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Against Rubbish Collecting: Educators & Resistively Ambivalent Youth

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Abstract

As a researcher whose childhood and adolescence were socially and culturally shaped by domestic violence, I am dedicated to challenging the multiple disparities/identities reproduced on the bodies of youth with histories of childhood domestic violence in public schools. This article evokes Bauman (2004), Bakhtian analysis (1984), post-colonial, critical sociocultural, and (dis)ability theory to offer the argument that youth with histories of domestic violence resist violating/violent practices in public schools. Educational practices and discourses that create disordered identities for such youth are re-envisioned in this article.

Children know more than we wish they knew; they know as much, if not more than we know. And yet our fetish for ignorance, our desire not to know, produces a discursive representation of the innocent child who cannot handle the talk... We think it is important to recognize that children are struggling for dignity within structures which are struggling to shut them down.

--Weis, Marusza, & Fine, 1998, p. 57)

The statistics are staggering regarding children and youth whose lives have been socially and culturally shaped by childhood domestic violence: Every year, 3.3 million reports of child abuse are made in the U.S. involving nearly 6 million children (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2006*). These youth make up the bulk of the American foster care system and constitute a majority of the youth who have come to be labeled as emotionally and behaviorally disordered (EBD) in American public schools (*Administration for Children and Families, 2004*). Data on the school success among these youth are equally troubling, for these youth often share unsuccessful schooling experiences with those who are socially and culturally marginalized in other ways, such as through racialized opportunity gaps or poverty (Berliner, 2009; Carnoy & Rothstein, 2013). Compounding these realities is the disturbing fact that domestic violence is a greater common denominator than race or poverty for U.S. prisoners. Acoca (1998) found in her study of 3200 incarcerated girls that ninety-two percent had experienced one or more forms of abuse (p. 565). At best, the schooling landscape is bleak for many--if not most--of these abused youth (Pyscher & Lozenski, 2014).

This article describes how youth with histories and real-time experiences of childhood/adolescent domestic violence (e.g., physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect) are commonly positioned as objects of disorder in our public school systems. As we know, being tagged and labeled in deficit ways dramatically impacts how one experiences schooling. This article also attempts to unravel entangled sets of deficit discourses and related practices that constitute how certain youth who have histories of childhood domestic violence are understood as disordered subjects. It begins with an explanation on how labeled youth (e.g., emotionally behaviorally disordered) have come to be constructed and studied from the perspectives of disability studies, critical sociocultural, postcolonial, and poststructural scholars. This inquiry goes beyond philosophical play, using a similar analysis grounded in Biesta's (2013) method for discerning subjectivity through one's existence. She contends,

The idea about speaking the truth about the human being for me, therefore, [is] not just a philosophical question...it was first and foremost an educational, a political, and an existential question... I tried to find a language that could capture how the subject exists. (see Winter, 2011, p. 110)

The article continues with discussing how the existing and intersecting scholarship offers an alternative view of youth with histories of domestic violence and the roles that educators can play in re-imagining their relationships and practices with these young people in public schools.

The tagging process of *disorder* did not originate in schools or with educators, but rather through greater authoritative bodies like that of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the industrial health care complex. In turn, educators, through their pedagogies and practices took up these deficit-oriented discourses in response to youth with histories of domestic violence who often resisted traditional models of schooling. Typical teaching practices in response to disordered youth are ones of pity and punishment. Tagging youth with childhood histories of domestic violence as disordered can be thought of as an act of discarding *human waste* (Bauman, 2004) or what Pyscher & Lozenski (2014) refer to as "throwaway youth" (p. 531). Bauman describes such acts as rubbish collecting, or form of maintenances forced on "wasted humans, meaning--the 'excessive' and the 'redundant' that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay" (p. 5). He also claims that acts of collection are an "inevitable outcome of modernization... It is an inescapable side-effect of

order-building (each order casts some parts of the extant population as ‘out of place’, ‘unfit’ or ‘undesirable’...” (p. 5). Using the theoretical works of Bauman (2004), critical sociocultural theory (Bakhtin, 1981; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007), postcolonial theory (Said, 1977; Smith, 1999), poststructural analysis (Foucault, 1973, 1977, 1980; Laws, 2011) and disability studies (Baker, 1999, 2002; Mitchell and Snyder 2006), this article explores the relationship between how youth with childhood histories of domestic violence are positioned as waste in public schools and in response, enact resistive ambivalence (Pyscher, 2012a, 2013; Pyscher & Lozenski, 2014) to deficit-based educational practices.

The Discourse of the ‘Traumatized/Disordered’ Other

It is perfectly natural for the human mind to resist the assault on it of untreated strangeness; therefore cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be.

--Said, *Orientalism*, 1978

As a critical educational researcher with a viewpoint shaped by long-term childhood/adolescent domestic violence, I am compelled to challenge what I call the Discourse of the disordered Other (Gee, 2014). From Gee’s (2014) perspective and similar to Foucault, dominant discourses, or what he refers to as “Big D” discourses, emerge out of “our words and deeds, [and] have talked to each other through history and in doing so, form human history” (p. 35). Foucault’s (1980) words also help to frame the analysis on the subject of the disordered/marginalized Other, explaining the complicated tension of subjectivity/objectivity, like that of the disordered Other, and traces how objectified deficit identities emerge. He states that our representation of others are “just fragments, and it is up to you or me to see what we can make of them.” He continues with a fitting metaphor, for my part, it has struck me that I might have seemed a bit like a whale that leaps to the surface of the water disturbing it momentarily with a tiny jet of spray and lets it be believed, or pretends to believe, or wants to believe, or himself does in fact indeed believe, that down in the depths where no one sees him any more, where he is no longer witnessed nor controlled by anyone, he follows a more profound, coherent and reasoned trajectory.” (p.79)

Using Foucault’s (1965, 1973) method of genealogical discourse analysis helps to unravel “a more profound, coherent and reasoned trajectory” that documents and outlines the history of disordered subjects. Rogers (2002) suggests that these dominant discourses occur in the local (e.g., classroom interactions, special education meetings), the institutional (e.g., district decisions on special education funding), and the societal (e.g., policy) settings (p. 215). Laws (2011), in her seven-year study of emotionally behaviorally disordered (EBD) youth, chooses to take up the definition of discourse offered by Weedon (1987), who claims, “discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern” (p. 108). To some extent and not unlike other sociocultural marginalizations (e.g., race, gender), (dis)abilities studies scholars Mitchell and Snyder (2006) contend, “Nearly every culture views disability as a problem in need of a solution”... which... “situates people with disabilities in a profoundly ambivalent relationship to the cultures and stories they inhabit” (p. 205). McDermott, Goldman, and Varenne (2006) trace the histories of classification by mental ability suggesting that such efforts “...accurately or not, has been a politically rewarded activity.” These rewards have

positioned those in power "...into ability and disposition groups that they cannot escape" (p. 12). McDermott and Varenne (1995) claim that an "explosion" of disabilities of deficit have emerged more recently, often objectifying children and youth while none of these representations "...guarantees a balance point between showing how bad things are in the lives of children who need our help and showing how the problem is a product of cultural arrangements—a *product of our own activities*..." (p. 331). Baker (2002) asserts that labeling practices reduce "...the totality of someone's humanity to a so-called 'trait' (p. 690) and that such "proliferation" over the last couple of decades serves to "mark students outside the norm of child development or at-risk of school failure" (p. 676). As evidenced, the acts of classifying humans and the organizing of cultural arrangements beg for Foucauldian analysis.

The practice of labeling are common acts that allow distinctions and categories to arise that often reestablish what norms are to be performed in service to maintaining the *status quo*. Ferri and Connor's (2005) study outlines the dynamic interplay between racism and abelism. It becomes clear that discourses like individualization and developmentalism serve an important role in the discourse of normalization. Individualization and developmentalism play an often harmful role in the objectification of youth who are institutionally labeled as disordered and are firmly rooted in Enlightenment thinking that promotes the belief that each individual human develops through his or her own individualized experiences (Baker, 1999; Corker and Shakespeare, 2006). Such binary shaping discourses (e.g., normal v. abnormal) often marginalize most to all sociocultural experiences that seem determined to settle on fixed (and individualized) states of identity, rather than viewing identity as multiple and ever shifting. These (dis)abilities scholars explain the powerful use of the genealogical method, as it allowed them to "attend carefully to discourse, particularly local, unofficial knowledge, in order to trace how the language of exclusion worked in everyday contexts" (Ferri & Connor, 2004, p. 462). Foucault (1983) argues that such a method helps to unravel how an object of discourse (e.g., disordered Other) becomes "an overall discursive fact" (p. 211) and how such a label sustains, maintains, and reifies itself in all kinds of institutional Discourses.

Disorderliness in Institutional Schooling

The saddest part of a juvenile judge's job is watching the progress of a tiny victim as he or she is molded by the system into a delinquent and eventually a criminal. (Estella Mary Moriarty, Circuit Court Judge; *from* Bernstein, 2014, p. 151)

In the K-12 public school systems, the Discourse of the disordered Other is routinely found in conversations about youth with childhood histories of domestic violence that are commonly euphemized with deficit-ridden labels like *troubled*, *problem student*, or *emotionally behaviorally disordered/disturbed*. These discourses of the disordered can be described as an act of Othering, identifying these youth as being in need of treatment-oriented pedagogies in an attempt to *reorder* their violent experiences in childhood and adolescence. Ironically, these treatment-oriented pedagogies tend to reproduce similar violating experiences. Britzman (2003) suggests that institutionally sanctioned discourses, "... [position] the subject in a dual way: in relation to what and how something is said and in relation to a community that makes particular practices possible and others unavailable" (p. 3). As explored later, the resistance of these tagged youth disrupts not only deficit-oriented teaching practices, but also the project of patriarchy (e.g., domestic violence as a norm), profitable economic systems (e.g., funding for special education), and the lucrative practices of incarceration. As a whole, a persistent tension lies between who gets agency (or not) in relation to resources and particular ways of being.

Vadeboncoeur & Luke (2004) suggest that labels like *emotionally behaviorally disordered* serve as signifiers, and when combined with other signifiers like *deviance*, they become “magnified by the discourse of ‘youth at risk,’ which creates youth as subjects at risk both discursively and materially” (p. 204). Subsequently, youth with histories of domestic violence make up a significant portion of the suspension and incarceration rates in our schools and prisons. This arrangement is costly for multiple institutions like schools and profitable for others like the industrial health care complex. It is in the profit that redundancy occurs for these so-called wasted youth with childhood histories of domestic violence. Thomas & Glenny (2000) claim the label of emotionally behaviorally disorder (EBD) signifies:

“A term that too conveniently packages together difficult, troublesome children with emotional disturbance. In its use is an insidious blurring of motives and knowledges, which imputes problems to children that in reality are rarely theirs. In the dispositional attributions that are therein made, unnecessarily complex judgments about punitive need take the place of simple judgments about what is acceptable or unacceptable behavior for a particular institution. Use of the term “EBD” enables the substitution of the former for the latter—of the complex for the straightforward—and this in turn perpetuates a mindset about behavior which distracts attention from what the school can do to make itself a more humane place” (p. 294).

Under the demands of cognitivist-behaviourist dominant discourses, Laws (2011) goes as far as to claim that our dependency on validity and scientific truth dedicated to intervention techniques and subsequent labeling discourages more complicated social analysis that considers other causal factors, such as living under the conditions of child abuse or poverty that play out as youths’ cultural responses. Deficit objectification embodied in labels like “antisocial, behaviourally disturbed or disordered, delinquent or pre-delinquent, and/or severely emotional disturbed” then become easily applied representations (Laws, p. 42). Such objectifications then become acceptable reasons for removing youth labeled as disordered. Our public institutions tend to ensure that youth with childhood histories of domestic violence often remain out of view and marginalized, deeming them as wasted lives or throwaway youth (Pyscher & Lozenski, 2014).

As a parallel to the Discourse of disordered Other and its relation to punitive and treatment-oriented pedagogies, I make use of Said’s (1978) description of how Western colonial officials’ discourses shaped the lives of non-Western subjects. Said explained this relationship as one where the Western colonizer “... knows how they [the colonized] feel since he knows their history, their reliance upon such as he, and their expectations” and “... that they are a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves” (p. 35-36). Like other people who have been socially marginalized, youth with childhood histories of domestic violence share identities of deficit and disorder. I contend that the discursive formation of the disordered Other helps to identify these youth as disordered subjects in need of treatment-oriented pedagogies in attempts to *reorder* their violent childhood experiences. Laws (2011) writes: “perhaps the practices used by the state are not intended to be so very effective... perhaps the strategies are critical for producing, in contrast, the normative subject. The actual intended product is not the child who is in need of help but the one who is not” (p. 109). Similar to this analysis, I suggest that public schools marginalize youth

with childhood histories of domestic violence through acts of medicalized labeling in service to other people's children deemed as normal youth.

It is an old story—privilege begets privilege. Public schools mostly work to protect compliant children from their disordered/disturbed counterparts as a service to other people's children, families, communities, and governmental agencies that comply and sustain their privilege (e.g., raced or classed) by removing and further marginalizing youth who choose mostly not to comply with the overt and at times, the masked oppressive pedagogies found in public schools. (Pyscher & Lozenski, 2014, p. 538-39)

To better understand how the discursive formation of the disordered Other is constructed and how it subsequently shapes teachers practices within the public school context, I turn my attention to the regulatory forces that overwhelmingly influence the constructed identity of these youth as disordered subjects. These regulatory forces include the Veterans Administration through the federal government, organizations like the American Psychiatric Association (APA), who produce a manual for mental illness called the DSM-V (2013), and for-profit insurance companies who use the DSM-V to allocate funds for diagnosed mental illnesses (e.g., special education labels). Youth diagnoses are actions in service to greater profits for pharmacological companies and their associations like that of the APA. Fairclough (2001) claims, “from the perspective of bureaucratic rationality, people are often objects to be ordered, checked, registered, shifted, and so forth” (p. 175). Imagine what shifts would occur in teacher pedagogy if we quit treating/teaching youth with childhood traumatic histories of domestic violence as broken, wasted lives.

Bauman (2004) argues, “for anyone who is once excluded and assigned to waste there are no obvious return paths to fully fledged membership. Nor are there any alternative, officially endorsed and mapped roads one could follow...towards an alternative title to belonging” (p. 16). Bauman's assertion demands an explanation of why these practices continue to occur. What is maintained in labeling youth with childhood histories of domestic violence as disordered? What purpose do self-contained spaces like EBD classrooms or prisons serve? Furthermore, is it not a euphemistic compliant-oriented act to identify such *perceptive* people as disordered? Schools are assumed to be safe spaces for children and youth. When disordered youth garner such intense attention and disrupt this sense of safety (compliance), schools and educators often claim that such youth should be removed into self-contained spaces like EBD classrooms or spaces for in-school suspension (ISS) so that they can be safe. In terms of removal, we can now add the euphemism *for safety's sake* to a long list of marginalizing acts enacted towards some of our most resistant and marginalized youth who are in need of treatment and containment.

Youth with histories of domestic violence are repeatedly labeled at-risk in the most detrimental and yet acceptable ways. The identities of these youth are often defined by governmental labels like SED (seriously emotionally disturbed). Of course, what follows governmental labels is money, and these discourses are big business, as mentioned earlier. SED is the current label that public schools are *required* to use to receive special education funds. But these institutions refuse to recognize their culpability in the very construction of the violent/disordered Other. Britzman (2003) argues that such actions attempt “to maintain an orderly and efficient society necessary to the underlying values of social control. Such a vision is based upon repression; the individual's potential to become something other than what has been predicted is diminished” (p. 47). Within

a school setting, how are these youth, whose sociocultural life experiences were forged through domestic violence, to respond in navigating violating/violent practices thrust upon their bodies by educational staff and greater societal discourses of disorder and removal?

Resistive Ambivalence and the Act of Rubbish Collecting

Finally, let us point out that the grotesque body is cosmic and universal. It stresses elements common to the entire cosmos: earth, water, fire, air; it is directly related to the sun, to the stars. It contains the signs of the zodiac. It reflects the cosmic hierarchy. This body can merge with various natural phenomena, with mountains, rivers, seas, islands, and continents. It can fill the entire universe.

-(Bakhtin, 1984, p. 318)

When we throw human beings out as waste, they respond in kind. Smith (1999) contends: “An object has no life force, no humanity, no spirit of its own, so therefore ‘it’ cannot make an active contribution” (p. 61). But I contend that youth with histories of domestic violence contribute through their performance of culturally resistive responses to the violating/violent discursive practices of institutional systems and their ever-present authoritative and ideological presence. Evoking Bakhtin (1981, in Morris, 1994), I argue that children’s habitus and cultural practices (Bourdieu, 1997; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), socially and culturally constructed out of experiences of domestic violence, are a refracted image and response to our inherently violent authoritative structures. Subsequently, these children and youth resist authoritative practices through liberatory acts of *carnival as a lived experience* (Pyscher, 2012a, 2013). This resistance can be described as a defense against a variety of authoritative actions. Fine (1994) helps to describe the power of these actions by noting how power is shaped by our social world, “Such structures are posited as largely invisible to common sense ways of making meaning but visible to those who probe below hegemonic meaning systems to produce counterhegemonic knowledge, knowledge intended to challenge dominant meaning systems” (p. 25-26). I make use of Bakhtin’s concept of *carnival* (Bakhtin, 1981, in Morris, 1994) to explain the resistant ambivalence performed by youth with childhood histories of domestic violence in the face of school-based oppressive acts. Elliot (1999) claims, “Carnival shakes up the authoritative version of language and values, making room for a multiplicity of voices and meanings” (p. 129). When one’s omnipresent imprisonment is so thoroughly solidified through every institutional turn (e.g. violent acts in both the family and school structures), then liberation through resistive ambivalence becomes a necessary *lived* experience. Bauman (2004) argues that when one is deemed wasted, one can produce immeasurable power. He describes this dialectical relationship as a “creative process,” claiming that when one is deemed wasted they embody

an awesome, truly magic power...the power of a wondrous transmutation of base, paltry and menial stuff into a noble, beautiful and precious object. It also makes waste an embodiment of ambivalence. Waste is simultaneously divine and satanic. It is the midwife of all creation...Waste is sublime: a unique blend of attraction and repulsion arousing an equally unique mixture of awe and fear. (p. 22)

This dialectical is palpable in our schools when we see tension-filled interactions between educators and resistively ambivalent youth. We need to disrupt the conveyor belt of school-to-prison pipeline for youth with childhood histories of domestic violence by *seeing* their resistive beauty as something very different from the broken and disordered identities placed upon them.

Within public schools, authorities like educators and administrators often *misread* these young people and mostly unintentionally oppress them through acts of self-containment and pedagogies of waste. Langman and Ryan (2009) describe carnival as “celebrating and valorizing the vulgar, the obscene and the erotic, liminal realms are times of freedom, agency, equality, license and spontaneity—indeed, during carnival, alternative meanings could be negotiated that resisted top-down impositions” (p. 46). These negotiations are essential for resistively ambivalent youth who often have to seek liberatory agentive spaces when navigating violating/violent pedagogies. Bakhtin (1984) described the people of carnival as building “a second world and a second life outside officialdom” (p. 6). For educators engaged in problematic interactions with youth who perform resistive ambivalence in response to violating/violent practices (e.g., words, tone of voice, gestures), the youth evoke Bauman’s (2004) fitting descriptions of “mysterious, awe-inspiring” fear (p. 22). Equally, like the proverbial brick wall, these states of resistive ambivalence run smack into the often present, compliant-oriented pedagogies found in public schools.

Pedagogies of Compliance and Pity

Teachers depend on compliance. This compliance is often produced through pedagogy. The structure of school is designed and controlled by greater authoritative architects like policy makers who often have no commitment to understanding or changing policy in service to the complexity of the classroom. Biesta (2013) describes how teachers considered our most talented are ones who master acts of complicity towards efforts in controlling their students, calling this phenomenon the “disappearance of the teacher.” She contends: “the best and most effective teachers are the ones who are able to steer the whole educational process towards the production of pre-specified 'learning outcomes' or pre-defined identities, such as that of the 'good citizen' or the 'flexible lifelong learner’” (p. 35). I suggest that in place of the ‘disappeared teachers, we have managed to replace them with inhumane ones. Thus, teachers need all youth, with or without childhood histories of domestic violence, to be compliant, to follow *the* rules, and to sit through seemingly innocent acts of accountability and responsibility. In the face of smaller acts of unintentional pedagogical violation/violence, youth with histories of domestic violence will almost *never* negotiate this shared space with teachers; especially if teachers depend significantly on pedagogies of compliance and pity. For these youth, the fall back will almost *always* be resistive ambivalence. As a sustained cultural practice, youth who embody and respond with practices of carnival perpetually perceive the falseness and pretense in tension-filled schooling interactions, including seemingly innocent expectations of compliance and/or to overt acts of violating/violent discipline.

Pity is a second pedagogical problem. This secondary problem lies in the objectification of these youth often labeled as the disordered Other. Even some of our most progressive teachers may very much believe that youth with these histories could be stronger, healthier, and better behaved, like non-traumatized (i.e., so-called normal) children. This sympathy can turn into a compliant oriented imprisonment. Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) remind us that “it becomes critically important, then, to examine the way alternate forms of knowing are marginalized or silenced” (p. 449). How, then, is waste expected to respond to the acts of rubbish collectors? What alternative is there outside of resistive ambivalence for these youth (and do we want one to even exist)? It may just be the job of educators as rubbish collectors to keep the waste and rubbish out of view in service to the greater community’s needs. Bauman (2004) describes the rubbish collectors as “...unsung heroes of modernity. Day in and day out, they

refresh and make salient again the borderline between normality and pathology, health and illness, the desirable and the repulsive, the accepted and the rejected...the inside and the outside of the human universe” (p. 28). He goes on to describe the significance of their actions as those who patrol this border with “...constant vigilance and diligence because it is anything but a ‘natural frontier’: no sky high mountain ranges, bottomless seas or impassable gorges separate the inside from the outside...” In turn, he suggests that such “boundaries beget ambivalence” (p. 28). Overall, these youth are damaged goods, and damaged goods are in need of *repackaging and removal*. Ultimately, however, the *act* of removal will meet unfaltering and sustained resistive ambivalence.

A Resistive Response to Compliance and Pity

The identities of ambivalently resistant youth who have histories of domestic violence are not in fixed states of existence. Often these youth fill our schooling spaces with a resistive ferocity that shakes the structure of schooling at its core. Consider the typical suspensions and the *difficult* work with *those* EBD youth. Not recognized by most school officials, the lived resistive ambivalence of these youth serve as a barometer of sorts measuring the violating/violent practices and pedagogies of educator as rubbish collector. Youth with histories of domestic violence *read* authority or authoritative violence in nuanced and poignant ways, while most teachers *read* these youth as an objectified disordered Other. This nuanced-fixed synergy is both problematic and a breeding ground for volatile situations in our schools. Rarely found even in critical literature, Weis et al. (1998) ask questions that emerged out of their two large ethnographic studies of poor and working class White girls and women living in post-industrial cities, whereby they later stumbled upon the theme of domestic violence permeating the lives of working class families. They later stated, “Given that biographies of violence permeate the homes and lives of many of our students, what does it mean for our own understanding of children’s behaviors and resulting classroom practices?” They added, “These children are in our classrooms and schools, smiling and sullen, victimized and victimizing. What do we know about the effects of violence on them?” (p. 67-68). We should also ponder to what extent educational researchers and practioners have come to make sense of their navigation and the youths’ taking up of agency in alternative ways while also *misreading* their resistive acts/performances of these youth as deficit rather than liberatory?

There is a dramatic shaping effect from what Foucault (1973) calls the “medical gaze,” and these youth know this gaze all too well (p. 29). Resistive ambivalence rightly scares educators because they are assigned to *contain* these powerful performances of resistance. What then is an educator to *do* with resistively ambivalent youth? How can they disrupt the collection and removal of wasted children and disrupt the school-to-prison and/or school-to-prostitution pipelines? Some educators, like that of special education teachers, are entirely positioned to collect human rubbish. But I believe there is an alternative type of educator who exists in greater numbers than we might realize. These educators embrace resistively ambivalent youth differently, both in their ideologies and their practices. They are the educators who practice acts of deep grace and humanity day in and day out in some of our most marginalized and segregated schools. They *read* resistively ambivalent youth more humanely than the teacher as rubbish collector does.

An Alternative Practice? Teacher as Alchemist

Unpopular narratives unleash ambiguous effects. A story may be deemed unpopular if it goes against the grain of the acceptable in ways that either offend

sensibilities or challenge the comfort of clear boundaries. The unpopular disorganizes questions of morality, of civility, and of subjectivity. It can grate on the nerves or expose what might have been repressed. In any case, unpopular things call into question what is taken as already settled. It sets loose unanticipated and rebellious meanings that throw into question our very agency.

-Britzman, 1991, p. 64

There are many questions to ponder while considering how to disrupt the Discourse of the disordered Other. An alternative set of practices would require an analysis saturated in an agentic research agenda and teaching practices that offer alternative ways of seeing resistively ambivalent youth who have histories of domestic violence. It would require reshaping educators' deficit-oriented ideologies that have been deeply ossified. Artiles, (2004) in his attempt to challenge the discursive practices of learning disability (LD), asks similarly poignant questions regarding the intersections of race and class that lie at the heart of learning disability (LD), and I believe that we who work with youth with histories of domestic violence must perpetually revisit these questions. He asks, "Do we adopt the parameters and practices of other discourses, do we define our own indigenous discourses, or do we forge hybrid discourses?" (p. 554). Laws (2011) further such difficulties by asking, "How is it possible to break from these positions and to occupy positions that dismantle the apparent inevitability of these positionings?" (p. 115). This is difficult work for any educator—to challenge how we represent deeply marginalized youth with histories of domestic violence and reimagine agentic possibilities for such youth. We must ask ourselves, what role do we play? How can we practice more humanely?

If educators deem youth as being disordered because of their violent histories (and sometimes present realities), they may be practicing the very dogmatic ideology that they profess to be fighting. If they either teach from or come to a place of critical consciousness, there is then a potential juncture for praxis-oriented transformation (Freire, 1973) in their daily interactions with these youth. Ferri (2004) asks, "What would it mean to consider all students essentially unknowable, exceeding any categories we might try to impose on them—regarding them as always in a state of becoming?" (p. 513). She also contends, along with practicing this type of analysis, that taking up ideological stances grounded in the interdisciplinarity of poststructuralism, disabilities studies, and critical sociocultural theory (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007) opens agentic possibilities for labeled youth to take up agency and subjectivity, while ushering in room for new, non-deficit discourses to emerge. Laws (2011) claims that once the labels of youth as disordered are placed in a sociopolitical context, these youth, "Rather than being seen as disturbed...[their] inappropriate behaviours might be seen as understandable responses to extreme situations" (p. 39). She also suggests that this type of ideological approach for the educators helps them to develop "a sense of agency" in their attempts to understand the dominant and deficit discourses that have come to shape their practices, while also redeploing "strategies to undo marginal positionings...thus recognising and re-cognising themselves/ourselves differently" (p. 136).

Rather than just naming the discourses that shape these youths' lives, we need to challenge educators to trouble their own deficit discourses and ideologies related to youth with histories of domestic violence. It is important for all educators to continue to identify agentic possibilities related to their interactions with resistively ambivalent youth. Equally, taking up "strategies to undo marginal positionings" on the educators' part helps to reposition identities placed on youth

with histories of domestic violence, not as reified disordered identities, but rather by viewing their schooling responses as dynamic and powerfully resistive responses which are forged out of particular cultural knowledges and interactions. These youth are fully aware of what the school system calls them and are fully resisting such brutality.

Teacher as Alchemist

We must disrupt our dependence on rubbish collecting. No educator wants to be a rubbish collector, and, in fact, the very comparison collapses the idyllic vision of teacher. In efforts to disrupt, educators must *transform* their pedagogies from one centered on *waste* into one centered on working with *ambivalence*;: an alchemy of sorts. To disrupt destructive practices, educators have to be willing to use discursive strategic pedagogies. For instance, educators will have to *listen* very differently to these resistive youth. One strategy might be for educators (and schools) to *listen* differently to the voices of children/youth whose habitus is built from social, cultural, and familial domestic violence—to *read* them differently. Mostly, school systems *do not* or *cannot* listen to the many meanings of these ambivalently resistive voices—thus, they are often misread. Imagine if educators in public schools were to heed the challenge of Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, and Cain (1998) :“Once culturalists admit that people use culturally meaningful behavior to bring about contested social ends, they have stepped outside their own position” (p. 13-14). Educators can start by contesting their own ideologies or their school’s practices that reify the disordered Discourses of Othering that both dominate and bleed into their everyday thoughts and practices. Macleod (2007) suggests that educators must reject punitive practices and continue to reject “individual deficit notions of the causation of troubling behavior in young people” (p.164). What, then, are we to do with compliance and ambivalence? Smith (1999) offers wise advice:

At some points there is, there has to be, dialogue across the boundaries of oppositions. This has to be because we constantly collide with dominant views while we are attempting to transform our lives on a larger scale than our own localized circumstances. This means struggling to make sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful. (p. 39)

Educators can challenge themselves to disrupt their authoritative and treatment-oriented practices that are in service to *bringing order* to assumed *disordered* lives.

How is the institution of schooling able to disrupt a greater discourse like that of the disordered Other if the monies are tied to greater forces, which in turn design the rules on how that money will be spent and how particular children/youth will be treated and disposed of? How do we come to understand how these practices are in service to the greater project of social compliance? To counter these greater effects, educators and our public school systems can reframe and redeploy different kinds of practices in relation to working with these youth. These youth need teachers to see and embrace their resistive beauty and cultural knowledges (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), which are in response to the visible and invisible brutal institutional practices (both in the family and school) they experience daily. Educators need to persistently ask themselves: How do we expect youth with histories of domestic violence “to operate within these multiple positionalities, these multiple worlds, in this simultaneity of belonging and disbelonging, of being both centered and off-center, “betwixt and between,” in the middle and on both sides” (Orellana, 2007, p. 129)? How do we expect educators to do the same? To shape our practices in real time with such compounding complications will take the work of an educator as

alchemist rather than one who steadfastly acts as a rubbish collector. In order to do this, we will need to practice and create alternative, more liberatory discourses, representations, and practices when working with resistively ambivalent youth whose lives have been shaped by histories of domestic violence.

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