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ARTICLE

Teaching (for) dispositions?**Old debates, new orthodoxies: Hanging onto a ‘knowledge approach’**

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Education has always been complicit in the shaping and promoting of dispositions. Teachers do teach (for) dispositions as they consciously and unconsciously respond to their students in the classroom. In their actions, teachers continuously informally assess students’ bodies, actions, comportment, expressed ideologies, and rhetoric. Under pervasive pressures for measurement and accountability, it is understandable that now even dispositions might be added to the mix of measurable entities for evaluation or certification. Moreover, in a context of diminishing state responsibility for social welfare, greater demands are placed on education—to *make a difference*—for example, to intervene in social injustices such as “racism.” In this context it may seem appropriate to demand that new teachers display the “correct set” of dispositions and sensitivities, as the call for papers suggests, “*to issues of social justice and white privilege in this society.*” Nevertheless, this paper argues conventionally that, despite the inseparability of dispositions from educational interactions and education’s necessary role in the learning and unlearning of prejudice, teachers ought to intentionally avoid any *formal* assessment of, or required pledges to, particular dispositions.

I support the general aims of a “social justice” orientation in education, but I argue that a direct “dispositional” approach may be politically and pedagogically unproductive. Politically, assessing “dispositions” as criteria for certification, or for inclusion in the “economy of grades,” by intention or by lack of vigilance, leads to a greater vulnerability to allegations of “political indoctrination.” Pedagogically, in the context of teacher education classrooms, a “dispositions” approach may prove impotent or counter-productive to fostering the desired aims underlying a “social justice” approach. Further, I suggest that the controversy—“professional ethic or political indoctrination”—is more a battle over what counts as knowledge rather than a battle over whether to mandate dispositions. I argue, therefore, that educators would be best to intentionally center their course content and formal evaluation on knowledge and competencies over dispositions.

While the term “social justice” may now have shifting, and still yet to be determined, meanings and uses in the contemporary moment, “white privilege” as a construct employed in anti-racist discourses definitely has links to the oppositional or critical pedagogy movements expressing themselves in North America from the early 1970s. Critical pedagogy was generally envisioned as a way to intervene in schooling’s role in the (re)production of social inequalities. Past conceptualizations and debates of critical pedagogy have well rehearsed a number of complexities, difficulties and failings of taking or not taking an explicitly “political” or “oppositional” pedagogical approach. These debates still have much to inform a large number of the emerging set of communities now advocating for a “social justice” approach because some versions of “social justice” education are entering similar conceptual terrain. I consider one fundamental axis of debate on “oppositional pedagogy” presented in the mid-1990s as a way of illuminating one key challenge to taking a “social justice” approach to education.

This paper advocates for a critical “knowledge approach” as a way forward for engaging learners in teacher education programs oriented by a concern for and commitment to social justice, with a recognition that “social justice” (in education) has critical and corporate framings. This “knowledge approach” is not a *return* (to the authority of the Canon or aligned with a “back to the basics” approach), but an opening up to new demands placed on knowledge and pedagogy in a transformed and transforming world. What is important in this post-foundational, transdisciplinary, and post-ideological moment^[1] situating teacher education is not a turn away from knowledge towards

“dispositions,” but a hanging onto a “battered” and “humbled” knowledge informed by its past failings, limits, and necessarily imperfect future. Despite the desires for education to “make a difference” in this era of empowerment, I suggest that education, at its best, remains a “weak” force for social change.

Evaluating dispositions?

While accreditation bodies and schools (as employers) may well have reason to “assess candidates for proper dispositions” (call for papers), I think it unwise for schools of education to become involved in the formal evaluation of dispositions. I am surprised to hear in the call for papers the claim that some schools of education are actually doing so. Politically, as I have stated, a “dispositional” approach leaves schools wide open to attacks of “political indoctrination”; pedagogically, it is unsound for a number of reasons; and philosophically, it essentializes “dispositions” and ethical responsiveness and instrumentalizes teacher education to favour processes of selection or filtering over learning.

Dispositions

One underlying source of contention in the debate of “teaching for dispositions” is the divergent meanings of the term “dispositions.” How static are dispositions? Are they “real” or static (enough) to predict future actions? Or, do dispositions emerge differentially, primarily as an effect of performances enacted by individuals in particular contexts? Even where we accept that one’s dispositions are fixed enough across time, the problem of how to recognize and measure dispositions in one context for future applications in another is deeply challenging. Despite the significance of dispositions, they remain intangible. We can infer them only from students’ performances in the classroom or simplistically accept at face value what students (are willing to) explicitly state. In the evaluative context of schooling, where students generally comply with the teacher’s demands on assessment, measuring or evaluating for the “correct” set of student dispositions seems facile or counter-productive.

Consider the articulation of the “dispositions” side of the argument as stated in the call for papers:

Conversely, educators of teachers argue that adherence to a professional code of ethics is expected of teachers as with all professionals. Furthermore, they argue that they have a responsibility to both their graduates and to the public to assure that prospective teachers will act in an ethical way in the classroom and are sensitive to issues of social justice and white privilege in this society.

In the context of the teacher education classroom, there are two problematic elements presented in this passage. The first is the implied correspondence between professional code of ethics of teachers in schools and the education of teacher candidates studying in classrooms as students. In teacher education classrooms, teacher candidates may engage in discussing, rejecting, accepting, repressing, and/or working through such controversial and important problems as racism and homophobia. *As students* they should not be expected to enact the same kinds of reserved, multiply responsive and rational behaviors expected of professional teachers. Their positionalities and practices as students are different than those as teachers with institutional authority. Ethical relations in the teacher education classroom are different than those found in K-12 schools. Of course there exist in actuality a number of dispositions required for basic participation as a student in the teacher education classroom. Basic modicums of respect are required, but these are below the proposed theme of a set of explicit “dispositions” corresponding to concerns and practices of social justice.

The second problematic assumption is that programs can “*assure* that prospective teachers will act in

an ethical way in the classroom.” Ethical actions are highly contextual and difficult to prepare for in any determined way. Exacting mandates that demand total adherence to particular policy statements, such as Ontario’s “Zero Tolerance” policy on school violence, can logically lead to actions that seem unethical and counter-productive. Further, it is tenuous to assume that teachers, who in the future may act unethically in the classroom, will openly advertise these propensities in their teacher preparation program.^[2]

Schools of education should be more than training centers organized to select and prepare teacher candidates to fit into the existing system as efficiently as possible. Promoting and supporting teacher candidates to adopt “social justice” approaches requires more than requiring them to adhere to a set of codified professional standards or to learn new jargon that can effectively tokenize equity. Because teacher education ought to work to expand the horizons of students’ thinking and ethical sensibilities, it seems more useful to focus on students’ intellectual and moral growth (learning) inside and outside the classroom over adherence to professional standards created in and for a different context (teaching in K-12 schools).

The classroom context

Pedagogically, there are a number of potential quagmires in adopting a more direct dispositional approach. First, as with any teacher mandate in a compulsory or quasi-compulsory course, there is the likelihood that students will comply and “perform” the desired dispositions to get a good grade or the teacher’s affection. Of course, this compliance has its advantages, such as potentially reducing prejudiced comments in class; however, prejudice may “go underground” rather than be exposed to differing viewpoints and possible alterations. In his essay, “Teaching Against Racism in the Radical College Composition Classroom,” Nowlan (1995) considers the dangers of taking a direct dispositions approach in response to a student’s distress over his pedagogical approach. The student is confused and disturbed that Nowlan has allowed and even drawn out “racist” statements and their rationalizations by students in his classroom. Nowlan defends his pedagogy by explaining that the alternative, a more direct or authoritative dispositional approach that shuts down racist commentary, risks avoiding and evading racism rather than confronting and contesting it (p. 250). For Nowlan, a dispositional approach does not require White people to “own up to” their racism, which means that they can *both* pay lip service to anti-racist sentiments and reap the economic benefits that structural racism affords them. As Nowlan says, “[r]acism will not be ended by pretending that we are all already opposed to it...” (p.250). With Nowlan, I suspect that a dispositional approach would often lead to this kind of evasion and pretending in the teacher education classroom.

A related effect of a “dispositions” approach, where readily accepted by students, is the downplaying of knowledge to sentiments. This outcome could well foster an undesired lack of responsibility to work at lessening one’s ignorance. In my own attempts to include reflective journal writing into students’ overall grade, I have wondered if students’ were effectively getting (higher) grades for displaying the “teacher-desired” sentiments. I began to realize that it was actually easier for the “White” students to speak of how the course had altered their perceptions of race and of their “unearned privilege,” than to demonstrate that they had engaged seriously in the course readings on structural racism. Similarly while it seems pedagogically helpful to use a text like Peggy McIntosh’s (1988), *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, which illustrates with very concrete examples the likely benefits that being (or passing for) White affords each individual, this concrete accounting of privilege produces in many students a checklist mentality and sustains a kind of “personalized” oppression-scale. The scale tends to divert attention away from studying the structural dimensions of racism towards focusing on examples and counter-examples of “privilege” and personal stories. If we are considering the future work of teachers in the contradictory and challenging space of school teaching, developing students’ robust (if necessarily incomplete) understandings of racism and

its individual and collective effects that must be articulated and defended seems a much more desirable aim than requiring their discursive commitments to “anti-racism” in the relatively “low-stakes” space of a teacher education classroom. Without a depth of (historical and social) understanding of the challenges ahead, critical dispositions can easily become re-adjusted and dampened in the “real-world” of schools.

In this light, the work of “social justice” education might be considered as deeply challenging, if not impossible, work. First, we have yet to understand the limits and possibilities of “social justice,” post-communism, with no teleological alternative to global capitalism.^[3] In such a world, preparing students to be successful in school towards securing a good income can be in considerable tension with the aim of developing citizens concerned with social justice. Further, schools themselves are hierarchically organized and are reflective of larger inequitable social structures and processes. Acting in an ethically responsible way with others means much more than adhering to a state’s “professional standards” for teachers. Again, a critical approach that is not naïve but exposes students to the immensity and complexity of the challenge and the likely barriers to adopting a “social justice” approach in the institution of schooling offers greater possibility in supporting a *sustainable* approach to an ethically aware practice. Casting teacher candidates as “change agents” as they prepare to move into schools as beginning teachers, often with the least political power among staff, seems questionable—especially where bolstered by “dispositions” over understanding of differently positioned others or of knowledge of the historical conditions producing inequities.

(External) politics

To even take this “dispositions” debate seriously requires a certain suspension of judgment because *allegations* of ideological or political “indoctrination” are politically motivated and largely unfounded. It is critical to recognize that organized groups of adults, on the political right (continue to) carry out projects for political and ideological influence even as they claim that their intentions are to support academic freedoms against the “takeover” of university liberal arts programs by the radical left (Ivie, 2005). At one level it seems that the debate on dispositions at present is more an outcome of allegations rather than of actual practices; I leave this possibility or response for other contributors. *This paper largely focuses on the internal dimensions of debate by educators who value (differentially, perhaps) the necessity and possibility of education to work towards the making of a more just world. My focus in no way is to diminish the important work of supporting intellectual freedom by (publicly) illuminating the contradictions and ideological intentions of campaigns to restrict democratically inspired practices in the university (Ivie, 2005).*

Thus, without examining the specifics of particular cases where political indoctrination or filtering is alleged, I remain skeptical that teacher educators are filtering out students based on the assessment of students’ beliefs or pledges, and that policies would dictate such an approach.^[4] In my own pre-service Education department,^[5] I have noted a spectrum of political and ideological viewpoints of teacher candidates. Extremely few candidates are unsuccessful in being promoted. If any filtering of this sort is happening, I suspect that it occurs in the admissions selection process of particular teacher certification programs, for example, via applicants’ “personal statements,” rather than during the program itself. Further, in spite of attempts to filter for students oriented to a “social justice” approach in this program, generally many of these students still struggle with “white privilege” and other constructs of an anti-racist discourse. Rather, based on the experiences of myself and colleagues, I suspect that most complaints against teacher educators stem from instances where individual students react to classroom spaces where their voices and viewpoints have been minimized by teachers who challenge dominant ideologies such as meritocracy that might unsettle these students’ understandings of their selves, their entitlements or their modes of participation in class.

Students may react to the altered configurations of how to perform “smartness,” in class assignments and discussions.^[6] Under a different knowledge/discourse regime, students’ understandings of their own capabilities (in relation to classmates) to contribute productively can come under question. Likely most at stake for students’ engaging with unfamiliar knowledge are their self-concepts and egos, much more than the granting of certificates or the mandating of pledges to a social justice approach. And perhaps teachers’ own egos enter into the fray as they encounter students’ resistance to their pedagogy, which may lead teachers to think that mandating students to pledge allegiance to their “social justice” agendas is appropriate. Finally, where the knowledge itself is under contestation, students may attempt to reframe critically-informed knowledge as “opinions” or “viewpoints” in contrast to the imagined objectivity of traditional disciplinary knowledge and its explicit aim of disinterested study. Indeed, this tendency is magnified in classes where teachers are explicit^[7] about their politics and positionalities, and in classes where students misread a teacher’s social constructivist approach as implying that all knowledge claims are relativized to the level of “anyone’s opinion.” Theoretical discourses that would support a social justice approach, however, are as knowledge based as more traditional academic discourses.

Taking a “dispositional” approach opens up educators to attacks that their courses are value-laden and not informed by “real” disciplinary knowledge. Some progressive educational initiatives, such as international education, have long come under attack from conservatives as being ideological and lacking in rigour. For example, on the World Studies initiative in Britain in the early 1980s, Roger Scruton (cited in Heater, 2002) writes: “The World Studies movement . . . seeks ultimately to take over every area of the curriculum. And to replace serious knowledge and formal scholarship with political posturing and infantile manipulative games [role-playing].” He further accused its proponents of “creating a ‘stampede’ in support of ‘a single mendacious idea (the idea that the North is responsible for the South’s immiseration)’” (p. 162). Here Scruton is not only attacking the content but the methods of teaching. He alleges that students are being indoctrinated, “stampeded” into an ideological position, rather than being educated on the actualities of North-South interdependencies.

As with international education, “social justice” pedagogies are often more explicitly oriented to shaping values and are predicated on hopes that education can lead from awareness to action. Nevertheless they can be founded upon robust theoretical perspectives. Critical educators would contest Scruton, arguing that the opposite conjecture, that the North is responsible for civilizing and bringing light to “others” as a founding truth in the traditional Western episteme, is an even more mendacious assumption, and, further, the historically dominant assumption. Yet it requires significant study to be able to counter dominant assumptions over what counts as knowledge. In their future practices, a dispositional approach may offer teacher candidates little once they have to defend their “dispositions” to differently-positioned stakeholders.

If a case can be made for a dispositions approach, it is best supported by a demand to intervene against past (and present) imbalances. Where social justice approaches are enacted as oppositional discourses and correctives to past canonical traditions of bias or “misteachings,” there is pressure for teachers to be forceful in challenging students’ common sense understandings. This pressure is further magnified by the limits of the classroom where students may not acquire enough knowledge to weigh in on canonical “misteachings” of the past. Against this backdrop, a direct mandate of a corrective set of “dispositions,” mapping onto the professional and ethical standards of teaching in schools, seems justified. Additionally, where these “misteachings,” which discriminate against various minorities, begin to play out negatively in the classroom dynamic affording some students “voice” at the expense of others, a more authoritarian “safe” space might be appropriate to support students’ (possibilities for) engagement with an anti-oppressive or counter-hegemonic curriculum. For some educators, pressing for dispositions aligned to social justice as a means of countering students’ learned biases is no doubt

tempting.

While one may find rationales for a number of distinct approaches to an education for “social justice,” I think that evaluating dispositions ultimately cannot defend itself politically against an increasing Rightist movement that has captured common sense ideas around accountability and the inherent right to be free to form one’s own opinion as an “autonomous” individual (consumer). Nor can a dispositions approach in public systems of pluralistic societies ultimately defend itself against the proliferating demands of diverse groups in an age where there is diminishing trust in the traditional authorities and master narratives (Lyotard, 1984). A dispositional approach only fuels the latest in a series of attempts to discredit critical disciplinary approaches. There is much noise around viewpoints, opinions, and “bringing politics into the classroom.” Teacher educators may intentionally and unintentionally reinforce attention to this noise by making off-the-cuff comments about a political leader or by being too “loose” with their grading. The core of the tension here, however, hinges on what counts for *knowledge*.

Critical then is to frame this debate around social justice on knowledge rather than on dispositions. Under contestation is the selection of readings and the theoretical constructs employed in the teacher’s discourse to interpret and analyse the readings, the “classroom,” and how each links to the wider world. This point is necessarily obfuscated by Horowitz (2006) in his introduction to his latest book, *The Professors: 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*:

This book is not intended as a text about leftwing bias in the university and does not propose that a leftwing perspective on academic faculties is a problem in itself. Every individual, whether conservative or liberal, has a perspective and therefore a bias. *Professors have every right to interpret the subjects they teach according to their individual points of view.* That is the essence of academic freedom. But they also have professional obligations as teachers, whose purpose is the instruction and education of students, not to impose their biases on their students as though they were scientific facts. The professorial task is to teach students how to think not to tell them what to think. In short, it is the responsibility of professors to be professional—and therefore “academic”—in their classrooms. *This includes the duty not to present their opinions and prejudices as fact, and not to require students to agree with them on matters which are controversial* (p. 19, my emphasis).

At first glance, Horowitz presents a reasoned approach. He does not suggest that perspective or bias can be avoided, and thus “leftwing bias in the university” is not a problem in itself. The problem for Horowitz arises when these “leftwing” professors present their biases and viewpoints as scientific facts. The move that Horowitz makes here is to admit that any “subject” can be interpreted from multiple viewpoints, but that the academic subject itself, as with traditional subject matter, can be and ought to be “objective.” Implied in Horowitz’s statement is the assumption that traditional canonical knowledge is not based on any opinion or prejudice nor mired in any controversies. Rather it is only under more recent theoretical perspectives, cast as controversial, where some professors have gone awry. Specifically, where the content of the academic subject unsettles dominant (common sense) interpretations taken for granted by individuals as Horowitz—whether on “objectivity” of knowledge and “disinterested study,” or on how knowledge is implicated in various regimes of control and discipline—Horowitz implies that one moves from the objectivity of “real” academic knowledge and into the realm of opinions, prejudice, and controversy. Horowitz’s somewhat vitriolic critique of academics as using “biased” oppositional pedagogies, has proven to be powerful amongst educational stakeholders. A dispositional approach is sure to fuel this line of rhetoric and offers little intellectual resources to confront Horowitz’s alarmist rhetoric.

Oppositional discourses have traditionally not hinged on “dispositions” but have very much been

centered on knowledge and the politics of knowledge. Past (internal) debates and practices of critical pedagogy can offer insights to “social justice” education that also now find themselves attempting to “teach against the grain,” to use Roger Simon’s (1992) metaphor. The next section returns to one principle axis of debate to reconstitute the proposed tension that centers on dispositions, to one centered on knowledge.

A Radical versus Liberal Pedagogy

An explicit focus on dispositions is not necessary, nor largely the precedent, for radical educators to receive allegations of “political indoctrination.” These charges have been directed against radical programs for the selection, and nature, of the knowledge to be studied. Typically, as with Horowitz, those who oppose radical approaches hold the implicit assumption that traditional disciplinary approaches present objective and politically neutral knowledge from which radical approaches depart. There are two typical reactions to alternative pedagogical approaches that center on content. One common objection is that concepts or issues being studied by students are outside the prescribed content of the course. So for example, in the case of a teacher education course taking an anti-racist approach, students make comments like: “All we do is talk about “racism”; when are we going to learn how to teach students how to read?” In this scenario, “racism” might be a potentially important or worthy topic, but focusing on “racism” is perceived by some students as taking away from the “real” content of the course.

The second and more complex difficulty of an oppositional pedagogy concerns content configured as “counter-hegemonic.” Counter-hegemonic logics challenge the students’ commonly held assumptions about the world and about themselves. Their explications represent a serious challenge to the oppositional educator, in part because these logics risk casting the student as an object of external forces. In challenging taken-for-granted assumptions of the individual as an autonomous, rational subject, the opinions and desires of students are viewed as constructed by socio-cultural contexts. In troubling common-sense understandings of the human subject, the “self” becomes under question and is implicated in how the student engages in the course content. Thus, the use of constructs like “white privilege,” may not only necessitate the use of unfamiliar discourse, but animate “their” own suppositions with some students in the classroom. In this case where students resist or contest the idea of “white privilege,” such a response can be interpreted as illustrating the axiomatic assumptions of the construct—that there is an invisibility to privilege and a “learned ignorance” by those with privilege.

When key concepts of the course content can be read in students’ learning practices and identities, there can be productive and unproductive pedagogical outcomes. On the one hand, student resistances can be productively employed in teaching the construct, for example, as in the case of teaching about “white privilege.” On the other hand, students may react to the tautology in play, where any form of questioning by the student can be categorized as “resistance” and an illustration of the invisibility of structural racism. This tautology is bound to produce inaccurate interpretations of student responses. As well, where “white privilege” operates as a tautology, students are likely to contest these theories.

A thought-provoking edited collection, *Left margins: Cultural studies and composition pedagogy* (Fitts & France, 1995), articulates and extends dimensions of oppositional pedagogy discussed thus far. Particularly, a debate between a liberal pedagogical approach espoused by Gerald Graff and a radical one espoused by Adam Katz illuminates how the present debate can be centered on a contestation over knowledge embedded in schooling. Many of the contributors to the collection, including Katz (1995a), provide explanations of the oppositional pedagogy they employ in the U.S. college composition classroom. At the end of the contributed essays, Graff (1995) provides a response to the essays where he reiterates the classic “double bind” of radical pedagogy. Writes Graff (1995):

On the one hand, the oppositional teacher declares an aggressive political agenda that supposedly goes far beyond mere liberal pluralism and. . .its ideologically suspect defense of “open debate” and a “free market place of ideas.” On the other hand, in order to avoid the authoritarianism entailed by enforcing any such agenda without open debate, the oppositional teacher inevitably has to reinstate the very pluralism that has supposedly been repudiated. It seems the only way oppositional pedagogy can avoid being authoritarian is by ceasing to be oppositional.^[8] (p. 275)

Thus the “double bind” for Graff is that to be oppositional and intervene forcefully against the ideologically charged field constructing the bounds of discourse operating in the classroom the teacher must be authoritarian. But being authoritarian is undesirable to the aim of supporting student learning. Graff later suggests that, in spite of what the oppositional pedagogue may avow, he or she typically ends up choosing pluralism to avoid totalitarianism. Graff instead advocates for a “liberal pluralist” pedagogy where different political viewpoints are respectfully accounted. He suggests pragmatically that “resistant” students are more likely to give a sympathetic hearing to oppositional ideas if these ideas are presented, not as a privileged standpoint, but as one option among several. Even if, writes Graff (citing Bennett):

“the conditions of free and equal competition of ideas have already been nullified by the prior, enormous distortion in favor one side,” teachers have no choice but to act as if these conditions existed, or at least as if it is possible to create them in our classrooms if not everywhere else (p. 280-281).

Graff suggests that even if open debate is impossible in the larger world, one has to at least attempt it in the classroom. Graff thus can only envision productive outcomes from schooling through relatively open and free debate.

Katz (1995b) responds to this so-called double-bind by acknowledging that radical pedagogy, as with all pedagogy, is impositional. He writes:

[O]f course oppositional pedagogy represents an “imposition” upon students, since “culture” is nothing other than the totality of such impositions by unequally situated economic, political, and ideological agents: so, while the dominant pedagogy imposes upon students the understanding that they are seekers after universal value or social reconciliation, oppositional pedagogy imposes upon them the understanding that their discourses and practices are sties of irreconcilable social contestation. (p. 309)

Here Katz emphasizes that all pedagogy makes an imposition on students. And in response to Graff’s concern that oppositional pedagogy must ultimately legitimate students’ opinions and voices to avoid totalitarian settings, Katz counters:

Since Graff must see the classroom as a purely ahistorical idealist space (“logical” and not material), he cannot understand that the “legitimacy” of students’ “opinions” as a historical fact, supported by the dominant culture, can be “recognized” by the oppositional classroom, precisely as a way of questioning the production of that “legitimacy” itself. (p. 308)

Katz’s approach, as he argues it, is not to condemn students’ opinions, “but to enable them to see their ‘opinions’ as historical and social products (and not as their own private property), which in turn can be critiqued and transformed” (p. 214).

Whereas Katz’s curricular content made explicit to students is to teach “opinions” as historically and socially constructed, Graff’s approach (in parallel to Horowitz) *implicitly* accepts axioms of liberalism

of the autonomous rational self and the idealist educational site as below contestation. Thus, while accepting and employing the dominant liberal axioms, Graff wants to bring Katz's axioms of subject-formation and social relations to the domain of "open debate" as one theory to be presented amongst others for student examination. On this point, I agree with Katz, who succinctly summarizes the key deficiency of Graff's position; Katz writes:

. . . Graff] condemns oppositional pedagogy for doing what any classroom does: include some knowledge-positions and exclude others, and use standards for determining the value of students' contributions to the class. In other words, any classroom evaluates the "legitimacy" of students' knowledge-positions: the difference in the oppositional classroom is that it openly posits and explains its criteria. . . (p. 308).

The oppositional classroom is required to more explicitly "posit and explain its criteria" because oppositional pedagogy attempts to de-stabilize students' knowledge-positions—their socially-constructed, common-sense understandings. With liberal approaches, on the other hand, students already largely accept the underlying ideologies, and thus, there is less imposition on students and little need for teachers to be explicit on the liberal assumptions at play. A concept like "white privilege" then runs up against these common-sense understandings many students have of themselves, and their knowledge positions become unsettled. Thus the oppositional approach does require a stronger intervention and a greater imposition on the student, as Graff implies. Under an oppositional approach, it is reasonable that students will contest the knowledge being presented as opposed to knowledge that is less implicated to their taken-for-granted assumptions about the world and about themselves. Nevertheless such contestation ought not to transport such theories into the realm of controversy and opinion any more than other theories implicitly or explicitly taught in the educational curriculum.

I think that Katz's argument is theoretically more robust, yet Graff's liberal approach does seem to connect better to the complexity of the classroom scene. There remain problems and difficulties with oppositional pedagogy, not because it is theoretically inconsistent, as Graff argues, but because it may fail to take account of the ethical relations^[9] between subjects in the classroom, which cannot be predetermined nor fully captured by a radical rationalist logic.^[10] Katz's approach may win the curricular argument but in practice lose the singularity of the student's relation to and opportunity for learning. Secondly, the significant knowledge needed to support an oppositional pedagogy is not easily mastered by teachers who take on its premises. Sometimes this means that the teacher is not able to productively respond to students' questions or contestations. Such a case may lead to the status quo where the teacher drops the oppositional approach and offers multiple ideas for debate, as Graff remarks. It can also lead, however, to a teacher defensively holding onto an oppositional approach but relying on the authority of an identity, or cause (like "social justice") for managing the classroom discourse. Where an oppositional approach operates as a "standpoint" theory, then it does move towards indoctrination. An oppositional pedagogy can even fall into the trap of traditional canonical theories privileging its underlying politics and rightness of world-view over a disciplined and rigorous examination of how knowledge is constructed, produced and disseminated.

A basic assumption of oppositional or critical pedagogy, that the teacher can be a "transformative intellectual," (Giroux, 1988) is indeed problematic. All educators, including Giroux and Katz, are subject to the web of socio-cultural forces constructing human subject-positions. The perspectives of critical pedagogues are thereby limited and open to contestation. Even if Katz is correct to point out that students' opinions and viewpoints are distorted by ideology, the classroom encounter necessitates a degree of humility both on the limits of theory and on the limits of learning—how individuals will agree or not agree to learn or not learn with one another. Psychoanalytic perspectives in education (Felman, 1982; Britzman, 1998), for instance, discuss resistances to, and crises in, learning that

emphasize the inner (psychical) forces of subject formation over external ones. A major challenge for critical pedagogy is that the student's relationship to knowledge is neither wholly rational nor transparent. With all learning, students are attempting to *concurrently* comprehend the teacher's meanings and respond to (evaluate) these meanings.

This debate that I have analyzed between Katz and Graff remains relevant to present debates around the teaching for dispositions in teacher education. Who is (more) right in this debate is not my concern; rather, the debate remains a resource for critical and progressive educators upon which to draw to illuminate and alter their practices. Fundamentally, the radical and liberal approaches remain conceptually incommensurable, yet they can be productively employed in one's practice at different moments with different purposes. Oppositional approaches challenge students' common-sense understandings and perceptions of self and others. These challenges create irresolvable tensions exacerbated in present-day contexts where students' views and self-concepts are to be explicitly valued and utilized to foster their learning. Where and how to employ oppositional pedagogy is the art of critical teaching; in addition to understanding the justification and aims of radical pedagogy propounded by theorists like Katz, critical teaching requires considerable self-reflexivity and on-going learning through the practice of teaching. Ideally, one's approach to teaching neither assumes the existence of a pluralist idealist space to enact classroom teaching in the liberal tradition, nor enacts an oppositional pedagogy as dogmatic, predetermined, and beyond contestation. With the debate of Graff and Katz in mind, I return to the aim of an education for social justice that is not centered on a "dispositions" approach but informed by the challenges of oppositional pedagogy.

Teacher Education for Social Justice

It is useful to separate out two versions of "social justice" circulating in educational discourses in the present historical conjuncture. One is the corporatized version of "social justice" that has become common parlance in the discursive landscape of corporations, banks, (corporatizing) universities, and inter-governmental institutions who claim to be "making a difference"—from the World Bank's "poverty eradication"^[11] to the more recent consumer choice of buying "Red"^[12] for AIDS retro-virals in Africa promoted by celebrity-philanthropists Bono and Oprah Winfrey. Under this version, there is an acceptance of the mutuality or complementarity of making profits and doing good in the world. The corporatist-framed "social justice" is very much hinged upon individual acts of charity, service and consumerism, with less attention paid to structural inequities and underlying causes of injustice.^[13] Given the increasing commodification of education through privatization and choice mechanisms intensifying education's role in acquiring individual and familial social advantage, "social justice" in the scene of schooling is at best contradictory. On the one hand, with the increased marketability of the subject-position of "global citizen," "doing good in the world" is itself a "value-added" component of advancing one's individual cultural capital.^[14] On the other hand, "doing good" as charity or service must have positive effects for others.

The more (neo)liberal forms of "social justice" education then tend to focus on individual "empowerment" for social mobility and advancement: learning as a way out of the "inner city," or learning to be charitable to others as/once one's career is established. Further, it advocates for models of *inclusive* education, albeit with less scrutiny to the politics of schooling (and society) and more focus on how individual teachers and administrators, with "awareness" and anti-prejudiced sensibilities, can improve schools to help "disadvantaged students" learn.^[15] The religious and conservative factions may be "up in arms" over inclusive educational reforms that counter their religious and traditional values (for example, including representations of gay/lesbian families in the curriculum). For the mainstream corporate world, however, "social justice" seems to pose little threat to established orders.

A second form of social justice in education is one that has affinities to the oppositional discourses of earlier decades. Insights garnered from earlier debates, such as the debate of Katz and Graff, can inform oppositional pedagogies such as anti-racist education under present contexts of schooling. Educators employing oppositional approaches need to be aware of, and anticipate, the likely reactions by students as their common sense notions come under question. For example, constructs like “white privilege” potentially unsettle students who have a traditional conception of education as politically neutral or have a vested, but under-acknowledged, interest in an inequitably structured society/world. However, teachers must also be open and responsive to students in the unfolding present of the classroom. This responsiveness requires one to withhold judgment and to understand that the manifest resistances students display can have multiple, divergent sources,^[16] so as to not pigeon-hole students based on past instances. Teachers do have the responsibility to challenge students’ prejudiced statements, and to trouble uncritical notions of agency and “doing good,” but this is not without the humility that comes with one’s own partial understandings, biases, and limitations. As teacher educators, we ourselves are still in the process of attempting to understand the limits and possibilities of social justice in today’s world and how education might play a role.

A critical social justice approach does not have to look down upon models of charity or of altruistic desires; these ought to be fostered and valued. Nonetheless they can point out the limits and potential pretensions of these acts and how they may indirectly or directly rationalize inequities. “Social justice” educators want teachers who care *but* we also want teachers who understand where certain kinds of benevolence, predicated on patriarchal, heterosexist, or racist visions, or made possible by economic exploitation, do violence to others.

“Knowledge Approach”

In essence I have been arguing that there are *no shortcuts* towards realizing the aims of a social justice approach to education. It is logical that dispositions will attempt to be the latest measurable component in an age of measurement, accountability, and profit-friendly altruism; however, intentionally assessing dispositions is not the best way forward. Knowledge has taken a real beating in a post-foundational, trans-disciplinary, post-ideological age. I am not suggesting a return to a presumptuous or elevated knowledge. I am advocating for a reflexive knowledge now educated by the failures of modernist dreams of “progress,” a knowledge educated on the limits of knowledge, a knowledge aware of its immanent relations with power (Foucault & Gordon, 1980), and *yet* a knowledge robust enough to be useful as a resource to support teachers’ ethically responsive actions as they in turn become responsible for supporting the learning of their future students in a complex, troubled, dynamic, and yet-to-be-determined world.

Oppositional knowledge and pedagogy enabled by contemporary theoretical literatures are not to be cast off as less rigorous, ideological or as situated in fostering dispositions. With the lessons learned from decades-long critiques of canonical knowledge and its production and uses, theoretical perspectives that utilize constructs as “white privilege” in “social justice” approaches ought to be seen as a corrective (albeit in some ways incommensurable) to myopic, functionalist and apolitical-idealized traditions continuing to have weight in mainstream educational vision and practices.

With a knowledge approach, what ought to be formally assessed continue to be performances and products of carefully deliberated assignments. An anti-racist pedagogy, for example, would not be framed around one’s personal relationship to racism but on *knowledge* of structural racisms as evidenced in a wide array of historical documents and present-day research. Adjacent to appropriate assignments and evaluation methods, a nuanced responsive approach employing both (liberal) progressive and critical teaching methods, as dissonant, would be a more fruitful way of promoting students’ sensitivities to concerns of social justice. Critical and progressive modalities have common

elements, and are sometimes conflated in “social justice” approaches unproblematically advocating simultaneously for “open debate,” “minority positions” and “social change.” However, as oppositional pedagogues accept, these distinct objectives are often under considerable tension. I propose that greater efforts be made to develop pedagogies to *anticipate* the kinds of obstacles and challenges indicative of these tensions as surfacing in “social justice” approaches. _

The “double-bind” that Graff describes continues to be one major tension for the critical educator to negotiate. On the one hand, we want to inclusively support and draw out student voices as human subjects with the desire to participate. As with Nowlan, we want our students (and ourselves) to “own up” to their/our prejudices by holding them up to the scrutiny of others. We want to hear students’ views and opinions on the (destabilizing) content we offer them, not only because their reactions might illustrate concretely the constructedness of “opinions” and knowledge-positions as Katz argues, but because many students are still in part just trying to make sense of what we are saying—their processes of comprehension and evaluation are synchronous. They may well be reacting to something other than what we are teaching according to their own misreadings. The process of voicing reactions to various misreadings acts as a kind of scaffolding for students to begin to approach the teacher’s desired meanings. On the other hand, the inclusion of some students’ voices can be at the expense of others’. Sometimes students’ (socially constructed) reactions, rather than being pedagogically useful, can interfere with and subvert the teacher’s and other learners’ agendas. In such cases, the teacher may have to intervene more forcefully. However, for me, unlike Graff, whose “double-bind” will dissolve once the educator appropriately drops the “oppositional” approach, the double bind represents an inherent tension that must be managed by the educator. The teacher has to be able to read the dynamics of the class and decide whether a safer, “politically correct” space is the direction to pursue, or whether there exists more respect and intellectual humility to employ a more dialogical and open approach.

Anticipating the dimensions of this challenge and others that are likely to emerge is an important component of the critical approach. Taking a social justice approach with little understanding of the implicit challenges and possible outcomes may lead to undesirable consequences where students may feel that the course itself lacks an ethos of “social justice,” or alternatively, that social justice means writing journal responses that capture “politically correct” sentiments. Navigating amidst these various dynamically shifting tensions, for me, is central to the art of critical teaching. Such teaching is a struggle that can be reflexively informed over time and by sharing the struggles of practice with other educators.

Sharing each other’s struggles in employing “social justice” oriented pedagogical approaches as tension-filled rather than “success stories” may also be helpful. An approach that focuses on struggles and even failures may be more productive than collaboratively emphasizing the “rightness” of social justice aims and approaches (in part to fend off external criticisms), or sharing “success stories” within heightened accountability regimes, which offer little insight into the complexities of the deep challenges inherent to a critical approach. Further, rather than collectively piggybacking on various *imperatives* of anti-racism and “social justice,” teacher educators may want to more fully engage in what “social justice” means in the present and how educators committed to “social justice” can learn from the sharing of tensions and failures to develop their anticipatory and reflexive pedagogical approaches. It may be more productive to focus on the pedagogy without falling into the dynamics of an ideological debate, many times instigated by the conservative right. Even Ellsworth’s (1989) well-known critique of “critical pedagogy” might have been read as an *opening* to better understand and alter blind spots in critical pedagogy, rather than as an attack against which a defense was deemed necessary.^[17]

There is precedent for collaboratively engaging in tensions of teaching in the fields of teacher research

and self-study in education. However, much of this work has not fully employed the critical resources that trouble concepts like “student voice” and learning from “experience” centering these “teacher learning” discourses. In this sense, these discourses have generally remained fairly insular to their core communities and somewhat instrumental (uncritical). As educators we would do well to learn, from the tradition of teacher research, the value of sharing reflections on teaching practices. At the same time, it is necessary to continually engage with scholarship that supports critically examining, and refining or altering, the lenses or constructs we rely upon for interpreting our teaching practices.

In conclusion, I suggest that to take the aims of education for social justice seriously as a teacher educator, it is best to avoid falling into polemical debates on “dispositions” in politically-charged times. To engage and influence, rather than mandate, “dispositions” in the classroom towards more socially-just practices, I have emphasized the importance of a “knowledge approach” that “hangs onto” knowledge and competencies while anticipating the necessary tensions, and potential obstacles, emerging from a critical (oppositional) approach. Through future dialogue, I hope to learn how others understand and respond to challenges of a “social-justice” approach to teacher education.

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[1] I mean we are “post” ideology in two ways. First, to call something ideological becomes somewhat meaningless once every kind of representation is ideological. Second, I suggest that we no longer really believe that “knowledge” (alone) can set us free. For example, the argument that if only we could become critically aware of how the Capitalist media distorts our knowing, we would transform social inequity has diminishing credibility. Ideology critique remains useful in an age of spin and overabundant information and images but is only one useful intervention among many necessary others. By “post-foundational” I am referring to the diminishing reliance on the traditional subfields of education such as “psychology of education,” and “sociology of education.” Teacher education programs are increasingly drawing on other more transdisciplinary theoretical discourses, such as cultural studies and “new literacies,” to structure their course offerings for teacher candidates.

[2] I am quite aware that students do in fact make incredibly prejudiced statements in the classroom. Sometimes these statements are intimidating to other students and to the teacher. How to respond in the moment of teaching is very challenging; however, as I argue, a direct dispositional approach is not the best response.

[3] The fiction of the “state” has given way to the fiction of the “market” (Stråth, 2003) as the dominant narrative driving school reform and the alleviation of (global) poverty. Present-day school reform trends such as privatization and choice mechanisms have only heightened the role of education in gaining individual social advantage (Whitty & Edwards, 1998); such social advantage then becomes the pre-conditions to “do good in the world” through charity and service.

[4] A recent allegation and defense at Columbia's Teacher's College is illustrative. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) sent a letter to Columbia stating that they were "profoundly concerned about the threat to the freedoms of speech and conscience posed by Teacher's College's current policy of evaluating students and pre-service teachers according to a set of mandated – 'Professional Commitments and Dispositions.'" Teacher College responded that FIRE had taken language out of context. And in line with my suspicions, Teacher College emphasized that while students' dispositions are included, and central to their vision, they do "not assess students on their attitudes or beliefs" (tc.columbia.edu/news/article.htm?id=5906, October 26, 2006).

[5] Our program in Toronto, Canada, would certainly fit into the growing trend of discursive commitments to "social justice" in pre-service teacher programs: "The principles and themes that infuse the Faculty's programs include equity, diversity, community, collaboration, interdisciplinarity and social justice (yorku.ca/foe/AboutUs/index.html, October 28, 2006).

[6] Even in the more neutral context of mathematics courses, I have observed how students who have demonstrated competence in a "skills" approach will contest alternative progressive approaches that threaten to rearrange prior "rankings" of competencies.

[7] These can be verbal statements or statements inscribed on the skin. In other words, a person of colour teaching for anti-racism tends to be read differently (as being ideologically motivated), than a Caucasian who can teach behind the invisibility of Whiteness as a racial category.

[8] There are a number of versions of this critique. For example, there have been criticisms that the radical teacher does not "walk the talk"—acting unjustly to students in the name of "social justice," shutting down the voices of some students to create "safe space" for others, etc.

[9] Here I am thinking of a Lévinasian-informed encounter with an other, where the ethical impulse is not rationalistic and pretermined (Lévinas, 1969). Radical educators may expect certain patterns of student responses (as constructed) and be prepared to unsettle students, but if responding to each student as also a partially agentic subject is important for radical pedagogy, than preconceived notions of how the radical educator will respond to the student cannot be fully pre-determined.

[10] A related analysis can be found in Ellsworth's (1989) critique of critical pedagogy.

[11] See web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,menuPK:336998~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:336992,00.html (accessed December 29, 2006).

[12] See joinred.com/default.asp (accessed December 29, 2006).

[13] For one example, where corporations such as oil companies offer funding to cancer fundraising campaigns, attention is turned toward diagnosis of cancer rather than to environmental contaminants. See King (2006) for an analysis of cause-related corporate philanthropy.

[14] In my dissertation research on the shifting uses of the "International" of the International Baccalaureate (IB), I illuminate how in the last decade, under increasing competition for academic distinction, the liberal humanist aim of "international understanding" transforms into an expedient for one's individual advantage.

[15] For one example, see the account of Spence (2002).

[16] Resistance to "white privilege," for example, could alternatively hinge on anxiety with an alternative discourse and should not be simply taken as evidence of the "invisibility" of the "knapsack of privilege" (McIntosh, 1988). Some students may choose to appear anti "anti-racist" rather than less "smart."

[17] The defense by Henry Giroux (as represented by Lather, 1992) illustrates how critical oppositional approaches that preach boundary transgressions and border crossings can ironically engage in their own authoritarian policing of (disciplinary) boundaries.