**Humble wrestling:**

**Bringing affect and assemblage theory to social justice teacher education**

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**Introduction: Teacher Education Labors to Change the World**

Across North America, university-based teacher education programs make space in their curricula for what is variably referred to as diversity, equity or social justice content. At work here are teacher educators: faculty, whether tenure-stream or adjunct, many of whom connect their work to the broader field of social justice teacher education or SJTE. The end goal of SJTE practitioners and the field as a whole is, simply, changing the world. In twenty years of writing by SJTE field leaders, world changing is ontologically constructed in relation to two long-standing demographic divides in North American public schools (see Airton, 2014). First, students of colour are becoming the majority in many school districts but are overwhelmingly taught by white, monocultural, monolingual, middle-class women. Second, white students consistently receive higher scores than students of colour on standardized literacy and numeracy tests. For SJTE, ‘changing the world’ means narrowing these divides by increasing the enrolment and retention of people from underrepresented groups in the teaching profession, and by preparing all teachers for a more equitable classroom practice. The demographic divides are, however, far removed in space, time and scale from the rooms in which SJTE actually takes place. With no access to the outcomes nominally defining and uniting this branch of teacher education, then, how do SJTE practitioners know if they are doing the work well or badly?

In what follows, two practitioners – A and B – struggle together to produce a version of ‘SJTE going well’ that will stand, stable-enough, in the midst of their conversation without **excessive force**:

A: ... like when it’s going really well for you, and so social justice teacher ed is going well, what does that look like and feel like?

B: Um, it looks like the students are engaged.

A: What does that look like?

B: It looks like they’re not silent or with a very flat and apathetic affect. Um, and that’s what I struggle against where I am. And they’re actually willing to take risks and ask their questions and speak. Um, and it looks like they’re humbly wrestling with things that challenge them rather than kind of doing that refusal to know or willful ignorance or just rejection, um, that, you know, it’s hard and you don’t even, whether or not you agree or disagree is not really relevant. Are you willing to grapple with some, a different pair of glasses? Will you put these on and see what you can see? You can take them off when we’re done. Rather than ‘I, you know, I disagree, I refuse, this is...’

A: Right.

B: Or that just total silence. ‘I’ll never take a risk, I won’t show myself.’ **Um, because if they’re not, if they’re not speaking up in the one class they have that grapples with these issues they’re not going to speak up in the faculty lounge.**

A: Mmm.

B: **Right? I mean, I don’t believe they will.**

A: No, I’m, I doubt they will either.

B: So that’s what it looks like, that’s all. It’s not like we’re all in agreement but the willingness to grapple and the engagement and the coming alive kind of. Um, it also looks like ‘you’re ruining my life, you ruined my life.’

A: Right.

B: **In a good way, right? Like...**

A: Yeah.

B: ...**you wanna see somebody going like [high-pitched, enthusiastic voice] ‘you ruined my life! [A laughs and claps] I can, I see different now! I can’t not see it!’ And I’m always like ‘yay!’**

A: [laughs] My students are like ‘I can’t go on the bus anymore without looking around me,’ you know?

B: Yeah, yeah.

Here, B ventures the idea that SJTE going well is a ‘humble wrestling’ in between two polls of resistance: the strident kind and the silent kind. *The going well is, however, still resistance.* It is not the absence of resistance, or seamless agreement with the instructor or with the politicized course content or with one’s more social justice-minded peers. Humble wrestling is both process and outcome; the goal is a willingness to try on the social justice glasses for a time, even they don’t stay on forever. Being able to grapple with discomfort – not avoid it – might mean that other discomforts could become more livable. Grappling grows capacity to ‘speak up in the faculty lounge.’

B doesn’t just venture an idea, however. In the midst of the conversation, they must labor quite forcefully to produce the humble wrestling – a kind of student resistance – as the thing SJTE wants. The conversation is forced, as if what B speaks about cannot stand as a good outcome of SJTE practice. This version of SJTE going well requires B to impulsively compel A into more forceful performances of validation. B is *compelled to compel*, driving A to laughter at someone giving thanks for a ruined life. This production is excessive, hyperbolic. Finally A is on board and can contribute a complementary example, implicating themself and producing with B the ‘good SJTE’ as dampening the ease or seamlessness of students’ lives. The conversation can now move along.

As with other examples from my recent post-qualitative (see Lather & St. Pierre, 2013) inquiry into the field of SJTE (Airton, 2014), my interest is how it went: its laboriousness. Why did it take force to produce a form of student resistance – humble wrestling – as a good SJTE outcome that could stand without further qualification? Isn’t wholehearted *student buy-in* to the politics and tactics of social justice what ‘we’ are after? With some digging in the SJTE literature, we can see why A and B could barely tolerate ‘humble wrestling’ as SJTE’s good outcome. This outcome is not the narrowing of the demographic divides enshrined in writings by SJTE field leaders, who have long lamented an inability to draw connections from SJTE courses to the kind of teaching thought to contribute to this version of social justice (e.g., Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Grant & Secada, 1990; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Zeichner, 2009). An apparent ‘failure’ within neo-liberal accountability culture, SJTE is perpetually at risk. Populating this atmosphere of risk is the specter of the SJTE impostor: a person, course or program patting itself on the back for preparing teachers to enact social justice while perhaps even doing the opposite. Who are we who do this work if we cannot show how we are different?

In the SJTE literature, an impostor inoculation is clarity of language, specifically in the field’s definition of ‘social justice.’ Without clarity, ‘social justice’ may be mistakenly applied or worse: it may proliferate too freely. Too many applications of ‘social justice teacher education’ and ‘social justice’ may empty out. McDonald and Zeichner (2009) warn that “the lack of clarity … [makes] it possible for institutions with differing perspectives, political agendas, and strategies to lay claim to the same vision of teacher preparation” (p. 595; see also Cochran-Smith, 2009). Sleeter (2009) warns that, without greater clarity, “the likelihood is heightened that newcomers to the field will conceptualize it in a way that falls short of major change in schools or society” (p. 218). Unsurprisingly, the SJTE literature bristles with language-based strategies of impostor detection: typologies, definitions and attributes of teachers who ‘teach for social justice’ and the programs held to prepare them for this work.

It is little wonder that A and B so labored to stabilize a version of student *resistance* as SJTE going well. Following Wiegman (2012), can a back-and-forth, ambivalent and reluctant student engagement affectively suture the gap between SJTE in university classrooms and a ‘social justice’ somewhere else? Can this index, in the moment, that a teacher candidate is ready to do the good work? In an impostor-anxious field, the answer is no. Rather, *preventing* teacher candidate resistance is a central SJTE concern.

In introducing their 2012 edited book *Cultivating social justice teachers: How teacher educators have helped students overcome cognitive bottlenecks and learn critical social justice concepts*, noted SJTE scholar Gorski and co-editors (2012) include a second-person address. They effectively tell the reader – tell *you* – about your own experience. The title emphasizes the cognitive in a conciliatory re-framing of resistance as learning-related and not always ‘political.’ However, the ‘cognitive bottleneck’ is unfailingly, excessively affective. Here is their address:

Making matters all the more challenging, every semester some of your students resist outright any conversation suggesting that [for example] lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer people experience bias or oppression, at all, or that their experiences belong in a conversation about ‘diversity,’ ‘multiculturalism,’ or ‘social justice.’ Others argue on misinformed scientific or even religious grounds that heterosexuality *is* normal, so it only makes sense that anything other than heterosexuality would be deemed abnormal, if not deviant. And every week you fight the temptation to interpret these responses as hostile or judgmental. You have turned to colleagues in search of pedagogical strategies only to learn that the challenge you face is a common one; you turn to the research literature and find, in fact, that the challenge is well-documented there. (pp. 1-2)

Although the last sentence clearly lends a universal quality to these experiences, the ‘you’ address does the heavy-lifting. In other words, student resistance is so common that it can be said of people whom the editors have never met, in cities and towns they have never visited. It is *quintessential*, as is the desire to find means of prevention.

When conducting fieldwork (see Airton, 2014) at the 2012 annual meeting of the National Association for Multicultural Education, “Shit My Students Say” was the only session I attended that was full to bursting,. The title’s irreverence enacts a familiarity similar to Gorski et al.’s (2012) second person address. ‘We are buds,’ it seems to say, ‘because we face the same thing day in and day out.’ The session description hinted at strategies for ‘shutting the shit down,’ where the ‘shit’ is resistance. This was not, however, a simple assumption. Later on, two SJTE practitioners in attendance would have this conversation:

C: But I was wondering, given the title and the content of the session...

D: Mm hmm!

C: ...what, like...I’m interested in hearing whether you can offer an opinion for why it was so packed.

D: Oh that’s an interesting...question. So I would suspect it’s because we have a lot of workshops about the problem and not a lot of workshops about the solution.

C: Mmm.

D: And the way that that [unclear] I think was framed as being about the solution, or about the idea of how you respond to the shit your students say. I think that the workshop itself didn’t necessarily get there, and so I heard a couple of people afterwards saying ‘I wanted us to get to the response, I thought they were going to tell us how to respond.’

C: Ohh.

**D: Which is a naïve assumption, that you’re gonna to go to any workshop and [silly voice] they’re going to say ‘this is how you respond.’ [unclear addition as C cuts in:]**

**C: [loud, enthusiastic] That would be so great! [laughs]**

**D: [laughing voice] Yeah, like that would be a wonderful handout. But...**

**C: Yeah. [laughs]**

**D: But that would be my guess...**

**C: Right.**

**D: ...is that there were a lot of faculty teaching these concepts for the very first time, were very new to these ideas, hearing the same kinds of stories and not quite knowing what to say.**

**C: [softly] Right.**

Here, that one could receive a manual on handling student resistance is hilarious and way for C and D to solidify their non-impostor SJTE credentials: that they are not as naïve as people teaching an SJTE course for the first time. To be seasoned, bona fide SJTE people is to scorn the desire for an easy solution to student resistance. Their SJTE-ness congeals as a shared derision of those who seek a one-pager on this problem. The session’s outlandish title might have been a way to somehow radicalize the ‘naïve’ desire for the answer: to make this desire edgy, critical and therefore okay. But C and D know better. Preventing student resistance is produced as the craft that binds ‘real’ SJTE practitioners together; successful stifling is the well-honed craft of the veteran. There can be no crash course.

These brief examples convey some of the work done by the affective genre (Berlant, 2011) of resistance the field of SJTE. Resistance is paradoxically comfortable in that the ‘resisting student’s’ utterances – the things to be anticipated and prevented – are canonical: ‘I treat everyone the same,’ ‘I didn’t own slaves,’ ‘I don’t understand how two people of the same sex could have well-adjusted kids,’ ‘they should just get a job,’ etc. Choruses of eye-rolling and head-shaking greet these familiar recitations in any field-specific gathering. Resistance is the obstacle thrown up by students in their privilege or ignorance, and what *Cultivating social justice teachers* and “Shit My Students Say” offer are ways to stop it in its tracks. It is a bad thing that gets in the way of our good work.

So far, I have fleshed out two contentions. First, the field of social justice teacher education has an abiding anxiety about its legitimacy, and it seeks to bandage this anxiety with empirical evidence (that it cannot find) and language (that sticks to everything, even the wrong things). Second, in the absence of certainty about who is and is not (doing) SJTE, practitioners produce a sense of their SJTE-ness in relation to a particular affective genre of student resistance. This identity function might be what ‘resistance’ is doing for the field, but is this necessarily what it does in the everyday life of the SJTE classroom? In the remainder of the chapter, I substantiate my final contention: that turning away from empiricism and de-centering language can lead to a different understanding of resistance and a favorable account of SJTE’s *vital* contribution to creating school communities less harming of social difference. This contribution is something that SJTE practitioners may viscerally know, but which is inadmissible in the neo-positivist arenas wherein SJTE’s ‘failure’ is repeatedly constructed as indisputable fact. I suggest that ‘teaching the diversity course’ in teacher education is an affective craft of tracking *and even mobilizing* resistance.

**Assemblage and Affect**

If it seems as though I have been referring to social justice teacher education as an entity in and of itself, this is because of the key role played by Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987, 1996, 2004) assemblage theory in my theoretical framework. I approach SJTE as an assemblage: an ever-changing network of relations wherein agency is distributed among its infinitely interrelated human and non-human components. Assemblages have an agency of their own; they act on and are acted upon by their components, such that ‘my responses’ to emerging events are never solely attributable to my intent but activated in service of the assemblage as it responds to local, contextual stimuli. In response to a stimulus at its threshold, an assemblage may undergo a series of processes described in detail by Deleuze and Guattari (1987): violently ward off the new, gently ward off the new, or become sustainably other through a gentle back-and-forth engagement with the new. An assemblage ‘works’ when it produces a sustainable plateau: a stable-enough state is also supple-enough to respond to the new.

Jeffrey Bell (2006) terms assemblages ‘dynamic systems on the edge of chaos.’ In Deleuzian metaphysics, dynamic systems are first and foremost expressions of a fundamental both/and which allows for identities – things, people, language, elements, qualities, properties, etc. – to become and become identifiable. Becoming identifiable is all there is to being. ‘Both/and’ is the double bind of being which is the closest Deleuze and Guattari come to articulating an ideal. Within traditional Western metaphysics, being reaches its fullest expression when stable identities emerge and maintain unchanging such that they are ‘complete.’ The criteria against which their completion is judged are images of the perfection commonly associated with divinity. In this model, things are *either* perfect *or* they are not, and completion is perfection. In Deleuzian metaphysics, however, things are *both* complete *and* in process. As such, Deleuze turns transcendence on its head by suggesting that while there *is* something eternal that exceeds being, it is not a static image or referent (e.g., a clear definition of ‘social justice’) that exists apart from beings. What is eternal is the continual process of becoming, which Bell figures as *chaosmos.*

Chaosmos is at once *both* cosmos, or “stable, structured strata that are in some sense complete” *and* chaos, or “unstable, unstructured, deterritorializing flows” (Bell, 2006, p. 4). All working assemblages navigate the two poles of chaosmos without succumbing to stasis through an excess of order (e.g., perfection, strict coherence), or collapse through a chaotic lack of order (e.g., meaningless proliferation). The cosmotic assemblage resists crucial adaptation to a continuously becoming-world, and the chaotic assemblage burns out through meaningless proliferation until it loses identifiability; both of these outcomes are death. A complete identifiable assemblage has sufficient consistency and stability to function but “is forever open to an outside it presupposes, an immanent chaos which both threatens the system and allows it to create novel adaptations” (p. 178). Completeness is not, therefore, a matter of reaching the pinnacle of development – ‘social justice,’ perhaps – but of continually moving between the two poles. Always in motion, an assemblage does not necessarily become something else as it becomes, but instead moves into a different organization still identifiable as *this* assemblage: as SJTE. If all goes well, this will be another plateau in chaosmos; if not, the assemblage will deterritorialize into its components and fall apart.

My study (Airton, 2014) of SJTE took place at what DeLanda (2006) would call the ‘lower’ level or ordinary life of the SJTE assemblage: in encounters (like the examples I have shared throughout) among less-than-sovereign subjects caught up in this larger network of relations. Even at this level, the assemblage can intensively destabilize. Or it can feel like ‘nothing is happening’ because a plateau has been produced. SJTE’s ordinary is where the sensation of its larger prepersonal processes makes contact *affectively*, “[catching] people up in something that feels like *some*thing” (Stewart, 2007, p. 2; original emphasis) even if we know not what. I take up affect theory as an archive of writings on the everyday uncanny experience of being caught up in things far exceeding ourselves, our intentions, our consciousness and our reasoning: assemblages. By tracking ordinary affects, “the varied, surging capacities to affect and be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences” (pp. 1-2), one can track assemblage becoming. The intensity of being caught up rises and falls in relation to how close the assemblage has come to a threshold with chaos or cosmos, where it threatens to come apart. Tracking affect as sensations of unqualified intensity (Massumi, 2002), then, is a way to stay alive to what happens and what can happen at the thresholds of assemblage becoming in everyday life. Being caught up in an assemblage is “directly compelling” (Stewart, 2007, p. 3); it is to be carried along by swells of intensity, only narrated (if ever) as ‘my emotions’ once the intensity has subsided and I can make sense from receding sensation (Massumi, 2002). So understood, the assemblage is materially apparent to human experience, however belatedly.

**Resistance is Not Futile: The Affective Craft of SJTE**

Although space limitations do not allow for more examples (see Airton, 2014), what I found in my conference fieldwork and conversations with other SJTE practitioners is that the SJTE assemblage is capacious, elastic and responsive to emerging local conditions; this is very different from the SJTE constructed in the field’s literature, which is heavily coded, stabilized and even juridical (Wiegman, 2012) in its definition of social justice and what will take us there.

Emerging particularly within my conversations with other SJTE practitioners was a continuum of student resistance undergirding SJTE classroom practice. Whereas the resistance ‘continuum’ in the field’s literature is largely a binary of ‘good SJTE’ versus the bad kind de-railed by resisting students, the emergent resistance continuum expresses a dynamic system (Bell, 2006). At one end, there is cosmotic resistance which stifles and suffocates the classroom. At the other end there is chaotic resistance which ruptures and rips it apart. What makes these different is not their *content*, such as a quintessentially resistant act; an action can be cosmotic *or* chaotic in the emerging present of an SJTE classroom. What differentiates chaotic and cosmotic resistance is their *form*: speed, duration, volume, pitch, quantity.

The goal, craft and contribution of SJTE practitioners is not keeping an a priori resistance at bay, but producing and maintaining a plateau of locally-specific *dynamic resistance*. A productive plateau can stabilize if cosmotic resistance is balanced by the intensity which, unchecked, leads all the way to chaotic resistance. As metaphor, the plateau is usually a space of respite where ‘nothing is happening.’ A mountain climber expends considerable effort both to attain and to leave a lofty plateau. The plateau is not where the action is, although it is the goal. In SJTE, however, the plateau is both goal and site of considerable activity. The consistency of the plateau itself that allows the new to gradually, laboriously emerge. SJTE practitioners’ sense of things going well or badly expresses the sense that steep, rocky and singular (Event-like) adversity and massive energy expenditure are not the way. The plateau is the productive middle where things are going well on a scale nowhere near SJTE’s goal of changing the world by narrowing demographic divides in education.

While producing dynamic resistance may postpone vigorous student ‘buy-in’ to things like privilege, white supremacy and settler colonialism, among other things, this postponement is integral. Without it, practitioners’ capacity for moment-to-moment assessment of their practice is hampered. In this framework, pre-empting resistance also removes the possibility of sustainable change. As such, degrees of resistance are an *affective barometer* with which SJTE practitioners develop an implicit sense of whether their work is going well or badly in real-time.

**Getting Tactical: Tips for Teaching from Dynamic Resistance**

SJTE’s job is to push new teachers to change how they encounter and work with different others, particularly if those others are from historically marginalized groups. This work is itself marginal in teacher education, regardless of the space or time accorded to SJTE in a particular program. This is because, whether infused or isolated, SJTE can seem like it has little to do with everyday teacher practice. This is often where traditional notions of resistance are anchored: in the idea that, if this stuff doesn’t have anything to do with teaching kids to read, write and do math, why should we (students) have to submit ourselves to such discomfort? If something necessarily uncomfortable is experienced as irrelevant to whatever degree, then a capacity to gauge and balance discomfort against relevance is needed. What (bodily, affective) discomfort feels like or how it manifests in one’s course could be quite different from the experiences of other practitioners or those written up by field leaders.

Fostering the conditions for a stable-enough and therefore sustainable becoming – for dynamic resistance in the midst of a *particular, local* class-assemblage of student and instructor bodies – is a well-honed craft of SJTE practitioners and should be claimed as such. For teachers committed to making classrooms more welcoming of difference – both what is presently held to be different and unthinkable difference-to-come – this affective craft is as politically and ethically significant as any sort of conceptual or semantic mastery. Difference precisely threatens disruption, and SJTE expresses a well-honed capacity to viscerally survive and welcome the most disruptive, the most different difference: to practice when one’s most cherished rules, concepts or categories are disrupted, no matter how pervasively they have come to symbolize the pursuit of social justice.

Regardless of what it looks or feels like in a particular local context, teaching from dynamic resistance – ruining our grateful students’ lives, perhaps – involves something other than creating a space for dialogue, using culturally responsive curricula, invoking contemporary inequity issues, or developing new teachers’ critical thinking skills. Rather, teaching from dynamic resistance involves becoming attuned to the affective barometer of one’s own classroom and laboring in the moment to *increase or decrease* intensity in order to keep things on a sustainable plateau. Chaotic resistance might have to be provoked, produced or allowed to actualize and run its course until it is once again in balance with cosmotic resistance. The same is true in reverse, but the objective is never to banish resistance altogether.

From my conversations with other SJTE practitioners I have extracted some examples: tactics for getting to or sustaining the SJTE ‘sweet spot’ or plateau where difference (of self and other) can sustainably emerge and be encountered with minimal risk of shutdown or rupture. These can initiate a slide toward either end of the chaosmos spectrum and therefore toward the middle: dynamic resistance. Although they may not work every time in every context, we might consider experimenting with their form and content. For example, a swift intervention in one instance might be an utterance, and its swiftness or timing might transfer to other local contexts if not its verbal character or semantic content. It is also important to remember that chaos is not ‘chaotic’ in a vernacular sense but is rather a meaningless proliferation, or wildly increasing degrees of movement away from the sustainable plateau. A warning: these tactics mobilize irony, deception and inauthenticity.

*To provoke chaotic resistance, try...*

...to avoid pushing or leading in a particular direction. Rather, ask a simple yes/no question, sit back and let students carry the conversation for as long as possible. Harness this energy in a redirection toward the place you got stuck – be it material (a configuration or orientation, maybe) or discursive (a term or a concept) and use the movement to ‘grease the wheels’ and propel you through. It might not have been the (semantic) content itself that got you into trouble.

...behaving and speaking as if students are already ‘on board’ with the concepts and commitments underpinning the course, or with the focus of the content with which you and your students are presently engaged. You can generate and catch students up in your own momentum.

...using a plant. Engage someone who can pass as a student enrolled in your program (perhaps a former student). Their task is to perform an approximate degree of strident, familiar resistance that your students have been able to confront or rebut in the past. Allow your students to engage the plant as long as necessary to build the required momentum. It would be a good idea to develop a subtle signal that you could use to ask the plant to desist.

*To provoke static resistance, try...*

...using the classroom, the school or education writ large as an ‘easy out.’ One might say, ‘I understand that you don’t agree, etc. It isn’t necessary that you agree in order to recognize that you have a responsibility in this area as a teacher. What is that responsibility, in this case?’ This may harness new teachers’ habitual desire for the practical and their budding sense of professionalism, prompting the kind of conversation that makes them want to take notes instead of play verbal ping pong.

...redirecting the conversation to scholarly sources. Invoke their own sense of being scholars in a scholarly profession. Further remind them of the considerable research on the topic with which they are (too) freely engaging (in some way). Hopefully you can refer them to a course reading. Failing that, use any available in-room technology to run a quick Google search for ‘hard data’ or a Google Scholar search, together consulting the abstract of the most widely-cited source in the results list. You might also prepare in advance (like a fire extinguisher) a list of Google/Google Scholar searches that can serve in this regard.

...using a plant. This is similar to the above use of a plant, except this plant would *respond* to ongoing student resistance in a manner consistent with your course concepts and goals, and which furthers the conversation you are hoping to have without overplaying your own hand and so remaining a facilitator.

These tactics are offered as provisional, experimental ways to teach from dynamic resistance in teacher education, and with some modification, in other contexts. But how might we prepare our students to exercise this affective craft in their own classrooms? In my rendering, difference demands the visceral ability to do something like ‘go with the flow’ of a particular context or encounter as it unfolds, without stopping or seeking to control it and without recourse to claims about our intent in so doing. This can look like pausing when we sense the welling-up of intensity as someone or something emerges to shatter expectations (which are most often unconscious and inarticulate, apparent only belatedly through affect). This pausing is immediate; it happens on the surface of the body prior to the possibility of narration or reflection on *why* one feels this way or *what* is precisely being undone. It happens prior to the privilege confessional and its paradox: that the reasons why we might expect particular things of the other do not actually matter in the moment when the expectation is acted out. Even our most changed intentions do not matter. Intentionality is of language; it is too late to the party, where affect has already erupted onto the scene. Helping teacher candidates learn to ‘get out ahead’ of themselves, pause at the welling-up, and deprioritize their very good intentions as in any way materially-significant is helping them to develop an affective craft of their own.

**Conclusion: From Depth to Surface in Social Justice Education**

My work in this chapter rattles tradition and common sense in social justice education more broadly, on two fronts: first, that everything we do must be representationally, transparently relevant to ‘social justice’ as currently symbolized; and second, that teacher intentionality (and/as critical consciousness) and self-knowledge (and/as reflexivity) are the vehicles of social change. At bottom, both claim the inherent value of authenticity, or the ‘realness’ of one’s connection (in the first instance) and commitment (in the second) to ‘the struggle’ outside (Wiegman, 2012). Authenticity underscores SJTE’s impostor anxiety, which lives on empiricist plane where the field’s affective craft is paradigmatically invisible.

If, via affect theory, language and representation are latecomers to the scene where difference may have already been shut down and snuffed out, so too, then, are intentionality, will, identity, narrative and history (here used to mean a stabilized narrative of the past). I am provisionally grouping these together under the rubric of *depth* because they presume the significance of what happens away from the immediacy of an encounter with difference and only in the aftermath of its emergence. SJTE does depth well and depth is incredibly important, but it is not all that matters. And so, I provisionally refer to what is affective, implicit, pre-personal and non-sovereign as *surface*.

Surface is a terrain rarely broached in SJTE. This is an ethical problem because harm on the basis of social difference does not begin and end with depth, and depth may not prepare us for difference-to-come. We who seek to change the world via teacher education must reckon with the vulnerability of depth to what erupts at the surface of social life. In other words, our efforts to coax students into a new consciously ethical and political relationship with, for example, privilege and oppression may bank too much on the power of consciousness in the moment of impact because the unfolding present can evacuate depth’s significance. Although painful, we must ask: does this change even *matter*? After all, there is only ever an unstable connection between what I hold myself to be doing (and the language with which I narrate this holding) and what actually (in the Massumian sense – see Massumi, 2002) happens. We might therefore begin to think about the unintended consequences of pedagogies aiming to ‘empower teachers to be agents of social change’ if what is required is a sense of one’s efficacy as only ever contingent, partial and non-sovereign. ‘Social justice teachers’ might need to be watchers-and-waiters rather than movers-and-shakers. They might need to be humble wrestlers. If we want teachers who pause, go with the flow and facilitate the emergence of the new, the concepts of agency and social justice at the heart of SJTE must become vulnerable to theories of affect.

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