to name strategies that work (for all students, in all situations, against all oppressions), but rather, to emphasize the partiality of any approach to challenging oppression, and the need to constantly rework these approaches.

### **Unknowability, Multiplicity, and Looking Beyond the Known**

#### *The “Problem” of Partiality*

All students come to school with partial knowledges. In some ways they may not know much about marginalized groups in society, but even when they do know about the Other, that knowledge is often a mis-knowledge, a knowledge of stereotypes and myths learned from the media, families, peer groups, and so forth. The school curriculum often does little to address these partial knowledges. For example, when U.S. history curricula focus on political leaders, military conflicts, and industrial inventors, they are including the voices, experiences, and perspectives of only certain groups in society, namely, the privileged. Left silenced or pushed to the margins are such topics as immigration, the gendered division of labor, and civil rights movements that can reveal the roles that the Othered in society have played in U.S. history. Anyon (1979), for example, tells us that U.S. history textbooks celebrate the achievements of industrial inventors but fail to discuss the practices and effects of labor exploitation on the working classes. Additional researchers point to ways that other groups are similarly privileged in the curriculum through the selective inclusion and exclusion of material, groups such as males (Minnich, 1990), White Americans (Asante, 1991), and heterosexuals (Lipkin, 1995). Compounding matters is the recognition that the structure of the social studies curriculum, not just its content, is problematic. More and more historians are arguing that narrative voice belongs in written accounts of history, by which I mean, signs that the author wrote the text and constructed a particular version of history belong in the text (Cronon, 1992). However, history textbooks continue to silence the narrative or authorial voice (Paxton, 1999). This lack of authorial voice implies that the account being told is objective and impartial (Richardson, 1997); it implies that “history” consists of facts, not readings or interpretations of events; and given the selective inclusion and exclusion of materials, it colludes in the privileging of hegemonic versions of history (Paxton, 1999).

The privileging of certain groups occurs not only in social studies classrooms, but also in science classrooms that purport to be teaching a “neutral” subject. As Letts (1999) points out, what we have come to call “science” has been critiqued from feminist, antiracist, postcolonial, poststructural, and even queer perspectives. Such critiques include the notion that “real” science has come to be defined as only the science that originated in the

“Western” (or, White) world (Harding, 1994; Lee, 1999). Not long ago, only men were considered capable of thinking scientifically (Battersby, 1989). Throughout history and even today, science asks only certain questions, and as a result, is used in ways that primarily benefit certain racial and socioeconomic groups in society (Harding, 1994). Depending on what it finds (or chooses not to find) and publicizes (or chooses not to publicize), science can have different political and material consequences on different populations, justifying the privileging of certain groups and the marginalization of others, as happened with the AIDS epidemic when the science community refused to devote significant time and resources until the “problem” changed from an African/gay disease to a virus that can spread to mainstream America (Treichler, 1988). Science can normalize only certain ways of being, such as when it talks about sex/gender in dichotomous terms, thus reinforcing the notion that there are only males and females and nothing else, despite that significant numbers of human beings and other living beings in the natural world are intersexed (Kessler, 1998; Letts, 1999). Even progressive educators help maintain the privileging of certain groups in society when they require that students think “scientifically,” objectively, and rationally (Ellsworth, 1992). Clearly, “science” is always and already implicated in challenging and contributing to different forms of oppression.

Mathematics is no different. Historically, mathematics has been a tool of colonialism and imperialism (Bishop, 1990). This should not be surprising, given that mathematics has an underlying “logic of control”: mathematizing and quantifying nature and time and space are ways for humans to control not only nature, but also society, since defining “reason” as, in part, the ability to think “mathematically” allows certain people (i.e., the “mathematical” ones) to extend their control over others (Fleener, 1999). Furthermore, mathematics often purports to be a transparent language—i.e., a language that reflects truths about the natural world—even though no language is transparent (Shulman, 1996). Different languages make possible different ways of making sense of the world (Macedo, 1991). Not only is any language encoded with culturally specific and gendered meanings (Shulman, 1994), but so too do people understand and use the languages of mathematics differently depending on the cultural context or situation (Bishop, 1994; Powell & Frankenstein, 1997). Therefore, indirectly, teaching mathematics is a way of teaching particular cultural norms and values (Shulman, 1994). Yet, as students, we do not often learn that ours is but one of many mathematics/sciences out there; we do not learn that our system of mathematics/sciences privileges certain ways of thinking; and we do not learn ways that mathematics/sciences often address certain social problems and not others, perhaps because different groups have yet to occupy positions in math/science communities with the authority to ask them and the resources to follow through (Harding, 1994).

Perhaps most commonly critiqued for teaching partial materials are English classrooms that insist on teaching the “canon.” Biases based on class, race, gender, sexuality, and other social markers often play out in the curriculum when the authors and characters of the literature being read consist primarily of middle class or wealthy, White, male, and heterosexual people (Palumbo-Liu, 1995; Schmitz, Rosenfelt, Butler, & Guy-Sheffall, 1995;

Sumara, 1993). By learning about only certain groups and perspectives in society, students are not learning about alternative perspectives and the contributions, experiences, and identities of Others, and by not learning such knowledge, students are not troubling the (mis)knowledge they already have. Silence and exclusion are significant parts of the “hidden curriculum” (Jackson, 1968; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hanson, 1993) being taught in schools—a hidden curriculum that sanctions the partial and oppressive knowledges already in schools and society.

In response, many educators have called for diversity and an inclusive, multicultural curriculum. Unfortunately, educators often stop after “adding on” differences as if adding, say, women here and Latinas/os there solves the problem. There are at least two reasons why mere inclusion cannot solve “the problem.” First, countless differences exist in society (such as differences based on race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, [dis]ability, language, body size, and the intersections of these differences), making it literally impossible to be fully “inclusive.” Second, even if all differences could be named and included, the very act of naming and including difference could operate in contradictory ways. For example, we might wonder, what does it mean to add Jews, or to add queers, or to add the working poor? In fact, what does it mean to “be” any of the things being added? Who counts as the “different”?

By adding, say, Black Americans, do we expect their voices to “speak” to racial differences (hooks, 1994)? If so, are we adding only those people whose difference is specifically and solely their race (and not also, say, their gender, sexuality, or disability) and, in the process, ignoring what it means for Black American women or Black American queers or disabled Black Americans also to be Black (but to be Black in perhaps a different way)? Does Blackness, in other words, take on normative (or, regulatory) qualities within the inclusive curriculum just as it has within Black liberation movements (Cohen, 1996)? Activists at the intersections of oppressions have long argued that, ironically, identity-based activist movements function just as mainstream society does in excluding its own margins (Powell, 1999), such as feminist movements and women who are of color (McKay, 1993), or antiracist movements and people of color who are queer (Conerly, 1996), or queer rights movements and queers who are female (Blackwood & Wieringa, 1999). Adding difference is problematic when the “difference” is itself normative.

Yet, “difference” always exceeds singular categories since identities are already multiple and intersected. What it means to be a woman is already racially normative (Higginbotham, 1992), just as what it means to be masculine is already heteronormative (Kimmel, 1994). Similarly, racial identities such as Asian American identities are already gendered, such as with Orientalist stereotypes of Asian Americans in the mainstream U.S. imagination (Okiihiro, 1994), and are already heterosexualized, such as when Asian American communities reify “traditional Asian values” that are centered on heterosexist familial roles (Kumashiro, 1999b). It is a problem, then, to speak of identities always and only in their separate(d) incarnations, which not only denies the already-intersectedness of identities, but more importantly, masks the already-privileged status of certain identities. In particular, treating identity as singular allows only certain identities to count as authentic, only certain ones to matter when learning

about what it means to be of that group. This should not be surprising, given that identities have meaning only because they are defined in opposition to an Other (Butler, 1993). Authenticity requires the existence of the non-authentic: To say *who we are* and *what we are focusing on* is simultaneously to say *who we are not* and *what we are not focusing on*. The naming of difference, then, whether in activist communities or inclusive curricula, can serve less to describe who a group is, and more to prescribe who a group ought to be.

Furthermore, the focus on difference fails to change that which is not-different, namely, the norm. Although a curriculum that aims for inclusion may succeed in teaching that the different or the Other is as normal or important as the norm, it does not necessarily change the very definition of “normal” and de-center the “mythical norm” (Ellsworth, 1992), namely, the White American, male, middle class, heterosexual identities that are traditionally privileged in society. Learning about differences will be accomplished through lenses already colored by the norm, as when we learn about Others in comparison to or contrast with the Self. What this means is, adding difference does not really change teaching and learning practices that affirm our sense of normalcy. And perhaps this is exactly why schools continue to teach in oppressive ways; perhaps we desire teaching and learning through normalized lenses (Doll, 1998; Morris, 1998). Perhaps we desire teaching and learning in ways that affirm and confirm our sense that *what we have come to believe is normal or commonsense in society* is really the way things are and are supposed to be. After all, imagine the alternative: Imagine constantly learning that “what is normal” and “who we are” are really social constructs maintained only through the Othering, the marginalization, the silencing of other possible worlds and selves. Imagine constantly learning, in other words, of our own complicity with oppression.

My point, here, is that perhaps we resist anti-oppressive practices because they trouble how we think and feel about not only the Other, but also ourselves. A good example is the refusal of many academics to engage with queer theory. As Fuss (1991) tells us, since the definition of “straight” requires the existence of “queer,” and since the privileging of heterosexuality requires the Othering of other sexualities, any effort to change what it means to be queer requires simultaneously changing what it means to be straight. So, too, with all other binaried identities. Our desire to teach and learn about the Other in traditional ways is a desire to maintain some sense of identity and normalcy. Therefore, difference is not merely something we have yet to learn, but something that we desire not to learn, something we (subconsciously) resist (Britzman, 1998). We resist learning what will disrupt the frameworks we traditionally use to make sense of the world and ourselves. (I will return to this notion of resistance later in this article.)

### *The Paradox of Addressing Partiality*

The “problem” with schools, then, is not merely that only certain voices are included. Since we can never hear all voices, such a view of the “problem” of curriculum leads either to a false sense of hope, as in, “I can solve this by including a representative selection of voices” (as if representatives can ever speak for the diversity that is in any group), or to a sense of despair, as in, “I can

never rectify this problem.” We need to acknowledge that there is a reason why certain voices are silenced in the first place (Scott, 1993). The problem, in other words, is also that we often *desire* hearing only certain voices, we desire the silencing of Others, and we desire the continuation of normalized teaching and learning practices.

Why are these desires a problem? Any assembly of voices indirectly tells an underlying *story*. The sum (i.e., the story) will always be greater than its parts (or, more accurately, will always exceed what the individual voices say explicitly). And the story then frames how we make sense of what it is we are learning, and of how it is our learnings relate to what we already know and to who we think we are. Some stories reinforce hegemonic frameworks for thinking about and acting in the world, others challenge them, and still others do both. Thus, stories always have political effects (Richardson, 1997); and the inclusion of more and different voices will tell not a “truer” story, but a different one, one with different political implications (Scott, 1993). What this means is, the desire to teach and learn in only certain ways stems from a desire (perhaps a subconscious one, perhaps not) to use only certain stories—especially the stories we have traditionally used—to make sense of the world and ourselves. And since the traditional stories are the ones that define normalcy (i.e., are the hegemonic ones), we ironically desire exactly what is harmful to ourselves.

It is easy to add difference to the curriculum in a way that complies with hegemony. As Spivak (1990) tells us, the inclusion of “ethnic literature” in English curricula can reflect an objectification of difference, where writers and literary critics of color, by making people of color into objects of (new) investigations, ironically contribute to a “new orientalism” or new form of colonialism. In fact, historically, the formation of “ethnic canons” (i.e., great works by writers of color) arguably reflects a commodification of difference, a type of currency in political correctness, since calls for inclusion grew as much out of the desire for change as the desire to appease the discontented (Palumbo-Liu, 1995). Capitalist structures and colonialist ideologies do permeate English curricula and can constitute their underlying “story.”

However, the underlying story can change. For example, often absent from lessons on what many call the Second World War is any discussion of the role women played in transforming the workforce in the United States; of the persecution of queers in Nazi Germany alongside Jews and other targeted groups; and of the forced relocation of Japanese Americans, many of them U.S. citizens, to internment camps primarily in the western United States. Such a unit indirectly tells a certain story about the war, something like the following: The Nazis were evil for persecuting the innocent Jews, the United States was the force of good in the face of this evil, the men in the United States helped save the world, and women/queers/Japanese Americans were not heroes, victims, or otherwise in this event. Were a teacher to try to cover more perspectives, the unit could expand to include women’s, queers’, and Japanese Americans’ voices. But if the expansion rests at saying “these other groups were also there, and now we have the full story,” such a move does not really change “the story,” at least the story of the United States. And that is the problem. We often expect that more voices added to the same story get the curriculum closer to telling a “truth” about World

War II because we assume that truth is learned when all perspectives are told. Haraway (1988), however, reminds us that knowledge is always partial and situated, shaped by social situations and personal identities that always color the lens through which we come to know. The juxtaposition of different or more voices into a curriculum does not get us closer to a truth, but it can give a different “story,” a different framework for thinking, identifying, and acting in oppressive and/or anti-oppressive ways.

The importance of inclusion, then, lies not merely in its broadening of perspectives, but also in its ability to change the underlying story of the curricular unit and its political effect. Rather than perpetuate a story that says “the United States was the force of good” (and perpetuate the notion that the United States is the big brother to the world, the place of freedom and righteousness, a meritocracy), the unit now can teach about the United States’ perpetuation of racism (against its own citizens) and homophobia (when it put queers from Nazi concentration camps right back into prisons), and perhaps tell a story of how “the United States acted in contradictory ways.” Rather than a story that privileges men, we might now tell a story of how patriarchal divisions of labor both influenced and were influenced by the war. The inclusive curriculum, in other words, not only can tell more about women, queers, and Japanese Americans; it can also change narratives of the United States’ role in simultaneously challenging and contributing to various oppressions. Were the curriculum to be inclusive in a different way (with voices from different groups, voices from different people within the same group, voices that contradict one another), the underlying story would change in yet other ways.

Such an insight can lead students to ask such questions as, “What story about the United States does the presence of these voices (and the absence of Other voices) tell us? When we add different voices, how does the story change? What knowledges and identities and practices do different configurations of voices make possible? Which stories justify the status quo? Which stories challenge the marginalization of certain groups and identities in society?” As students learn about differences, they can also constantly reflect on ways in which *what they learn* makes different knowledges, identities, and practices possible. In this way, anti-oppressive education is paradoxical: As educators and students *use* knowledge about differences to complicate current worldviews and identities and practices, they can simultaneously *trouble* that new knowledge by questioning the ways we teach and learn it, the stories they tell (or silence), and the political views and practices they make possible (or close off).

Anti-oppressive education involves constantly *looking beyond* what it is we teach and learn. This can happen when “adding” experiences of Others to social studies curricula, but it can also happen when adding contributions and practices of Others to math and science curricula. As Harding (1994) tells us, what we have come to call “truths” in the maths and sciences “are caused by social relations as well as by nature’s regularities and the operations of reason” (p. 353). So, just as there are social, political reasons why “history” consists of only what we have come to call history, so too is there a reason why “mathematics” and “science” consist of only what we have come to call mathematics and science. We desire hearing only certain (“scientific”) stories about the world in order to affirm our knowledges, identities, and prac-

tices. This is not to say that what we now know in mathematics and science is not important, or has not been immensely helpful in improving our lives—on the contrary, our knowledge has been very helpful in many ways. But just as there is much more to learn within what we call (Western) mathematics and science, so too are there alternative ways to know and act in the world through other mathematics and sciences.

If science and mathematics classrooms have traditionally taught science and math in only certain contexts and attempted to answer only certain questions, then students can be invited to learn sciences and maths in different contexts (Frankenstein & Powell, 1994), and use sciences and maths to answer different kinds of questions and solve different kinds of problems, especially problems relevant to their own lives (Ladson-Billings, 1995). They can even use sciences and maths to (con)test prior scientific/mathematical findings that have been used to privilege and marginalize different groups (such as findings that perpetuate stereotypes). Also, if science and mathematics classrooms are centered on approaches to science and math that claim universality (despite their necessary partiality), then students might critically respond by exploring alternative approaches (such as approaches that explore chaos and contradiction and the impossibility of totality), and seek not an understanding of *what is math/science*, but an exploration of *what do different approaches to math/science make possible and impossible in terms of understanding the world and addressing different problems* (Fleener, 1999; Shulman, 1996)?

To put it another way, mathematics and sciences can be taught in ways that constantly *look beyond* what is being learned and what is already known. As with teaching social studies, educators can approach the teaching of maths and sciences in paradoxical ways: simultaneously learn new knowledge, while critiquing the very ways we come to know; simultaneously learn about the contributions of science and math, while exploring ways that science and math have closed off further learning, privileged only certain knowledges, and in the process, contributed to oppression. Educators can teach students to be not only mathematicians and scientists, but also math critics and science critics (Harding, 1994), just as we teach students to be social critics (not only sociologists and historians) and literary critics (not only readers and writers).

In English classrooms, since curricula often face problems with the politics of representation (and the difficulties of inclusion), students can learn to *read texts in critical ways*. As I already noted, including different literatures can be problematic if students read the texts as merely a way to get to know differences. Since no text (such as a novel) on, say, Native Americans can ever reflect all voices within Native American communities, the knowledge we gain from any text will always be partial (Butler, 1997). Such partiality means that, inevitably, the text will reflect the realities of some people but miss those of others; it will represent the voices of some groups but silence those of others; and in doing so, it will challenge some stereotypes while reinforcing others. Using texts as ways to know Others will always work against oppression in contradictory ways. This is also true when we acknowledge that texts can never tell the “whole” story, since even texts used to tell “representative” stories are problematic when we expect that they actually “tell” us about difference.

Texts are never transparent media that give us access or entry to a different reality. They are always partial re-presentations of what it is they tell us about. My argument, here, is not unlike post-modernist critiques of research write-ups that present qualitative data in the form of block quotations (Richardson, 1997). Interpreting voices as if they are “literal representations” (Britzman, 1995) or transparent and stable “mirrors” of reality (Scheurich, 1995) obscures the history and context in which the text was and still is being produced, and tends to conflate tellings of events with the actual events (Fine, 1994). There is always a difference between the text/telling and the object of the telling.

Furthermore, using texts as ways to know difference is problematic when we acknowledge not merely that texts have silences, but that they have necessary silences. Just as I earlier argued that identities have meaning because of what they are not (i.e., whom they exclude), so too do texts have meaning because of what they leave unsaid (Marshall, 1992). The unsaid is what gives the said its meaning. U.S. literature, for example, never has to explicitly privilege Whiteness since what is unspoken (though still present), namely, the “Black shadow,” does much to accomplish this task (Morrison, 1992). Yet, conventional readings of texts, such as readings that look at universal meanings of texts (e.g., their themes, the intentions of the writers, and the development of the characters) or that look at personal connections to the texts (such as similarities between the reader and the characters, and the reader’s opinions about how the story could have ended differently) treat what is said in the text as its reality, as the embedded “meaning” of the text (O’Neill, 1993). Such readings fail to treat as central to their analysis what is unsaid (as well as what we *do not want* to say), how both the said and the unsaid constitute the underlying story, and how the effects of that story are often hegemonic.

Just as social studies, science, and mathematics curricula need to look beyond what is being represented, so too do English curricula. In particular, since different ways of reading texts have different effects, students can learn to read texts in multiple and anti-oppressive ways. This can be done on two levels. First, students can learn to read for silences and the effects of those silences on the “meaning” of a text (Ellsworth, 1997). For example, rather than ask, “What does this novel tell us about, say, queer youth?” teachers can ask, “What questions does this novel raise about queer youth? Which stereotypes of queer youth does this novel reinforce, and which ones does it challenge? In general, what is not said in this novel about queer youth, and how do those silences make possible and impossible different ways of thinking about queer youth, about homophobia, about the reader’s own sexual identities, and about change?” Educators can teach that the partiality of texts is exactly what makes texts useful for anti-oppressive education.

Second, students can learn to examine their desire to read in particular ways and their resistance to reading in other ways, and can do so with the understanding that some reading practices are desired because they are more comforting (though more oppressive) than others (Morris, 1998). For example, besides asking, “What does this text tell us about, say, White American working classes?” teachers also can ask, “What are different ways to read this text, what different knowledges about White American working classes does each reading give, and perhaps most importantly, why do we traditionally learn to read about White

American working classes in only certain ways?” O’Neill (1993) tells us that such an approach to teaching literature—that is, teaching literature as cultural criticism—looks beyond any false notion that there are meanings embedded in texts. It refuses to limit learning to what is said in the text. To read critically is not merely to read texts that say critical things. Instead, as O’Neill suggests, to read critically is to ask such questions as, “What are possible readings of this text? How are particular readings of characters marginalized or privileged? How are cultural issues of race, gender, class, or religion produced by different readings of texts? What are possible endings for this story, and how do these alternatives shift possible readings of the text?”

Such critical reading practices contrast with traditional reading practices that end up repeating our sense of normalcy. This is not surprising since teaching as cultural criticism involves explicitly trying to read against commonsense interpretations of literature. And that is exactly what makes this process difficult. As I argued earlier, we often desire to teach/learn/read/identify in traditional ways and these desires form a cycle: Just as how a reader reads is greatly influenced by the reader’s identities and life experiences (Haraway, 1988), so too are the ways a reader identifies and makes sense of the world influenced by how the reader reads (Sumara & Davis, 1998). Not surprisingly, we are invested in reading in particular ways in order to maintain our own sense of self. This investment is what educators can address. We can help readers overcome their desire to read in traditional ways, and be open to reading in ways that bring about change.

In this section, I have described how the “posts” writings suggest approaches to teaching that embrace unknowability and paradox in education, embark on multiple ways of knowing, and look beyond what is already known. I have concluded by suggesting that such approaches to anti-oppressive education confront significant forms of resistance to difference and change among students. In the next section, I explore ways the “posts” writings suggest addressing these resistances.

### **Resistance, Crisis, and Resignifying the Self**

Anti-oppressive education that aims to change students and society cannot do so without addressing the ways students and society resist change. As I discussed in the previous section, people do not often desire learning about our own complicity with oppression, and when we do learn such things, the process is rarely easy (Ellsworth, 1997; Felman, 1995; Luhmann, 1998; Pitt, 1998). Learning about oppression and unlearning (Britzman, 1998) what we had previously learned is normal and normative can be upsetting. In particular, learning that *the very ways in which we think and do things is not only partial but oppressive* can be a very discomforting process, a form of “crisis” (Felman, 1995), and thus, is not what we typically desire. Yet, “education” is not something that involves repeating what one already knows. Rather, education involves learning something different, learning something new, learning something that disrupts one’s commonsense view of the world. The crisis that results from unlearning, then, is a necessary and desirable part of anti-oppressive education. By implication, learning to overcome one’s desire for the comforting repetition of normative knowledges, identities, and experiences involves learning to desire the discomforting process of unlearning. Desiring change involves *desiring to learn through crisis*.

Learning through crisis is perhaps most easily foreseeable in social studies classrooms where critical (Freire, 1995) discussions of social differences and oppressions become central to the curriculum. Lessons that critique, for example, the harmfulness of stereotypes and the invisible histories of institutionalized oppression can involve confronting one’s own prejudices and acknowledging the harmfulness of one’s own practices (such as when we unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes or comply with institutionalized oppression). These consciousness-raising processes can be emotionally upsetting and can require time and space in the curriculum to work through the resulting crisis before proceeding with the more academic part of the curriculum (Kumashiro, 1999a). Furthermore, working to bring about change in oneself as well as in society can be very labor intensive, and may need to be a process that happens year-round and not only in isolated and rare moments. Change (of the student and of society) cannot happen in predictable, controllable lessons: Students are never exactly who we think they are, they never come from exactly where we think they do, and they never respond exactly as expected. Anti-oppressive education is not an easy, rational, straightforward process, and pretending otherwise can actually contribute to additional forms of oppression (Ellsworth, 1992). Therefore, an anti-oppressive education that expects crisis for both student and teacher may need to create a space in the curricula where students can enter and work through crisis in ways unforeseeable by the teacher.

Unfortunately, what happens in classrooms is often not crisis, and not change, but rather, repetition and comfort for both student and teacher. This is the case not only in social studies classrooms. In English classrooms, for example, essays are often assigned to allow students to show who they are or what they know. The problem is that, as with research and literary texts, the writings of students are never transparent re-presentations of, in this case, their minds and souls. All texts, and words themselves, are partial. And even if they were not partial, the use of writings as demonstrative or representative of who the students are or what they know limits the potential of the writing process to bring about anti-oppressive change in the writer (and, arguably, in the reader as well). As Richardson (1997) suggests, writing can be not only representative (where we try to re-present something textually), but also performative (where the process of writing brings about difference in the writer), which means that writing can be less about repetition (i.e., retelling) and more about change.

In many English classes, instructors assign essays in which students are to explain the theories covered in class, or synthesize the readings, or critique the readings/texts, or connect the readings/texts to the students’ lives or observations. For such assignments, the standards for evaluation (i.e., signs that the student “got it” or “did well”) are often signs of repetition, such as the main points of the readings, or critiques of the readings that are supported by other writings, or connections to personal lives that draw on frameworks students have earlier used to make sense of their lives or observations. Furthermore, in addition to the *content* of the essay, repetition is often required in the *structure* of the essay. In particular, essays are considered “academic” when they engage in forms of citation, of invoking the authority of someone who spoke earlier (Zenger, 1999), and essays are considered “well written” when they adhere to already existing models of what is

“good academic writing.” By learning to be “good writers,” students are necessarily being constructed into subjects that were predetermined by “standards” in academia. In saying this, I do not advocate abandoning all academic essay writing since different types of writing assignments accomplish different things. However, I do suggest interrupting the privilege of certain ways of writing as we trouble what it means to write. Writing assignments cannot be limited to what teachers already know, that is, the proper academic essay. Writing will not be anti-oppressive if it is always forced to repeat and adhere to limited stories or frameworks of what it means to learn.

This applies even to assignments that ask students to reflect on their own lives, namely, autobiographies. Miller (1998) critiques the ways many educators assign autobiographies in their classrooms, noting that “telling one’s story” not only presumes a rational development of a singular subject from ignorance to enlightenment, but also privileges the developmental model as “the story,” making other stories unthinkable and untellable. Such a modernist use of autobiography merely repeats already-told stories, “reinscribes already normalized identity categories,” and forecloses the possibility of seeing oneself in ways neither the student nor the teacher could have predicted. Instead, Miller argues that autobiography should engage not in repetition (and mirroring the already-familiar stories), but in resignification (and making one’s story unfamiliar and unnatural, to both the student and the teacher). Can we imagine an assignment where teachers ask students to write in ways that trouble the already-familiar stories? Can we imagine an assignment where the product is less important than the process? And, can we imagine an assignment where students are helped to resist repeating their and their teachers’ knowledges, identities, and practices, and to engage in the discomforting process of resignifying knowledges, identities, and practices? Writing, like reading, can be about changing “who we are” and “how things are,” but such a move cannot come about if we insist on repeating the same stories of what it means to “do” a writing assignment or to “be” an English student.

So, too, with mathematics and sciences. One commonsense view of when a student has “learned” math and science is “that the foundations have become ‘obvious’ and disappeared from view; one is able to take the basic axioms for granted and use them correctly and unselfconsciously” (Shulman, 1996, p. 449). Students have learned math and science, in other words, when they think mathematically and scientifically as do other mathematicians and scientists. Learning math and science is about engaging in the repetition of “doing math” and “doing science.” And not surprisingly, given the colonialist, patriarchal, Eurocentric, and heterosexist nature of (Western) mathematics and science, commonsense definitions of “good teachers” and “effective math/science education” that center on such views of “learning math/science” actually hinder efforts towards equity in education (Secada, 1995). Teaching in commonsense ways cannot help but maintain social inequities.

If educators are to contest the proper domains of maths and sciences, and critique the ways they are already complicit with oppression, then it seems contradictory to require that all students acquire certain standards of knowledge about and skills within what we currently call math and science. Meeting standards is, like many forms of essay writing, a practice of repetition

(repeating predetermined knowledge), a practice that closes off the possibilities of learning what has yet to be known (by both student and teacher). Meeting standards focuses on only how we already “do” math and science, and ignores the other possibilities of doing. Furthermore, meeting standards assumes that teachers can know and control the processes of teaching and learning. Yet, as Ellsworth (1997) tells us, teaching involves a great deal of unknowability. We cannot fully know who our students are, we cannot control what they learn, we cannot know with certainty what it is they actually learn, and we cannot even be certain that what we want them to learn is what is in their best interest to learn. To acknowledge the unknowability of teaching is to acknowledge that teachers cannot say ahead of time what we want students to learn, what we will do to get them there, and how we will then determine if they got there—which is a popular format for lesson planning. Therefore, maths and sciences education cannot be about only giving students what we traditionally consider to be mathematical and scientific knowledges and skills. Such an emphasis on official knowledge (Apple, 1993) closes off anti-oppressive possibilities for change. I do not advocate abandoning all instruction in how we currently “do” math/science, but I do suggest interrupting the privilege of current ways of doing.

At the very least, educators can recognize that different communities and cultural groups develop different practices for working with numbers and thinking numerically, not only cultural groups around the world, but also cultural groups within the United States, including ethnic communities, children in different age groups, and professional groups (D’Ambrosio, 1985; Nelson-Barber & Estrin, 1995). The “numeracy” (Street, 2000) being taught in mathematics and science classrooms, then, is only one of many approaches to calculating, solving, predicting, modeling, and so forth. An anti-oppressive mathematics and science classroom can teach in ways that draw on Delpit’s (1986, 1988) theory of the culture of power: Teachers can learn where students are coming from, build from students’ own cultural proficiencies, and make connections between ways students are already numerate/scientific and ways they need to be numerate/scientific to succeed in mainstream schools and society (Lee, 1999). Anti-oppressive math and science education cannot close off the “proper domain” of maths and sciences with a set of already-known stories about what really “is” math and science. To aim for standards is to make students into who we already know we want them to be, and that is problematic when our knowledge is always partial.

In summary, anti-oppressive education works against commonsense views of what it means to teach. Teachers must move beyond their preconceived notions of what it means to teach, and students must move beyond their current conceptions of what it means to learn. Anti-oppressive education involves constantly re-examining and troubling the forms of repetition that play out in one’s practices and that hinder attempts to challenge oppressions. It involves desiring and working through crisis rather than avoiding and masking it. It involves contesting the standards that currently define education in the disciplines. And it involves imagining new possibilities for who we are and can be.

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

What does this all mean for the training of teachers? Little has been written about anti-oppressive teacher education that makes

use of these “posts” theories. More research needs to be done on what happens in classrooms when teachers try to do this work, including in disciplines not discussed in this article such as second-language learning, physical education, and the arts; on how to prepare teachers to teach in these ways; and on how the field of anti-oppressive educational research itself can continue to look beyond what it already knows, such as by exploring theories, data sources, and research methodologies that remain silenced or marginalized.

Nonetheless, the theories explored in this article do suggest implications for at least three areas of teacher education: instruction in academic areas, preparation for lesson planning, and supervision of student teaching experiences. First, instruction in the academic areas. The same suggestions for anti-oppressive education in social studies, English, mathematics, and science classrooms in K–12 schools apply to anti-oppressive education in similar classrooms at the university level. In other words, for student teachers, preparation to teach in anti-oppressive ways involves receiving the same type of instruction from their professors (in the core disciplines) as their future students will receive from them. The barriers, here, are substantial. In higher education, traditional signs of “knowing” the discipline—such as high grades in coursework and publications in peer-reviewed journals—are often equated with an ability to teach the discipline. Professors do not normally receive training in how to teach, much less in how to teach in anti-oppressive ways, and not surprisingly, by relying on past experience, commonsense, and models of former instructors, professors generally teach what is traditionally taught, and do so in traditional ways. An anti-oppressive teacher education program may need to train professors in the core disciplines to teach in anti-oppressive ways, but at the very least it can teach student teachers to constantly “look beyond” the official knowledge being taught in their college courses.

As student teachers are taught differently, they can also be assessed differently, by which I mean they can receive the same type of assessments from their professors and from certification agencies that their future students will receive from them. For example, when preparing to teach mathematics, student teachers cannot be evaluated based only on how well they are able to repeat what currently constitutes “mathematics,” such as its theorems, its terminology, and its applications. “Learning math” also consists of (continually) developing the abilities and desires to look beyond what is already known, such as to see what is made possible by other forms of mathematics. Current national calls to test the discipline-based knowledge of teachers ensure only that teachers can engage in repetition, and do little to reflect any ability to teach in anti-oppressive ways. Anti-oppressive teacher education involves teaching student teachers not only to *think mathematically*, but also to *think about mathematics* differently.

The second implication of the “posts” theories centers on how to help student teachers learn to plan lessons. As I argued earlier, teaching involves a great deal of unknowability, making it literally impossible to fully know who our students are and how teachers affect them with what they teach. Recognizing unknowability requires departing from a rigid adherence to the traditional model of teaching in which teachers think in terms of what they wish to achieve (i.e., the objective), what they will do to achieve their objectives (i.e., the activities), and what will tell them how well they have achieved their objectives (i.e., the as-

essments). This is not to say that such a format should be abandoned, but lesson plans need space for the unpredictable and uncontrollable things that always get in the way of knowing our students and achieving our objectives.

Learning to plan lessons is not unlike learning subject matter in the core disciplines—both involve paradoxically using new knowledge while troubling the ways we came to know. Student teachers can learn to tailor their lessons to the individualities of their students, while recognizing the partiality of their knowledge of students and, thus, constantly retailoring their lessons as they search for different readings of their students. Student teachers can learn to plan lessons that center on clear objectives, while recognizing the impossibility of teaching in controllable ways and, thus, constantly rethinking their implementation. Perhaps most importantly, student teachers can learn that reflecting on lessons involves asking not merely, “what ‘worked’?” It also involves asking, “what did this lesson make possible and impossible? In what ways did it enable repetition, crisis, change, and so forth?” In other words, student teachers can learn that there is no panacea, that there is no one best way to teach, and that there is no one correct way to make sense of what happens in the classroom. In fact, student teachers can learn that even “proven” lessons or “master” teachers act in both oppressive and anti-oppressive ways. Learning to teach, as with learning a discipline, should not be a mere repetition of already-told stories about what it means to teach well. This is what makes teaching a process that never “works” and is in constant need of “working through.”

The third implication of the “posts” theories centers on the supervision of student teaching experiences. There are many ways to observe student teachers. For example, just as readers often focus solely on what is said in, say, a novel, so too do supervisors often focus solely on what is said, on what is explicit, on what is visible in the classroom. The supervisor observes the subject matter being taught in order to ensure it is correct and appropriate. The supervisor observes the responses of students in order to assess whether the lessons were planned thoughtfully and implemented effectively. The supervisor observes interactions in the classroom in order to record instances where students are being marginalized or privileged. These are important observations to make. However, when the supervisor privileges these kinds of observations, the student teaching experience becomes one of repetition: of repeating the official knowledge in the disciplines, of repeating the lesson plan as if teaching did not involve unknowability, and of repeating the commonsense view that oppression consists only of observable acts and interactions.

Therefore, anti-oppressive supervision of student teaching experiences involves focusing on both what is said/visible and what is not said/visible in the classroom. In addition to what is included in the curriculum, the supervisor can ask the student teacher about what is not included in the curriculum, and what those silences may be teaching indirectly. In addition to what occurred in the classroom and how that matched or did not match the intentions behind the lesson plan, the supervisor can ask the student teacher about what did not occur in the classroom, or what occurred but was not intentional; about ways students were addressed by the lesson, and ways students were missed; and about what learnings, interactions, insights, and changes were made possible by this lesson, and what was closed off. Finally, in

addition to the visible interactions that served to marginalize or privilege different students, the supervisor can ask the student teacher about ways students or groups or identities were being marginalized or privileged in invisible, unobservable ways, including ways that arise through patterns established only over time. The hidden curriculum is no less important than the formal one, and thus, anti-oppressive teacher education involves focusing observations, support, and evaluations of student teaching experiences as much on what is being taught and learned intentionally and visibly as on what is being taught and learned unintentionally and indirectly.

The “posts” perspectives on anti-oppressive teaching and teacher education resist offering utopian practices. They do, however, suggest approaches to troubling our own practices and imagining different possibilities for teaching and learning. By urging us to look beyond the repetition of commonsense and tradition that often helps perpetuate multiple forms of oppression in schools and society, they are able to offer insights that can help improve the educational experiences of all our students.

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