

SOCIAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY, DECONSTRUCTION, & TEACHING:

WHAT MAKES A BABY

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Abstract

A primary lesson within social justice education for pre-service teachers is learning to be attentive to the production of social norms and the ways in which the maintenance of said norms sustains practices of oppression and marginalization. In this paper, I critique additive frameworks of diversity that often emerge when discussing social norms with students newly exposed to ideas of power and privilege. In light of additive approaches to addressing systemic marginalization, in which the “solution” is to simply add various kinds of diversity onto an uninterrogated central norm, I propose deconstruction and critical literacy (Janks, 2010; Luke, 2012) as strategies that can both broaden students’ understanding of oppression and also through which they can explore ways to address it. Drawing on queer (Britzman, 1995; Butler, 2004) and poststructural (Derrida, 1976; Kumashiro, 2000) approaches, I offer possibilities for helping education students to explore their own relationships to cultural texts. In leveraging the idea of deconstruction as a way to consider qualities of openness as well as moments where openness fails, I investigate frameworks through which students can learn to trouble calls for diversity education as an exercise in “inclusivity,” to call dominant norms themselves into question, and to pursue justice as an openness toward the unknown. As a

specific example of exploring critical literacy and deconstructive strategies in teacher education, I do a close reading of Silverberg's (2012) *What Makes a Baby* and its accompanying reader's guide. In addition to framing analysis of this book as a springboard for engaging critical literacy practices, I propose that closely considering deconstructive strategizing in relation to this text can provide a valuable analysis of ideological and political elements of schooling for future educators.

Keywords: critical pedagogy; critical literacy; deconstruction; teacher education; children's literature; *What Makes a Baby*

"The trouble about diversity, then, isn't just that people differ from one another. The trouble is produced by a world organized in ways that encourage people to use difference to include or exclude, reward or punish, credit or discredit, elevate or oppress, value or devalue, leave alone or harass" (Johnson, 2006, p. 16).

"The terms by which we are recognized as human are socially articulated and changeable" (Butler, 2004, p. 2).

"Who helped bring together the sperm and the egg that made you? Who was happy that it was YOU who grew?" (Silverberg, 2013, p. 22 - 23)

INTRODUCTION

Students often come to teacher education with a sense that "diversity" is generally valuable and important to recognize within educational settings. However, for many students, an understanding of difference often comes detached from a nuanced sense of how it is connected to power, privilege, and oppression. Neuwirth (2003) reflects on her own experiences of entering the teaching profession and how, as a white teacher, she felt that a colorblind approach was the best one to take toward teaching her students fairly. She recounts that, only upon entering graduate work in multicultural education and being exposed to critiques of colorblindness did she realize that this stance was doing a great disservice to her students of color. In her revisions to her own teaching practices, she writes about the importance of not only recognizing and valuing students' differences (racial and otherwise), but also of examining the ways in which curriculum emphasizes

the idea of difference at all. In critiquing examples of her own early attempts at teaching multiculturally, she writes:

I also have come to realize that there is a vast difference between looking at race, ethnicity, and gender throughout the curriculum and merely supplementing existing instructional materials on special occasions, such as Cinco de Mayo, Brotherhood Week, and Black History Month. . . . When I think about multiculturalizing my teaching, I imagine including ethnic and cultural diversity in such units as rhetoric in speech communication; place, space, and location in geography; problem solving and citizenship in social studies. . . . [This approach] will help illustrate that diverse ethnic groups are part of the U.S. past, present, and future; that they have a distinct viewpoint on events in this country; and that they are part of the full range of human experiences” (p. 276).

In facilitating the politicized sensibility that Neuwirth describes as instrumental within her own teacher education, it is crucial to shift from understanding difference in an additive framework to understanding diversity in relation to critical framings of difference and advocacy for justice. An additive approach to understanding difference and ameliorating injustice is, as Neuwirth describes, that by which people attempt to redress the wrongs of discrimination and marginalization by simply adding marginalized groups onto an uninterrogated norm. Common examples of this approach within education are to add specialty curriculum units, such as those corresponding with Black History Month or International Women’s Day, while not addressing the exclusion of people of color and/or women from the rest of the curriculum. Sometimes this approach is evident in textbooks when the writers have added a section on a notable figure from a marginalized group, but that section is set apart from the main text in both formatting and style. Particularly if teachers frame this information as if it is not really important to learn (e.g. it won’t be on the test), the additive approach to diversity can further ghettoize marginalized groups by continuing to frame them (and the reasons for their marginalization) as ultimately dismissible (DiAngelo, 2006; Thompson, 2003). Education about diversity that accounts for the ways in which marginalization of certain groups occurs (as well

as the way in which educational processes may themselves further said marginalization) requires intentionally critical approaches.

In considering how education about oppression and social justice might work, Kumashiro (2000) poses four approaches: education for the Other, education about the Other, education that critiques privileging and Othering, and education that changes students and society. Of these four approaches, he maintains that the latter is the most effective in aligning education with social justice, since it is the most capable of engendering recognition of systemic oppression and identifying possibilities for change through the disruption of social processes. Within this approach to education, Kumashiro describes sensitization to the discursive production of oppression as key and explains that a degree of uncertainty is necessary for moving away from oppressive structures and imagining new ways of thinking and being. He affirms that “teaching... like learning, cannot be about repetition and affirmation of either student’s or teacher’s knowledge, but must involve uncertainty, difference, and change” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 44). As Neuwirth so skillfully demonstrates, it is vital for teachers to cultivate frameworks for critique and habits of reflection so that they can continue to evaluate their own praxis around issues of difference, privilege, and power.

In teacher education courses, it is not uncommon for students, particularly those with privilege, to respond to knowledge of marginalization by articulating hopes for educational frameworks in which everyone feels included. An important challenge for instructors to issue, then, is “included in what, and by whom?” As social justice advocates have often claimed, it is important for anyone who wants to work for justice to interrogate normative structures and the way that people (including themselves) uphold them (Delpit, 1998; Johnson, 2006; Neuwirth, 2003). To do this, learning how to notice, critique, and imagine alternatives to norms is key. Freire’s (1970) model of problem-posing education resonates with these goals, for the process of pursuing difficult questions together not only values the knowledge that students already have, but holds them and their teachers accountable for using the knowledge they produce to address inequity. In a combination of introducing critical frameworks that Kumashiro (2000) describes can help students to identify the production and maintenance of oppression

and then posing questions about how to imagine a more just world, teachers can involve their students in interrogating their own relationships to power.

As an example, Cory Silverberg's (2012) book *What Makes a Baby* provides a clear model for how to interrogate norms and enact more just practices within education. Intended as a tool for introducing young children to reproduction and kinship structures, the book's narrative is characterized by a radical, deconstructive openness. This quality renders it able to be applicable for diverse ways of birthing and rearing children, including but not limited to surrogacy, adoption, conception with a donor's sperm, home and hospital births, biological and social parenthood, and support by people from a wide variety of experiences and identifications. Using this text in teacher education classes can function in several ways: it can serve as a model against which students can compare other texts, it can work as a prompt for discussing how "inclusion" itself can be a problematic and limited goal for envisioning and enacting justice, and it can provide a framework for considering knowledge production within textual interpretation itself. In other words, it is an artifact around which teachers and students together can experiment with deconstruction in relation to pedagogy.

As Biesta (2010) explains, "the point of deconstruction is not simply to affirm what is known to be excluded by the system. What is at stake... is an affirmation of what is wholly other, of what is unforeseeable from the present" (p. 720). Inasmuch, deconstructive strategies can help students to think beyond calls for inclusion of specific categories and to consider what might be involved in maintaining a critical openness to difference. Britzman (1995) refers to this stance as the capacity to interrogate what makes anything "thinkable" as well as what may exist beyond the thinkable (p. 156). Since engendering criticality of norms and the ways of thinking that uphold them is critical to pursuing education as an endeavor in social justice, providing a framework within which students can experiment with deconstructive thinking can serve as a valuable part of the process of pursuing equity for students. Though deconstruction is a complex idea, there are accessible ways of introducing and exploring it — for example, using specific texts, as I will explore with *What Makes a Baby*.

A note before proceeding — my goal in exploring this particular text is not to put Silverberg’s (2012) work up on a pedestal, or to suggest that his is the only text that can prompt students’ thinking about education, difference, and justice. While I do think that, because of its philosophical approach and stylistic features, WMAB is a particularly useful text for exploring these concepts, other texts, even ones that further dominant and oppressive ideologies, can also prove helpful in exploring deconstruction. Since deconstruction is a strategy (Peters & Biesta, 2009), students can use it to question hierarchies, norms, and representations within any text. Also, since the element of critique can sometimes feel overwhelmingly negative in curricula about power and oppression, and since an important aspect of social education is to engender critical hope (Boler, 2004; Carr, 2008), it can be helpful to provide models of texts that both effectively and positively explore themes of social justice. While WMAB does function as a “good” model of a more inclusive approach, the reason that it is particularly helpful to consider is because of the way in which the narrative prioritizes further conversation and exploration. As Silverberg (2013) himself suggests, it is important for conversations about reproduction and kinship to draw from a diverse set of references. Furthermore, while it is significant to frame such “model” texts as always imperfect and never beyond the reach of critical thinking, it can prove just as helpful to consider a text for what it does well as what it does poorly. In doing so, students can learn to experience critique in a more multifaceted way — as a tool that not only helps to consider when and why, but also how ideas and expressions can be different in order to advance a more just world. In examining the approach and message of WMAB, students can consider its openness and orientation towards justice in relation to their own philosophies of education.

WHAT MAKES A BABY

Cory Silverberg published *What Makes a Baby* in 2012 and distributed it with the help of an overwhelmingly successful crowd-funding campaign. In his request for support, he explained that, “What makes [the book] new is that it’s a book about where babies come from that works for every kind of family and every kind of kid” (Silverberg, 2012b). Silverberg’s text remains true to his description — in both the

illustrations and the narrative, WMAB creates space to describe reproduction and kinship broadly enough to sustain a wide range of specific applications. In a reader's guide, Silverberg provides not only extensive explanation of his choices in words and images, but also an array of suggestions for how adults might use the book within conversations with children about what makes babies (including, perhaps, what made themselves). Silverberg (2013) is upfront about his intentions for making the book widely applicable. He explains that it "focuses on the child's experience and leaves many blank spaces to allow the adult reader to share stories, and to allow the children to ask questions. This book doesn't pretend to give you all the answers." (p. ii). While Silverberg implies that the openness of the book makes it applicable to a wide variety of circumstances (e.g. what conspires to make specific babies), WMAB is also valuable for the ways in which it can help its readers to identify and reconsider dominant narratives. Presenting the story in this way, Silverberg (2012a) does much more than make a book that is accessible for all families — he fundamentally destabilizes essentialized norms for understanding gender, sex, and kinship. Furthermore, he presents viable alternatives for understanding and speaking about all of these constructions and relationships. This is especially important because students new to critical analysis (and often students who benefit from oppressive systems that privilege their lives and experiences over others) can experience critical frameworks as only and overwhelmingly threatening. WMAB not only models a more just way for understanding kinship structures; it does so in ways that are hopeful and clearly useful.

Additionally, as the reader's guide illustrates, the text exists in relation to both potential and actual conversations about it. While this is true with any text, Silverberg is explicit about exploring the conversations that could emerge from a reading of the book. For example, he posits that while learning about the reproductive features of bodies, children may have questions about whether they or people they know have certain features that the text mentions (e.g. eggs, sperm, etc.) (p. 4 - 7). He provides several ways to address these questions that vary in both detail and length. Throughout the responses, though, he maintains an openness to a wide range of experiences and potential directions

the conversation could go. However, just because he does not posit a singular or best answer does not mean that there isn't a value system in place. As he explains:

As an educator I'm aware of how powerful (and subtle) early messages are, and how they can easily lead to our thinking as adults that there is something wrong with us if we don't fit neatly into the expected categories of sex and gender, or that we have failed as parents if we don't have sperm or eggs to contribute to the baby-making process. The upside is that it's possible to help even the very young understand that the world is varied, amazing, and complex, and still provide information that they can understand. (Silverberg, 2013, p. 6).

Silverberg clearly acknowledges the harm that can result from reductive and exclusionary understandings of gender, sexuality, reproduction, and kinship. He implies that because the world and people's lives within it are diverse, presenting information that acknowledges complexity can be challenging. Importantly, though, he demonstrates that, with some thoughtful framing and resources, it is possible.

Seeing this evidence of a praxis that refutes marginalization and hierarchies of experience may be particularly valuable for students who resonate with theories of social justice but are struggling to see how to explore them in action. *WMAB* provides both some concrete examples of what social justice praxis can look like and also provides a way into broader conversations about the circulation of power. In considering the conversational possibilities Silverberg references within the context of teacher education, it is feasible to foster conversations about discourse and the way that power flows through it (Foucault, 1978). Positioned relationally and within discourse, it is easy to understand how the book itself represents a multitude of potential conversations that can take shape in their own specific contexts.

At the same time that the readers guide can help to consider the potential of certain lines of discourse and their implications, the text itself can serve as a central anchor that illuminates a humane way to think and speak about human life. Butler (2004) pursues the questions of what ultimately makes a life "livable" (p. 2). In doing so, she considers the structures and institutions that regulate, limit, and allow life, such

as language and law. Furthermore, she interrogates the category of the human in terms of its construction and maintenance by dominant institutions.

Butler explains:

The terms by which we are recognized as human are socially articulated and changeable. And sometimes the very terms that confer ‘humanness’ on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status, producing a differential between the human and the less-than-human. (p. 2)

This question of defining and delimiting “humanity” is important in relation to the ethical codes that dominant systems bestow on those who get to be considered human (and that those systems withhold from those considered less than human). As a text and an approach to conversation, *WMAB* provides a clear way to think more expansively about human lives and what makes them livable. While Silverberg’s focus is reproduction and kinship, his methods can transcend those specific areas. The shift that Butler explains and Silverberg demonstrates from normative and individualistic to structural and relational is key, for even if students have learned to understand themselves as neutral (because they are privileged and/or benefit from normative structures), not all of their future students will. As facilitators of knowledge production, it is vital that they learn to think expansively about understandings of human experience in order to make life more livable for all.

As Silverberg describes, he consistently includes open referents in his narrative whose purpose it is to be explored in specific conversations between readers. For example, his statement that to make a baby, “you have to start with *something*” is factually true, ambiguous, and ultimately open (Silverberg, 2012a, p. 2). What that “something” is remains open to further interpretation. The conversations that could unfold between the reader and their audience about the “something” that “you have to start with” in order to make a baby could range from desire to genetics to love to medical procedures. Because the referent is not an enumeration, it remains continually available for enumera-

tion, but not foreclosed by the naming of specific examples. In this way, it serves as a form of deconstruction and a point of entry to understanding deconstructive potential.

Furthermore, the text and readers guide can help to prompt critical reflection on the role language can play in reinforcing or possibly subverting norms. At the very least, the care with which Silverberg explains his word choice (particularly in a book in which there are so few) can help students to consider just how intimately language and power are related to one another. As Butler describes, it has often been through discourse that people have limited what gets to be considered human as well as the parameters of a livable life. She writes, “On the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized; they fit no dominant frame for the human, and their dehumanization occurs first, at this level.” (2004, p. 25). Butler describes how this violence within and as justified by discourse fuels physical violences in the form of acts against those understood to be less than human. This cycle, then, creates livable lives for some at the expense of others. Though at first glance, Silverberg’s text is about babies, it is also about Butler’s question of what makes a livable life. Through the text, readers can explore not only various factors that come together during conception, pregnancy, and birth — what, biologically and socially, creates the conditions for these processes — but also the ways of speaking about and understanding life that reflect actual experiences and broaden normative understandings of ways to be and live.

In addition to the words themselves, the illustrations and visual design of *WMAB* contribute to the radical openness and accessibility of Silverberg’s overall narrative. His language is simple, and the colorful pages are bright, pleasing, and aesthetically similar to other children’s books. Outside of specific contexts or conversations about his approach, it may even be unclear why Silverberg has worded certain phrases the way that he has. For example, students used to operating from a context that equates cisgenderedness with normativity may be unsure why Silverberg explains bodies in the following non-gendered ways: “Not all bodies have sperm in them. Some do, some do not.” “Not all bodies have eggs in them. Some do, and some do not.” (Sil-

verberg, 2012a, p. 3-4) Particularly if they do not have an analysis that lends insight into the need to delink biological characteristics from social identification (e.g. if they were assigned female at birth and they agree with this assignment to the extent that they do not even regard it as such), they may not understand why Silverberg does not just refer to “women” as having eggs and “men” as having sperm. Conversely, if students have had relationships with trans* people, are themselves trans*, or for any other reason fall outside of normative expectations for reproductive functions, they may be relieved to read a description of bodies that accounts for their experiences.

By using the ambiguous “some” to indicate the bodies that have eggs and/or sperm, Silverberg refuses to reinforce norms, to set up a dichotomy between the bodies, or to gender them in any way based on their biologies. For example, he does not say that women’s bodies have eggs in them unless there is something wrong with them. He also does not say that men’s bodies usually have sperm in them. Rather, he pares down the information to that which is pertinent to describing the process of reproduction while at the same time remaining faithful to a broad range of experiences. By not going into detail, he not only avoids reifying norms and pathologizing difference, but he also creates a narrative that actually and factually applies to diverse biological orientations. He opens the possibility for enumeration about specific circumstances (e.g. where the egg and sperm came from that made any given child), but does not require it for the sake of the narrative. Along these lines, a thought experiment to consider with students is how this text might read differently if it specifically or exclusively described how these bodily orientations apply to cisgender or trans* people. In other words, what is the effect of Silverberg *not* enumerating or specifying? How does he achieve this openness, and what does it do? Students may be interested to learn that this effect is difficult to accomplish, and if they do come to these conclusions, it is possible to push them even further to consider why, as well as to ponder how to hone this skill if they find it to be useful.

DECONSTRUCTION & CRITICAL LITERACY

Modeling critical literacy is a skill that is valuable to cultivating criticality in relationship to education. Reading texts closely to explore the meanings available within them, as well as exploring alternatives for how the texts can be constructed or received, is helpful for teachers thinking about their roles in producing knowledge with students. For example, students might consider the effects of Silverberg referring to the egg and sperm coming together in a “dance” as opposed to other ways of describing their union (Silverberg, 2012a, p. 17). As Silverberg (2013) explains in his reader’s guide, he picked “dance” because of the egalitarian connotations. Conversations about this word choice could involve discussing how other descriptions can reinforce problematic gender norms (e.g. if the sperm is represented as more aggressive or assertive, while the egg is presented as passive). Furthermore, students could consider what other words have a more egalitarian connotation, alongside dance. On the next page, Silverberg (2012a) describes the product of the egg and sperm as a “tiny thing” that sometimes, but not always, grows into a baby (p. 20). Since scholars (Janks, 2010, 2014; Luke, 2012) describe critical literacy as a practice of interrogating texts for patterns of dominance and oppression as well as thinking about practices of literacy as themselves implicated in larger political struggles, critical literacy frameworks can help to extend discussion around this point regarding Silverberg’s decision not to create a norm that prioritizes some forms and outcomes of reproduction over others. Using this narrative, it is also possible to draw closer attention to narratives that produce standards that shame miscarriages, abortions, or the bodies that have either.

Discussing *WMAB* in teacher education courses can also facilitate questions regarding texts that students themselves have read (or that someone has read to them) about kinship formation and reproduction. These conversations can provide an opportunity for reflexivity regarding their own education about babies and the processes, structures, and relationships that support their growth. In thinking back to these lessons, they can interrogate how they learned about gender, sexuality, race, and class in relation to reproduction and kinship, from whom, and what those lessons might have omitted. Since, in many cases,

WMAB is radically different from the normative framings in which students are accustomed to learning and speaking about reproduction and kinship, it presents a foil for considering exactly how those framings contribute to marginalization of non-normative groups and experiences. In this way, comparing *WMAB* to other texts can serve as an entry into conversations about how to approach all texts in terms of the politics surrounding their inclusions and exclusions. As critical literacy scholarship indicates (Janks 2010, 2014; Luke 2012; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2010), readings texts for the political implications of their content can serve as a powerful way to address power and oppression within not only specific texts, but also more broadly within educational practices and social patterns. For example, Schieble (2012) suggests that, through young adult literature, critical literacy frameworks can foster consciousness around the privileges and patterns of domination associated with whiteness. Considering characterizations of white people in books (even fictional narratives) can help students to examine how whiteness becomes associated with privilege and dominance in the world within and beyond specific texts. Furthermore, considering whiteness as both a social and a textual production can help students to contemplate possible avenues for altering oppressive structures by questioning, critiquing, and even imagining alternatives to dominant narratives.

Applied to *WMAB*, critical literacy frameworks can help to consider how Silverberg's open descriptions of reproductive and kinship processes compare to other texts about birth and families, his motivations for representing these processes in an open way, and the politics that might emerge from using his text as a teaching tool. If, as Janks (2014) explains, the practice of critiquing texts and practices of literacy "enables participants to engage consciously with the ways in which semiotic resources have been harnessed to serve the interests of the producer" engagements with *WMAB* could involve an examination of Silverberg's craft and the politics that inform it as well as, by proxy, how this craft may differ from more common representations of stories of birthing and rearing children (p. 36). When using *WMAB* in teacher education, I have noticed that students often find this narrative to be exceptional. When they think back to the texts through which

they learned about reproduction and kinship, the majority remark that those texts reinforced a normative framework of a heterosexual nuclear family who conceive a child without any outside assistance and who experience few if any complications in pregnancy. Closely considering WMAB allows them to evaluate the stakes of promoting such narrow and exclusionary frameworks for understanding the world. Critical literacy frameworks offer ways to think about how books and conversations about them can “analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life” (Luke, 2012, p. 5).

In this way, deconstructive strategies can compliment the questions that students unearth through critical literacy, for deconstruction can present a way to consider that there is no way outside of text, or that, in other words, ideas and words depend on other ideas and words to make sense. As Derrida (1976) noted, there is no way to get “outside” of these constructions in order to grasp a better understanding of the “truth” — for the “truth” does not underly expressions of ideas and descriptions of perceived reality, but rather, knowledge is created within language and does not exist as an expression of “truth.” A deconstructive position takes up knowledge production in that it relates to the exercise of power through discourse; for it is through discourse that norms are produced alongside and as dependent upon alterity, or that which the norm is both not and “preferable” to. In providing a way to think about this relationship, deconstruction presents a means by which to become oriented toward justice and questions of what the production of norms continually marginalizes. As Biesta (2009) notes, “What is at stake in the occurrence of deconstruction is an attempt to bring into view the impossibility to totalize, the impossibility to articulate a self-sufficient, self-present center from which everything can be mastered and controlled” (p. 30). In the interest of questioning the supposedly self-evident (e.g. that a heteronormative pairing is necessary to make a baby), it becomes possible to explore forms of openness — not for the sake of expanding norms, but as a way to consider their ethical failures (Britzman, 1995). For Derrida (1976), this is the critical potential of deconstruction — to bring justice into focus by questioning relationships to and understandings of alterity. In deconstruction, openness

helps to account for the vast array of ways in which people are always already living, and also to anticipate continual change and flux. For example, the “something” to which Silverberg claims are the origin of human life, approached deconstructively, can be malleable enough to represent a range of not only present but also future life circumstances.

CONCLUSION:

ENGENDERING DECONSTRUCTIVE POLITICS IN EDUCATION

The pursuit of deconstruction within teacher education is a collective effort, as discourse and knowledge production are also collective. Particularly if and when students articulate and return to investments in individual capacities to transcend norms, it is helpful to trouble this notion by considering the ways in which language and knowledge about what it means to be human are collectively created and understood. Though, of course, there are tensions and contradictions within understandings, none of these things ever change just because one person wanted them to badly enough, or because one person found their way outside of systems of discourse. As Butler (2004) explains, “one does not ‘do’ one’s gender alone. One is always ‘doing’ with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary” (p. 1). As facilitators of knowledge production (presently, as students, and eventually, as teachers), pre-service teachers might do well to take Butler’s description to heart. For while Butler references gender, it is gender and a vast array of additional factors that students learn to co-constitute in schools; and it is in schools that teachers can have the capacity to be aware of restrictive and regulatory processes around identity and experience, and, with critical praxis, can hopefully work to expand what counts as a livable life.

In cultivating said praxis, it is valuable for social justice educators to understand criticality as an ongoing process without a finite end. Just as additive approaches to diversity can further marginalize oppressed groups, a fixed, essential version of what critical praxis resembles risks rendering criticality as a stance that does not need to continually adapt. As Kumashiro (2000) posits:

Rather than aim for understanding of some critical perspective, anti-oppressive pedagogy should aim for effect by having students engage with relevant aspects of critical theory and extend its terms of analysis to their own lives, but then critique it for what it overlooks or for what it forecloses, what it says and makes possible as well as what it leaves unsaid and unthinkable. (p. 39)

In other words, anti-oppressive pedagogy should help students to establish and develop a skill-set that enables them to be critically attentive and flexible, rather than to master pre-established content regarding diverse populations. Considering Silverberg's (2012a) approach to telling a story of reproduction and kinship as well as imagining the ways in which even this very open narrative has limitations can provide tangible ways for students to consider what cultivating this kind of skill-set might involve. Looking closely at the text and having conversations about how students might use it in an educational setting provides concrete ways to consider questions such as: At a very simple level, who does language include and exclude? What are the effects of this inclusion or exclusion? Are there ways to describe things that do not marginalize people and their experiences?

It is important to pursue frameworks in which future teachers can both learn to identify norms and consider how social legibility depends on them. Ultimately, a hopeful possibility engendered within social justice education is the capacity for students to not only recognize norms as they are enacted and constructed, but to learn to live, as Butler suggests, in "critical and transformative relation to them" (p. 3). This is necessary for, as deconstructive theories suggest, though social scripts are malleable and always shifting, there is no ultimate way outside of them. If students and teachers are to take up the question of what worldview makes life livable for the most people, they have to contend with the structures and ideas that support and delimit life. As Butler (2004) states:

Individuals rely on institutions of social support in order to exercise self-determination with respect to what body and what gender to have and maintain, so that self-determination becomes a plausible concept only in the context of a social world that supports and enables that exercise of agency. (p. 7)

To imagine a world in which self-determination is possible, then, involves cultivating structures and practices that support said determination, and to do this for the most possible people involves being open to and prepared to craft support for that which is beyond existing knowledge. As Biesta (2009) argues, deconstruction is politically helpful precisely because it enables an openness toward and a “concern for the other” (p. 15). More specifically, deconstruction is an openness “toward the *unforeseeable* incoming of the other” (Biesta, p. 16, emphasis mine). In other words, deconstruction can cultivate an openness toward the unknown and the unpredictable. Through deconstructive strategies, teachers and students can consider what it means to expand in the direction of justice without having to measure their actions against a measure of progress toward ultimate completion. Understood as such, deconstruction does not predict a time or circumstance when the openness will be complete (and can then become fixed or closed), but rather insists on continual, consistent movement in the direction of justice.

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