



- » JAAACS Home
- » Article Archive
- » Editorial Statement
- » Call for Manuscripts
- » Author Guidelines
- » Editorial Board
- » Review Board

- » Submit An Article
- » Contact JAAACS

Volume 3

June 2007

A Reading on Four Registers: Educational Reforms, Democratic Cultures, Research Methodologies, and the Question of the Posts

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Abstract

This essay situates educational reform discourse with its emphasis on transparent understanding and philosophies of control in tension with post-structural and critical discourse suspicious of correct readings and generalizable claims. Employing the idea of “cross reading” research projects to map the friction between texts that fix interpretations and those that incite a proliferation of readings, the essay argues for explicitly using issues of omission, misrecognition, and mishaps to unsettle conceptions of research into educational reform. What these tensions might mean for conducting school-based research is addressed on four registers that assist in moving with and through contemporary instrumental knowledge claims: from dualisms toward complexities, sneaky kid and reading difference differently, reform as deliberative art, and post-reconceptualization in post-post times. The essay concludes with a tentative exploration of a trilectical educational praxis that positions inconceivability as a performative site for thinking through educational reform in as-yet unknown ways.

As soon as a theory is enmeshed in a particular point, we realize it will never possess the slightest practical importance unless it can erupt in a totally different area. This is why the notion of reform is so stupid and hypocritical. Either reforms are designed by people who claim to be representative, who make a profession of speaking for others, and they lead to a division of power . . . or they arise from the complaints and demands of those concerned. This latter instance is no longer a reform but a revolutionary action that questions the totality of power and the hierarchy that maintains it.

—Gilles Deleuze

Facing “the nightmare that is the present” (Pinar, 2004) which is saturated by the drive for standardization and competitive aggression, I am much less interested in proposing any new version than trying a good translation. Through our collective and individual efforts to translate the curriculum, we may be able to “improvise” (Aoki, 2005) openings and “seek

passages” (Martusewicz, 2001), even momentarily, to engage and transform day-to-day educational praxis.

—Hongyu Wang

This is a complication of the conversation begun in Jesse Goodman’s *Reforming Schools: Working Within a Progressive Tradition during Conservative Times*. As I craft a response to the text, I avoid the temptation of following the framework of other reviews I have read—ones that involve 1) rehearsing the theoretical approaches and methodological assumptions, 2) assigning a level of worth to the arguments displayed, and 3) investigating the validity of the findings presented—on the way towards a final decision about its ability to contribute to the intellectual advancement of the field. Rather, in place of these well-worn approaches, and while still engaging in a reading of the text, I offer an exploration of the significance of this work on four registers and examine ways it might be put to work to rethink theorizing and methodologies in an era when instrumental reasoning so completely sets the “conditions of possibility” (Foucault, 1994, p. xxii) for educational reform.

To think differently, I consider how a text on the progressive tradition in conservative times might be used to reconceptualize the very notions of research in schools and education reform in ways the author might not have intended. To complicate the essay, I offer four readings that reposition the research on education reform as less about a transparent process of capturing knowledge through language than what might be possible if we give up on language as in any way adequate to the knowledge it seeks to represent. Here Goodman’s research project is conceived of less as a reflection of reality than as a medium of experience, as an assembling of ideas, terms, and concepts through which interpretation reveals the hollows between language and experiences and how unreliable knowledge via language is for speaking to the truth of experiences. To do so, on the first register, I examine the work Goodman does in the first half of the text by paying close attention to the ways he positions radical and reform leftists, develops a pragmatic reform agenda, and privileges grassroots reform efforts. Here I ask, does the text “fix” interpretations of educational reform or does it incite a proliferation of readings and possibilities for engaging in as-of-yet unknown meaning making activities? On the second register, I put forth the idea that reading the text across another long-term research project that addresses explicitly issues of omissions, misrecognitions, and mishaps might unsettle Goodman’s research into educational reform by exposing the dark underside of humanistic ideals, particularly the ways humanism has functioned as a form of oppression. In this second reading I ask, what are the implications for research on educational reform when texts are thought of less as mimetic devices than objects mediated by interpretation, commoditization, and ritualization in the production of knowledge?

On a third register, I examine the work Goodman does in the last half of the text, examining in particular representations of educational reform given his positioning of reform-leftist research as ushering the progressive tradition into contemporary times. After exploring the promise of his efforts at establishing democratic cultures within public schools, I look into the question of what might be lost in the assumptions that underwrite his analysis, particularly the depiction of reliable participants who faithfully recount the truth of experience to get at the history of educational reform. Finally, on the fourth register, I ask difficult questions about what it means to avoid the

temptations of returning to conventional ethnography and school reform research in the face of the contingencies of interpretation and undecidability that surround the question of what constitutes truth and fiction. As a concluding task, I inquire, what are the implications of thinking through trilectical educational praxis that sees the very inconceivability of educational reform as a performative site for thinking through how to teach and learn out of the refusals, inadequacies, and breakdowns in our efforts at knowledge production? These four registers and corresponding questions guide my review and help inform my strategy as I attempt to explore the “forms of rationality” (Foucault, 1984, p. 36) at play.

As I attend to each of these questions, sometimes explicitly and other times implicitly, I seek to describe my own journey mapping a response to the text, offering at two points in this essay a reflection that abrades my initial reading. While my aim is to offer an analysis that honors Goodman’s substantial efforts at school interventions that have taken place over many years, it is also my intention to explore what critical theory and post-structuralism might have to offer regarding alternative readings toward the practice of textual analysis. Accordingly, this review is undertaken with great suspicion, less in response to the discourse Goodman puts to work and more as a reaction to the historical and contemporary discourses that mark education reform efforts. In addition, while I draw heavily upon what Lather (2004c) refers to as “scandalous” discourse practices intended to “dissolve the continuities of dominant narratives” (p. 23), I am not fully convinced that we might not also need coadunative discourses as well. The second quote at the beginning of this article, suggesting a position less in opposition to other intellectual formations than an effort at integrating with them, is part of a broader epistemological orientation that underwrites this response: what has been put forth in our scholarly efforts as the unavoidable creation of victims necessary for the advancement of knowledge is actually not a compulsory, but a modernist, Western iteration of knowledge production. What comes from a “mistrust of the course of things” and recognition “that everything can go wrong” is less revelry in activities of a “deconstructive character” than what becomes possible in reducing modern knowledge to rubble “not for the sake of the rubble, but for that of the way leading through it” (Benjamin, 1986, p. 303). Finding purpose in Benjamin’s excitability around the seemingly impossible task of reading mimetically, the call for integrating alternative intellectual formations within educational reform might require counter-discourses that challenge dominant narratives as well as those coadunating discourses that so intermingled “provoke existing terminology into doing new work” (Rolleston, 1996, p. 28).

PART I (CHAPTERS 3-6) RADICAL VERSES REFORM LEFTISTS: SETTING UP DUALISMS, MOVING TOWARD COMPLEXITIES

In *Reforming Schools: Working within a Progressive Tradition during Conservative Times*, Goodman raises to the surface a series of concerns about the state of progressive scholarship in the new millennium while creating his own historical rendition of work for social justice in a broad sense and change in public schools in particular. To do so he delineates two key dimensions in the formation of and, consequently, the contemporary state of the field: in one group, radical leftists who are committed to criticism and transformative remedies and, in another group, reform leftists who are committed to augmentation and affirmative remedies (see Fraser, 1997). The key differences between them as outlined in Goodman’s

text follow the debates found elsewhere over the contributions of deconstructive versus dialectical reasoning (see Edgerton, 1996). If we were to conjoin the social groupings with the theoretical positions, the argument might go something like this: radical leftists privilege deconstructive approaches to reform. They highlight spaces between concepts where meanings breakdown, thoughts are rendered ambivalent and, in what Derrida described as “the unreadability that stems from the violence of foreclosure” (1995, p. 389), the focus is on reading for irreducibilities rather than what is easily generalizable. Here final meaning is refused in the recognition that ordering structures involve a will to power that out of necessity produces exclusions and others in the process of assembling a framework. What seems most worthwhile to radical leftists for reducing violence and atomization involves continuous reconceptualizing that has the capacity to keep meaning and ideas in motion with the realization that “to show things are not as self-evident as one believed” and “to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such” (Foucault, 1988, p. 155) provide the terms of discomfort necessary for ongoing reformation of thought, structure, and practice. In deconstruction, the undecidability of the right reading is exactly the lesson.

Opposite radical leftists are reform leftists, who privilege dialectical approaches to educational reform. They assume that educational processes adhere to certain forms of reason and therefore can be accessed through language. Here the excesses of signification are displaced by theories of correspondence that assume an abundance of awareness and preciseness of language, both acting as the conditions necessary for coalescence in the next big move in installing a succeeding regime with the new right story. Thus, where deconstruction teaches us “to give up on a knowledge one can get hold of” (Lather, 2000, p. 155), encourages a proliferation of readings, illuminates the partiality of narratives, and assumes meaning is open to rearrival in the moment of reading, dialectics involves maneuvering across concepts in pursuit of increasingly more valuable, worthy, and fuller knowledge. Dialectical pursuits, then, proceed with significant faith in the capacity of epistemology to reveal what must be known for increasing understanding. The shape of the scholarship of anthropologist Charles Nuckolls (1995) on South Indian kinship and cultural dialectics illustrates this point. After twenty years of fieldwork, he finds that social norms “that oppose each other” lead to tensions in primary kin relationships, an “oppositional dynamic” that gets resolved through particular knowledge structures, specifically mythical tales that reconfigure their social relationships (p. 113). The dialectic is implicit in research that fuses difference into the same and can be viewed as beneficial since it leads to a privileged interpretation and opportunity for closure. Indeed, in situations where an issue demands quick action, a theory of dialectics can be helpful. As Edgerton (1996) aptly reveals in her description of the limitations of difference, “a deconstructive approach may be inappropriate to particular problems for an immediate, daily, or local nature . . . because of its infinite deferral and lack of closure (p. 44).

These theoretical distinctions have significant implications for Goodman’s assertions regarding educational reform. Even as he makes a sharp distinction between radical and reformist leftists, placing some culpability for conservative resurgence with the radical left’s elevation of ideals over the messy and compromise-ridden work of coalition building, his broader critique concerns uncompromising forms of abstraction and deconstruction that fail to make it in

schools, one that resonates well with more recent discussions of the limits of neo-Marxist thought and critical pedagogy (Burbules, 2000; Flores, 2004; Gore, 1992; Lather, 1998). Here one might trace the initial visibility of such critiques to Ellsworth's 1989 Harvard Educational Review article, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy?" Accordingly, the issue of educational reform is a timely one. Out of the ruins of "conservative politicians and intellectuals" who successfully linked "the reform leftist tradition in the United States to the radical leftist of the 1960s and 1970s" (p. 6) and effectively shattered the possibility for actualizing a progressive agenda within schools, Goodman puts forth a neo-class analysis that positions as primary a Marxist reconceptualization that focuses on "class as a manifestation of collective identity" that is "based in cultural representation" (p. 12) as well as material distribution. Torn between symbolism and materialism, recognition and distribution, he enfold the difference cultural styles and intellects make into the history of class struggle.

Drawing on Foucauldian notions of regimes of truth and systems of discourse, Fraser's ideas on counter-publics and recognition, and Pinar's description of existential thought and autobiography, this is an effort at crafting a more nuanced and textured analysis of class differences, one that nevertheless leads toward a mutually recognized although imperfect and contested Habermasian social contract. Here recognition across difference in pursuit of what is reciprocally beneficial is wedded to a common call for social justice with the potential to mobilize a coalition of classes (in both the recognition and distribution sense) with the capacity to oppose conservative agendas. In lieu of what Fraser (2000) refers to as claims of "recognition of difference" that currently "drive much of the world's social conflicts" after the "demise of Soviet-style communism and the acceleration of globalization" (p. 107) and the related challenges involving displacement of economic concerns and reification of social group identities, Goodman outlines a compromised reform agenda that allows the possibility of a pro-capitalist stance as long as it brings with it a strong democratic state and engenders what Kelley (1998) points to as a "sense of entitlement [and] a right to support as taxpaying citizens" (p. 81). Goodman aims to find a way to act amid theoretical complexity.

His historical account is characteristically different not only for the ways he delinks a pragmatic reform agenda from assumptions of a Hegelian intellectual ascendancy or Marxist historical materialism, but also for its attempt to locate a third way that retains the principles of liberal, social, and participatory democracy while offering a postmodern description of the continuous reconfiguration of power blocs. Here the attempt to locate conceptual maps that offer strategic direction while operating on shifting ground illustrates the need for theories of educational reform that, for example, can account for the ways in which "the proletariat and the bourgeoisie form a coalition against intellectuals" (p. 13) as they have regarding proposals to drill for oil in Alaska and extract lumber from federal lands in Oregon, even as "during the past century, intellectuals and the proletariat in the United States have often worked together" (p. 13). Educational reform theories must have the capacity to account for alliances that are "often temporary, coming together around particular issues but falling apart where the issue is no longer pertinent" (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004, p. 21); these are allegiances without guarantees. After the demise of correspondence theories of voice and experience, investments in Marxist emancipation through "species-being" (Marx

& Engels, 1978, p. 46), and identity categories as the basis for visibility politics—working from the ruins of progressive education into what is termed “restorable possibility” (Beach, 1999, p. 231)—this is Goodman’s take on a pragmatism we can bear to learn from. Elevating theories of practical consequence, what gets proposed are ideas rooted less in the capacity to represent the world than the ability to help individuals and groups understand personal experience and lead purposeful lives within the context of public education (p. 121). Hints at a neo-deliberative tradition abound.

Goodman does not negate that both radical and reform leftists are linked by an interest in progressive politics. Instead he argues that by weaving a one-dimensional tale of the history of the United States that focused on inhumane ideas, structures, and practices while failing to characterize the ways the country has worked to make life more democratic and socially just, citizens who might be sympathetic no longer see themselves in relation to a progressive tradition. Furthermore, he argues radical leftists’ emphasis on critique and deconstruction decreased the possibility of building “a coalition of classes” by privileging commitment to the ideals of interrogation and confrontation over forging relationships with more mainstream liberals, effectively opening a space for conservatives to demonize the set of precepts associated with liberalism (see Apple, 2001, 2003). The result, asserts Goodman, has been a shift in ideological orientation away from a democratic nation state with strong control over its capitalist impulses and support for its social justice initiatives and toward privatization and the dismantling of public service projects. More specifically, he argues that these efforts at coalition building have been thwarted by the broad attractiveness of economic rationales that drive contemporary educational reform combined with the lack of public spheres in which leftist educators might produce and circulate counter-discourses regarding noneconomic rationales for public education. Also important, and quite at odds with the broad overview he provides regarding the differences between radical and reform leftists (and detailing a history of the latter), he takes a pragmatic turn to the “grassroots level” to construct a rationale for educational reform that is counter-hegemonic in its creation of passages through current regimes of meaning, connecting the “values of democracy, social justice, and existential meaning” with reform efforts among those “who actually work in school buildings” (p.21).

The notion of grassroots interventions is as mindful of the past as it is suggestive of future images of educational reform, ones that offer explorations of local thinking, organic memory, and contextual modes of discourse and description that discompose dominant reform narratives. Grand strategies for national, state, and even school-wide curriculum plans are confronted with insights garnered from thinking small (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Turnbull, 2005) and forms of knowledge grounded in place (Ball, 2004; Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991; Silko, 1996; Turnbull, 2003). The wisdom of grassroots reform is exemplified, for example, in Mahatma Gandhi’s 1930 salt march for the work it did in helping the people of India regain independence from oppressive British rule in general and British salt tax in particular. Defiance of the salt tax was largely economically inconsequential for both the British government and the national citizenry. Its violation by the people of India, however, was crucial as a cultural act of circumstance, a practice that symbolized self-knowledge and heightened awareness of the conditions under which they lived. In doing so, and working at the grassroots level to enact a praxis of dismissal rather than an oppositional stance to British rule,

the salt march in combination with the decision among the native citizens of India to make their own salt revealed among laypeople the capacity to liberate themselves from British oppression. Grassroots reform is less about taking control under the terms of school-government struggles than enacting a vehicle for experiencing educational difference differently. Here Goodman's lesson is to shift the mode of struggle toward experiences with reform processes and even finding meaning in the inability to locate and name difference.

Goodman's decision to highlight educational reform that operates at the grassroots level was not by chance. Intervening at local, community levels function as a tactic for turning the logic of state and federal reform operations against purported democratic representatives and by doing so disarticulating prevailing beliefs about their power. By turning to state and federal leadership and showcasing needs and making demands, public educators strengthen narratives about the centrality of government and private business to the work of public education and the privileged position such leadership holds in their professional and organizational lives. As Foucault points out now quite famously, "where there is power, there is resistance [and] this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault, 1995, p. 95). Grassroots interventions reveal a paradox within the current politics of reform: opposition to the No Child Left Behind Act, high stakes testing, and inequitable funding—while it illuminates the reality that reforms have not in actual practice performed as they were purported to in theory—concurrently legitimates the authors of law and policy that have proven over the last three decades their unwillingness to intervene on behalf of a progressive tradition. Without moving the mode of struggle elsewhere, countermoves in reaction to a government or business actor "play into his hands" and therefore "have no effect on the balance of power" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 16), a particular problem when, as Goodman argues, "coalitions of classes that oppose much of the conservative resurgence" remain "considerably weaker" (p. 20). Grassroots interventions are promising for their ability to provoke disorientation and "displacement in the games" (Lyotard, p. 16), making possible proactive moves that cannot be determined by others beforehand. Operationalizing educational reform at the level of the everyday practice of students, staff, and teachers, rather than at the level of policy allows for contextual images of reform in excess of and counter to state and federal representations of the structure and practice of schooling.

As I will describe at different points in the remainder of this article, when it comes to fixing interpretations of educational reform or inciting a proliferation of interpretations, Goodman's arguments do not always open up spaces for alternative readings. He asserts radical leftists' idealisms and deconstructive tactics enabled conservative resurgence but fails to illustrate that it is also plausible that it was the very heterogeneity of the left, including the radical left's visions of transformation, revolution, and passages toward as yet unknown sites of learning (Ellsworth, 1997; Giroux, 1992; Lather, 1991; McLaren, 1999; Miller, 1992; Pinar, 1992) that allowed for the continuation of a progressive tradition (albeit in significantly and continuously reconceptualized forms) in spite of repeated onslaughts from the right. Also important, drawing a sharp distinction between radical and reform leftists, and deconstruction and dialectics effectively, serves to suggest that images of reform that are impossible to implement within contemporary public education be separated from reform efforts that might have a chance in actual school settings. My reading is somewhat different: I do not want to

push aside impossibility so easily but rather situate the very inconceivability of radical educational reform within public schools as the very interstices of any knowing that might enable the expansion of the efforts of educators toward honoring diversity and equity. Even with these differences in reading, I join Goodman in asserting that the task at hand for progressive educators is an impossible one in any utopian sense. My interest, however, is in how experiences with limits, breakdowns, and impossibilities can be positioned as the very locations in which to labor with our limit experiences, those “ambivalent experiences” through which our “meaning-giving capacity is revealed” while at the same time “it encounters its limitations in ‘an-other’ meaning,” limits that are related to “belonging to a collective subject” and “being ‘exposed’ to a meaning . . . over which once has no say, but to which one has to respond” (Masschelein, 1998, p. 527).

Thus, Goodman’s first three chapters, those that introduce the reader to his study, function as a sort of dual gesture. In the first, he offers a historical revision of the field meant to “fix” the previous conflation of radical and reform liberals. Once freed from such a detracting relationship, he provides a corrected history of reform leftists’ driving philosophies and pivotal moments, for example, tracing “the advent of the reformist orientation to the abolitionist movement” (p. 35) and describing the split among “the bourgeoisie, intellectual, and intelligensia” as marking the beginning of a new coalition of reform liberals who pushed “to expand democratic control over the state” (p. 34). What seems excluded in this gesture is the way healthy tensions within curriculum studies in particular and in the field of education in general between radical and reform leftists (to use labels) have enlivened debates about the purpose and significance of schooling; different ways faculty have envisioned and actualized undergraduate and graduate education; and contributions of various educational theories and methodologies to the field of curriculum studies. In the face of either/or arguments about practicality, calls for transparent signifiers that inevitably map nicely onto conventional meanings, and demands to be easily understood within the disciplinary standards for discourse, it seems less worthwhile to introduce a corrective interpretation than to reposition the language of educational reform in ways that produce new spaces, practices, and ideas. Given the proliferation of contenders for the history that made a difference, what might be productive in the present moment involves encouraging a multiplicity of discourses and expansion of the registers of writing that disavow the assumed binary between reformist and radical scholarship.

In the second gesture, Goodman employs key tactics, such as pragmatism without teleology and class intervention without false consciousness—strategies that have, ironically, historically been explored most extensively for their usefulness within radical leftist scholarship—to temper the structuralist aspects of his reform agenda and open up spaces for alternative readings of action and reflection. Also, Goodman’s illustration of educational reform as a grassroots struggle holds promise for providing an alternate reading of autonomy, one that is something other than attempts to secure further “democratic” access to existing structures of the nation-state. What he describes in outlining and challenging local spheres of influence (classroom, elementary program, secondary program, departments, assemblies, administration) extends beyond structures of decentralization, a reform strategy that retains as its premise notions of power centralized at the top of a series of semi-independent and diverse underbodies. What he offers as reform,

particularly within subsections of “Structures and Rituals” and “Struggles and Dilemmas” in chapter four, more closely resembles a philosophy of decentralism, a focus on power within the grasp of educators as they recreate, regenerate, and rely upon decision-making bodies that operate on a human scale. Here he displays for the reader a process of change without guarantees: a consensus-focused reconfiguration of school cultures built out of challenging assumptions of powerlessness, restyling relations of power, and engendering dialogues of authenticity. Far from a best practices model that assumes continuity, what Goodman illustrates is a process of complexity fraught with risks and breakdowns, including termination of services, resentment by school leaders, and hidden motivations that place personal gain over program goals.

READING AGAINST A READING: REFLECTION ON PART I

An easy way to commence a reflection on Goodman’s first three chapters would involve assessing the validity of the representation. Key here would be making assertions about the truth found in the scholarly work. Put differently, my role would be to evaluate the extent to which his claims about educational reform are truthful and therefore the extent to which the knowledge he provides advances the intellectual capacities of the field. Do the selections from the data correspond or uphold the analysis presented? Do the theoretical selections that underwrite the framework for the study resonate with the broader assertions of their authors? Do the representations of educational reform correspond to the actual realities of reform? Less comfortable with this method given the bricolage-styled strategy at play in the first three chapters and my own scholarly positionalities, it seems more beneficial to explore potential truth effects, a concern that moves away from the mimetic capacities of the work and toward the truths such a reading might produce (see Roggeveen & Johar, 2002). Otherwise stated, what might be said about educational practices, teacher identities, and democratic bodies from the position of liberal reformism brings representation to bear upon educational reform.

Seeing great potential in post-structuralism and critical theory, a reading of Goodman’s assertions and consequent study of educational reform as the right strategy presents a concern: it renders the work of those dealing in criticism and deconstruction less consequential to the field, as well as to school reform. The first quote at the beginning of this article reflects my own concern over the assumption that the more practical the language, the more truth to be found in its content, a concern that the discourse on pragmatism can sometimes mask. This is what Jonbert (cited in Benjamin, 1999, p. 482) points to as the clarity that has become “something so characteristic of the truth that it is often confused with it” (p. 3). Here “the style for which to strive” in educational reform is at issue since it has a “self-destructive structure: It erases itself as a style, one style among others” (Fenves, 2003, p. 69). Taken this way, “the advice to write simply” so as to be pragmatic is not so much direction on how to gain access to a real reality as it is instruction on a style that harbors antagonisms and ruptures in order to obtain “the highest authority” (Benjamin, 1999, p. 482). This is my concern over what is potentially lost in Goodman’s aim for the text: “to state ‘something clearly enough, intelligibly enough, so that it can be understood and thought about” (p. 37). Poststructuralism and critical theory bring to the table concerns that range from the limits of the texts to how to write in a style that has embedded within itself the recognition that it is but one of many potential styles.

Lest my comments be taken differently than intended, to the extent the intention of the author matters, Goodman does offer a series of alternative readings in the first three chapters. There is the troubling teleology and refusal of false consciousness, as well as much needed attention to the ways a concern over failure has “created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation in some of the schools in which HEC [Harmony Education Center] has worked” (p. 47) on the way toward building organizational autonomy in spite of a “political environment that distrusts what happens in schools” (p. 52). What is most at issue is that other than naming these limits in order to refuse them or claim to work outside of them, there is little exploration of Goodman’s (and necessarily reformist and radical liberals’) culpability for or complicity with them. To fail to do is to risk playing the “God-Trick” (Haraway, 1992) in one’s writing: to represent the world as if one has an omnipotent view of it. As Ellsworth (1989) points out, recognizing that traditional education is inherently paternalistic for it assumes those in need and those who know, the only option available might be to explicitly acknowledge the limits of academic reason and enter into each educational encounter aware of our complicity in their formation and with a willingness to challenge our relationship to and investments in those formations (p. 308). Fearing a metatheory of educational reformism that too easily conflates the discourse of pragmatism with the epistemological claims of traditional empiricism, my yearning and striving in reading Goodman’s text is for a confrontation with the unknowable that amplifies a sort of awareness of the unsettling reality that comes out of encounters with novelty, surprise, and irony. Thinking of situated knowledge as a worthy substitute for the broad claims that often characterize school reform, my interest is in theories that account for but do not subsume difference into universal categories, instead seeing difference and irony as imbricating knowledge production that can put difference to work differently in reforming schools.

In closing this section, reducing Goodman’s scholarship to a question of representational truth risks masking more than it reveals. He is careful to note the problems with assumptions of progress, speaking for others, or writing with the purpose of implying “therein lies ‘the answer’” (p. 36) and takes a tool box approach to assembling theories that will allow him to think about school in ways that are not already shot through with explanation. Yet, at critical turning points in the text, these insights get subsumed within discourse that erases the author’s own inability to know and privileges a metaphysics of presence and philosophies of control that are quite common to conventional school reform discourse. What would it mean for research on educational reform to give up the pursuit of mastery while continuing to seek fidelity, “knowing all the while we will be hoodwinked” (Haraway, 1991, p. 199) along the way? Searching through my files on underway projects, hoping to find something in my compilations of educational research that might foster my thoughts on where to take the next section of this article, I ran across Harry F. Wolcott’s (2002) *Sneaky Kid and Its Aftermath: Ethics and Intimacy in Fieldwork*, in which he works through the implications of his study of an educational dropout for the ways we think about methodology. Written in response to the fallout around an ethnography that caused a firestorm for what it refused to reveal, this text raises difficult questions regarding what to do when representations act as a barrier to representations, or more precisely, when the “deceptive continuity” of historical events are shown “to be in fact a process of silencing” (Felman, 1999, p. 213). Here Benjamin’s description of “the very discipline” this is “constituted by what it excludes (and fails to grasp)” (Felman, 1999, p. 213) is informative for

thinking about the ways in which producing the contours of knowledge brings with it a dark underside fraught with failures and omissions.

In the following section, I read my efforts to struggle through the trials and tribulations associated with interpretive research with my graduate students across efforts to think opposites alongside each other and defer closure in pursuit of language that is more tentative and less weighty. I end part two with an exploration of the implications of alternative readings of Wolcott's work—readings taken up by him and others—for Goodman's scholarship on educational reform. Making visible a supplement in the research, my concern is less with critiquing Goodman's work, as if to stand outside of it, than to ask if it is possible that another project is already partly underway. This is one that involves interrupting the authority that often attends scholarship on educational reform and its overblown promises by asking different questions about the power-charged relations involved in any research interaction and academic essays that are less records of the past than creations of it in any effort toward producing knowledge that advances the field. What I speculate on involves what might be produced and learned from returning to the HEC project on a different register, one that involves seeking out the "blindspots of the text," not as an absence to be filled, but as "the organizer of the space of the vision contained in the text" (de Man, 1983, p. xxix). Put another way, this is about vision lost in the "necessary blind spots of understanding" (Lather, 2004, p. 1).

PART II

A STUDY IN LIFE HISTORY: A TURN TOWARD SNEAKY KID TO READ DIFFERENCE IN EDUCATIONAL REFORM DIFFERENTLY

In a follow-up to his 1983 inquiry into the life of an educational dropout, Harry F. Wolcott (2002) draws upon what he terms "the story of the story of Brad" (p. ix) to examine issues of ethics and intimacy in research and to address with hindsight the dilemmas surrounding a case study that by 1994 had become the "Brad Trilogy" (Singleton, 1999) and had incited at least one methodology article (Page, 1997), an ethnodrama (Saldaña & Wolcott, 2002), and a state of the field article (Barone, 2002). In the original 1983 article entitled "Adequate Schools and Inadequate Education: The Life History of a Sneaky Kid," Wolcott described the experiences of a young man who had dropped out of school, freed himself (partly) from the trappings of the "establishment," and built a cabin in the woods just outside the city in what was revealed as Wolcott's backyard. Portrayed in great detail, this is the lived history of a twenty-year-old who had been shuffled between divorced parents living in Oregon and California, sent to reform school, and found and lost (abandoned?) a series of second-rate jobs and substandard apartments. In thinking through the implications of Brad for educational adequacy, the topic of Wolcott's first article on the subject, we learn that Brad's thoughts and practices are difficult to classify. In some sense, he put his education to work. Brad learned how to enroll in a food stamp program and ration his meager benefits so that they would last over the month, eating "powdered milk" and "dry foods in bulk" (p. 20); and he lived rent-free behind Wolcott's house. More 'insider' than 'outsider' to society, Brad is portrayed as someone who has learned the cultural meanings of his practices and yet even with those understandings has decided to live outside formal educational structures. He both assimilated and resisted educational norms.

A researcher describing the journey of learning about his subject, Wolcott initially depicted Brad as someone hiding out from life and resisting acculturation into society—communities that he described as overly constraining and without substantial rewards for conformity. Brad represented those for whom formal education often fails to account, those who by resisting the normalizing tactics of schooling somewhere along the line fall outside the parameters of relevance. By the end of the article, however, Wolcott illustrates that continued time with Brad revealed that educational experiences coupled with a need for security “provided an overwhelming sense of purpose” (Wolcott, 1983, p. 18) that drove Brad to establish numerous “standards of conduct” that guided him to “always wash up before going to town” and prevented him from doing anything that would “screw somebody for no good reason” (Wolcott, 1983, p. 20). Through the progression of Wolcott’s writing, Brad becomes a more complex subject. Any educational reform would have to account for the ways formal schooling had both served him and failed him well, adequate enough to teach him the reading, writing, and arithmetic necessary to get by but inadequate to the extent Brad could not envision how to become a productive and successful contributor to society beyond dead-end jobs, day-to-day living, and attending to his own immediate needs. The character of Brad, as crafted by Wolcott, is much too complex to simply be reformed.

Why address an ethnographic case study on educational adequacy in an article on school-based educational reform? Wolcott’s scholarship has implications for Goodman’s research—not as a critique of his latest writing on the Harmony Educational Center’s (HEC) reform work—but rather as a reading of what rereadings might be theoretically and methodologically possible in foregoing sameness and continuity to examine the silences in the data and the failures of things to go as planned. When I give the 1983 article I described above to my graduate students who are preparing for their dissertation research, they almost always offer me a positive reading. They tell me the research is meaningful because it illustrates how public education can both assist and fail its students at the same time. They like the ways Wolcott attends to the details of Brad’s life without losing the connection to the broad issue of what constitutes adequate public education. They sense it is true to life and, even when they occasionally question whether Wolcott could have done more to explore Brad’s background and emotional and relationship troubles, they conclude that given the clarity of his writing and active prose he employs it is a strong piece. When the question of the implications of the article for educational reform arises, most of my graduate students, particularly those who had been teachers, imagine that a revised curriculum, learning communities, alternative schools, outreach programs, and a shift in institutional cultures might help make school and therefore life more “doable” for a young person like Brad. We talk about each of the reforms in detail, their feasibility and potential impact, and usually by the end of our discussion we both feel relatively confident that we have assembled a series of ways to proceed, ones that we feel have the potential to improve public education. Before they leave, I hand them a copy of Wolcott’s 2002 work, *Sneaky Kid and Its Aftermath: Ethics and Intimacy in Fieldwork*, and ask them to complete a thorough reading of the text before they schedule a follow-up meeting. They undoubtedly have a wholly different take on Wolcott’s research with “sneaky kid” by our next discussion.

In the 2002 text, Wolcott makes possible a series of alternative readings of the study and corresponding 1983 article. The first

involves a different set of research procedures. Most of my students envision and are taught in their research methods courses that there is an incontrovertible set of steps to conducting qualitative inquiry. Topics must be found, methods must be established, and interview protocols developed and approved. Participants are secured, data gathered, and finally, analysis ensues before the writing begins. In reading this follow-up text, they find that research is often less linear and rational than they learned about in research methods courses and imagined for their dissertation. Wolcott and Brad had already had a relationship prior to the research project and it was only with an invitation from what was then entitled the U.S. Office of Education to write on the issue of educational adequacy that Brad was written into—and hence came into existence within—the scholarly body. As Wolcott (2002) details quite matter-of-factly, “The invitation gave focus to an idea I had been mulling over but had never had never been able to formalize . . . what I saw in the assignment was an opportunity . . . to do some systematic interviewing with Brad about his life” (p. 36). Here Wolcott’s rereading of his research troubles my students’ initial conceptions of appropriate methodologies and research practices. As something other than a researcher searching for an opportunity to give voice to the voiceless, Brad was a researcher’s solution (and voice) lying in waiting for the appropriate problem to come his way, one to which Brad could be offered as the remedy. Interrupting conceptions of the right procedure to protect the subject and guide the researcher toward valid knowledge production, my students struggle with the difficult questions Wolcott’s rereading raises about proceduralism and transference. Given what Spivak (1988) describes as the commodifying and colonizing regimes of meaning of the “first-world intellectual masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter” (p. 292), what is positioned as an issue of global imperialism is always already at play in the specificities of place, an issue of the micro-politics of asymmetrical relations between the knower and known.

The second reading has to do with the mode of struggle between the knower and the known. Accordingly, we grapple with a series of issues present in the text: Brad as an image in the research that acts as a representation of youth who drop out; the methodological practices of the researcher who brings these images to life on the disciplinary stage; and the types of subject positions research makes available through the writing style. I push students to read against through lines and assimilations in the confrontation between the original article and alternative readings that have been made available, to explore what the disjunctures and inconsistencies mean for educational research methodologies and curriculum theorizing. The friction between original and alternative representations opens spaces for examining Wolcott’s insight into—including his own complicity with and culpability for—the ways life history with its “confusions, contradictions, and ironies” and “indecisiveness, repetition, and reversion” gets forced into “a straight forward, one-dimensional logic” (Järvinen, 2000, p. 372) via investments of narrative formula and the patterns required to engage in academic knowledge production. Here folding back to fold forward to the difficulties of truth and identity raises questions about a turbulence in the prototype, that of outright exclusions, partial truths, and ambivalences in the object to be mined for its invariance. Attending to how stories are told, the focus is on reading for absences, discontinuities and contradictions. How might we understand an author like Wolcott, who claims (“beware of my intent”) that he has not undertaken “this examination of the saga to unburden” himself but goes on point-by-point to set the record straight on the writing

process taken up in the research, who might be blamed for Brad's incarceration and any notoriety and financial gain that arose from the academic firestorm the research caused? How do we make sense of Wolcott's confession years later that at the time he conducted the research Brad's "interest in his own sexuality was arousing some interest" (p. 42) in Wolcott that culminated in "a sexual advance that [Brad] did not turn down" (p. 43)? What was previously a "charming" representation of the researcher and subject has now become a site of innumerable contrary and possibly irreducible heterogeneous readings.

My students learn that Wolcott and Brad had their secrets and agendas, ones that were revealed only after a highly charged and controversial court case made their personal relationship and forms of intimacy a matter of public record. They also begin to describe the series of agendas that seemed at play in the inquiry process. Wolcott reveals in the 2002 text that together he and Brad "muted" or "deleted" certain elements in crafting the image of Brad. In reading Wolcott's rereading of his research—the story of the story of Brad—they recognize the strategies embedded in the presentation of the research itself and question Wolcott's motives and the extent to which he can be trusted as a researcher. If he excluded his intimate relationship with Brad from the original article, they wonder what else he might have left out. Their suspicions, however, allude to something much more promising—the recognition in research in general of what feminist historian Joan Scott (1988) describes as the "politics of history," that we as researchers are caught up in interpretations that are "not fixed . . . but rather dynamic, always in flux" (p. 5). Unable to corner the truth of an experience that seems in excess of what language will allow and the intentions of the author, what they are confronted with involves "the capacity for endless interpolations into what has been" (Benjamin, 1978, p. 16) where the very idea of historical truth takes on a disquieting reality, that of the "unimaginable occurrence" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 60). A mother who testifies under oath that she believed "Brad had make up the whole thing" (Wolcott, 2002, p. 103) and a researcher who admits he intended "to normalize Brad" in order "to lend credibility to the case study" (p. 152) this is "unresolved, irreparable, inconsolable memory" (Bellamy, 2004, p. 95), the working of the "ruins of memory" to see in truth only that which knowledge has failed to grasp, knowing within reach only when viewed as "a practical performance" (Bellamy, p.95). In all of this, is Brad a victim, a hack, a commoner, or a contriver? Is Wolcott a victimizer, a hero, a gentleman, or a manipulator? The complications and complicities that surface in Wolcott's 2002 rereading of his 1983 reading of Brad offer an important lesson—a lesson Wolcott might not have intended: presenting research as a mirror of reality is not the same thing as presenting it as a production of reality.

The third reading involves the question of what constitutes research after the recognition of the difficulties of direct and unmediated access to a transparent and unadulterated reality. To write of interpretative research is to enter territory more troublesome and complex than questions over the extent to which the language represents reality, getting into concerns over what constitutes truth, identity, knowledge, and rigor. As Wolcott (2002) explores, what comprises "accurate and compassionate reporting" (p. 143) when an essential reality to be accessed and represented by the researcher is exactly the issue that research with Brad raised? He finally settles upon the claim that if the ethical move in qualitative research is founded upon truthful and affirming representation, then the advice

he must offer a field-based researcher is that the only move he or she can make is to “reject ethics” and “refuse to allow yourself to be boxed in by pretending to be something you cannot possibly be” (p. 145). As both Miles and Huberman (1994) and Newkirk (1996) note, tracing the very possibilities of qualitative research, any act of inquiry is a “betrayal” to the extent that it claims to know the consequences and procedures of the investigative act beforehand, ensure that the research will be put to work toward particular ends, or provide a faithful and accurate representation of the real thing. Thus, what Wolcott leaves us with is precisely the question of what it means to conduct research after the beauty, purity, and loveliness of knowledge production is gone, at least in any complete and unquestioned sense. His conclusion is a rather overcoded one: “you can be ethical or you can conduct social research [but] you can’t do both” (p. 145). Nevertheless, what he illustrates involves the ethical breakdowns that occur in the production of knowledge; the researcher creates the textual representation of social groups and historical moments and leaves people in those social groups to struggle under the weight of its effects.

I work out of Wolcott’s rereading to offer my students another reading on an alternate register (a reading of a rereading of a reading), one developed out of a confrontation with the impossibilities of representations among asymmetrical relations, a failure in the capacity of subaltern discourse to translate into dominant (in this case, disciplinary) discourse that can in any way constitute a representation. Here I extend Lather’s reading of Chow’s argument that “Western intellectuals turn themselves into witnesses where they become visible, ‘neutralizing’ the untranslatability of the native’s experience and the history of that untranslatability” (Lather, 2000, p. 157) to a myriad of contexts where power relations are unequal to such an extent that privileged subject positions can be named through identifying patterns of control. The issue is less one of reducing ethics to a binary of either “have ethics” or “conduct research” than how to work the deconstructive character that incited the crisis in representation into a tactical maneuver toward processes of representation that illuminates the volatility of the real thing and the very difference efforts at representation make. This means talking to my students about what it means to work with those who are in the know about what has occurred and the researcher’s vulnerability in attempts to capture such knowing through efforts at its representation in writing.

In the case of Wolcott and Brad, what to do about the risk and vulnerability that comes with research with people is as insistent as the question of the way to order it is unanswerable. Case in point: there is no easy way to tease apart and give weight to the indeterminable number of interaction effects—biological, cultural, psychological, economic, and so on—that gave shape to the last years of Wolcott and Brad’s relationship. Wolcott points out that the state of Brad’s mental health underwent significant decline immediately before he fled the cabin on his property. Brad “became increasingly distraught and disorganized” (p. 46) and talked of “‘a sledgehammer to the brain’ that was disordering his thoughts” (p. 47) as Wolcott reports he tried to intervene and offer other options, including staying on the property. Over the two and a half years after Brad’s departure, Wolcott would only hear of Brad’s activities from his mother in California, where he lived at the time. Research begun in 1981 and culminated in its first publication in 1983 would take an unexpected turn in 1984 that would reveal the extent to which academic writing is less a mirror of reality than a production of it.

The subject of an article on educational adequacy would return to Wolcott's property, drain nearly 500 gallons of heating oil into the house, attack both Wolcott and his partner when they arrived home, and set the house on fire. Everyone survived, but life for Wolcott and Brad underwent dramatic change, one Wolcott (and most likely Brad as well) could have never been guessed would be an outcome of their chance meeting years ago. Brad would go to prison; Wolcott would be criticized for becoming intimately involved with a research participant and failing to detail the full texture of his experiences with Brad in his writing. He would also be criticized at conferences and in scholarly journals for violating professional standards of conduct between researchers and subjects (see Ockander & Östlund, 2001; Schreiber, Rodney, Brown, & Varcoe, 2001).

While I have covered only selected highlights from the study of "sneaky kid" and its "aftermath" and risked dramatizing an already dramatic research project, the point of such a rehearsal is to explore poststructurally informed incommensurabilities, ambivalences, and breakdowns in understanding as the very sites of impossibility from which we might learn how to produce different ways of thinking about educational reform. As an openly gay ethnographer, Wolcott offers a rereading of his sneaky kid research, drawing upon his own analysis, transcripts, field notes, memories, and the work of others to interrupt his own writing. Troubling his previous research—and our troubling of his troubling—together bring suspicion to the very possibility of a bare and patent reality, or to phrase it differently, the capacity of the researcher "to be truer to the lived realities of other people" (Saukko, 2003, p. 72) through evaluating "any lived reality against the social context" (p. 73). Revealing what until the Brad trial were secrets kept from the field, his silences in both the first reading and follow-up rereadings show the slippages between the real Brad and Wolcott and attempts to access them, gaps that illuminate in the concept of the original a shiftiness that opens it up to innumerable interpretations and a proliferation of perspectives. Far from attempting to fix the right interpretation, Wolcott's rereading reveals partial narratives and undecidabilities that point to the impossibility of fully capturing educational experiences and knowledge that when confronted with its own constitution sees not fuller knowledge but a stranger within its knowing. When pressured to commit to an uncompromised position on his research with Brad, Wolcott (2002) declines: what seemed for him "at the time the best of individual responsibility" had become for others "the worst form of the abuse of power" (p. 166). There is much to be learned about meaning making and texts from novel readings of the ruptures and breaks within long-term research projects, ones that might add another dimension of complexity and texture to Goodman's studies of educational reform.

Providing arguments that are situated in the literature and hover close to the data, but without conspiratory language that makes claims to have the complete picture, Wolcott offers up multiple readings of Brad's life, not as an attempt to fix previous textual representations, but in a way that ushers historical truth onto the stage of its own performance. Put another way, the rereading of research with Brad is not put forth in a way that suggests previous sketches were incorrect and new ones must be produced and circulated as the just-discovered truth, what is commonly the installation of succeeding regimes with the new right story. In place of such approaches, his 2002 follow-up, and debates inciting articles, conference papers, and academic deliberations, have a deconstructive character that challenges the ways meaning gets made in educational research. At issue is whether these truths are mere sets of facts, and

therefore mimetic devices, or constellations of productions that have their own generative effects outside of the possibility of the truth of the original. As Page (1997) points out in her use of Wolcott's scholarship on Brad to teach a qualitative research course, "why would an ethnographer trust words as evidence, given that people lie, that their knowledge is always partial, or that context influences the words people find it sensible to employ?" (p. 145). Here meaning cannot be located with the aim of the author, the themes in the data, the context in which it is produced or consumed, the interpretations by the reader, or the body of the text itself. Instead, meaning leaks from across these locations and ventures onto the scene of intelligibility through writing. Ellsworth and Miller (1996) capture this idea when they suggest educational research would benefit from "accounts of and by subjectivities who experience and conceive of themselves as multiple, fluid, bounded and open, gendered/raced/classed yet unfinished" (p. 252, emphasis in original).

Last for this section, what is the relevance of a long-term ethnographic project on one educational dropout turned to a focus on methodologies, intimacies, and ethics for a long-term project meant to capture efforts at educational reform across many schools? The first involves a question over what happens when the data that informs a long-term research project is read not for what it can do in terms of themes and repetitions in crafting a grassroots vision of reform but for its failures to perform as assumed. This reading for anomaly and estrangement is less for synthetic understanding than for the ways irreconcilable differences produce unsettling knowledge and force confrontations with otherness. The next relates to what happens when the words of informants are not read as unmediated truth and the real of experience but as providing key knowledge about the topic under examination and concurrently as untrustworthy, undependable, contaminated data. Subject positions, cultural scripts, and personal investments—this is a situation where crafting an "irreducibly disjunctive" (Said, 1972) doubled reading of the words of those in the know is precisely the task at hand. What is at stake here for informants involves what is made vulnerable in self-understanding, positions in the world, and desires toward cultural creation when revealing one's thoughts about themselves and the world. The last concerns how research narratives are structured and weighted by the press of methodological formulas, particularly how subjects are brought into existence via the researcher's imagination. This reading is concerned with what interpretation makes available through research bound up in issues of procedure, desire, worth, and relevance.

PART III (Ch. 4-6): EDUCATIONAL REFORM AS A DELIBERATIVE ART: INTERVENTION, CONSENSUS, AND CONFLICT

In the second half of *Reforming Schools: Working within a Progressive Tradition during Conservative Times*, Goodman examines a series of attempts at establishing democratic cultures within public schools, social contexts he believes are a necessary precondition for engaging in curricular and pedagogical reforms. Working in retrospect, examining what events at a myriad of schools that underwent reforms allowed for the development of cultures that valued deliberation, he describes three goals that emerged through the endeavors of the HEC. By way of the theme of increasing autonomy that cuts across the three goals, what is at work in Goodman's reading in the second half of the text is a reconfiguration

of social relations as a first step to democratic school reform.

What were the three goals that Goodman found across schools, those that underwrite the organizational culture that might move other schools toward democratic school reform? The first goal involves a necessarily autocratic intervention “that disrupted conventional ways power is distributed” (p. 56) to set up a democratic structure that is representative, all-inclusive, and knowledge-creation driven (e.g., a leadership team [representative] and series of study groups [inclusive of remaining teachers]). A primarily representative body composed of individuals who faculty “trusted to represent their interests” (p. 56); the responsibility of this representative body was to articulate and communicate the ideas and concerns of the school community. Not working alone, leadership teams were supported by a series of issue-focused, proposal-making study groups that offered spaces for the entire faculty not involved in the leadership team to work toward creating a more inclusive culture, one capable of driving its own reform.

The second goal has less to do with structural reconfiguration than with governance progresses. Challenging the “culture of silence” among faculty, particularly at meetings, the HEC consultants developed a consensus-driven process that assured “those affected by a particular decision” that they will have “an unmediated voice in making that decision” (p. 58). Eschewing majority votes that can easily result in a minority of outsiders who feel unaccounted for in the methods of governance, encouraging investments that minimize the potential for “non-compliance” and “subversion” required deliberation among the entire faculty until full agreement was reached. Furthermore, group consensus processes were combined with active solicitation of feedback and input by way of introductory interviews, regular meetings, and “brief and unplanned discussions” (p. 61) during which issues were moved into the open through both pre-planned and spur-of-the-moment interactions. Here alterations in structure and process—initially autocratic on their way to becoming democratic—were used to stimulate democratic functioning within school communities.

The last goal, different from the first two in that it addresses directly neither structure nor process, attends to the need for faculty to “reconceptualize and embrace conflict” as an innate element of “people working together for common purposes” (p. 63). Given the history of acrimonious relationships between faculty and administration, Goodman points out that if a given school community were going to “work through its differences in public” without engendering “feelings of marginalization” or interests in sabotaging reform initiatives, faculty needed to shift their focus away from their problems with each other. Making a “moral appeal,” the HEC consultants asked faculty to find solidarity in looking beyond their differences to attend to their shared purpose as educators: working toward improving “the existential quality of their students’ lives in school” (p. 62). By means of illustrating the debilitating effects of unresolved tensions on the student body and conflict avoidance maneuvers as antithetical to the practice of democracy, this was an effort at using “standards of interaction” and “feedback norms” as two tactics within a broader effort to reconfigure strained relationships between adults so that, in these mostly high poverty schools, there was a near complete focus on improving students’ experiences in public education. Tempering the universal principles at work in their reforms, handling conflict productively required forms of operation that attended not only to generalizable goals but

also to difference and specificity. Accordingly, the HEC consultants worked with teachers to identify various “spheres of influence” that allowed for solutions based upon the extent to which they affected an individual’s everyday life within the school. Classifying primary and secondary stakeholders, the voices of those who would be most affected by a resolution are favored. Reconceptualizing conflict as an innate element of finding common goals, privileging students’ experiences, and prioritizing the input of those most affected by a resolution— this was democratic practice attempting to deal with modes of thought and action that repress multiplicity and otherness.

Setting up reconfigured structures and rituals, Goodman illustrates forms of cultural change that come about through self-awareness and developing immediate and practical forms of freedom and control, what Pinar (2006) describes as study that “acknowledges the historically and cultural situatedness of the ‘self’” (p. 112). Long histories involving experiences with betrayal and deceit, working in schools that are underfunded, understaffed, and overcrowded with students who do not see much value for themselves in the education process, complacency is not merely an issue for students, but also for teachers and administrators. Accordingly, Goodman finds a primary element of reform involves discovering ways to challenge the defeatism and sense of powerlessness staff members have internalized under forces they experience as beyond their control. Leveraging a rationale that might make a difference for educators characterized in the literature as “battered” (Anyon, cited in Goodman, 2006, p. 65), a turn toward existential freedom provides a starting point for developing a sense of individual autonomy and encouraging supportive, democratically infused school cultures. Making reference to Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1956) as providing the foundation for his thoughts about educational reform, Goodman opens up spaces for thinking differently about the responsibility teachers have for the meaning they make of their experiences, even if they cannot be held responsible for the creation of the social, political, and economic contexts in which those experiences take place. The tactic conveyed involves confronting structural deterrents that might be viewed as an absolute limit with “creativity, moral courage, and determination” (p. 69) cultivated out of an existential register, one where “experience understood as subjective and social, that is, as gendered, racialized, classed participants in understanding and living through historical moments” (Pinar, 2004, p. 194). By focusing initially on faculty’s personal accounts, rather than social constraints or theoretical accuracies, the aim is to establish forms of self-awareness—a democratization of interiority—in one’s thoughts and occupational positionalities before moving outward towards spheres where faculty might be able to positively influence and support others.

The hope embedded within Goodman’s reading of the HEC reforms should not be taken as a sign of reductionism. Entitling subsections “Struggles and Dilemmas,” “Ideology and Power,” and “Is it Radical Enough?” he promises neither easy solutions nor guaranteed successes. In their place are a series of frank depictions of the pitfalls and breakdowns that occurred with attempts at engendering more egalitarian and supportive school communities. Noting from the onset three barriers to school change—1) “several teachers [who] started to blame Daniel (an HEC consultant) for the tensions that had been brought into the open” (p. 67), 2) a principal who “was uncomfortable with power being distributed to the faculty” (p. 70) and terminated HEC services, and 3) another principal who “didn’t know if he was needed any more” (p. 70) once the teacher leadership

team was in place— this is not an overly reductive or celebratory read of educational reform. Convincing district leadership that the HEC reforms would be worthwhile and gaining admittance to schools were only the first in a series of battles.

Once inside the schools, there were still many reports of resistance from faculty members who had been hardened by years of experience with tactics veiled as reforms aimed at increasing control over teacher practices. Readers are told of a situation where, in the first meeting of the faculty after the approval of the HEC reform project by central administration, teachers “focused on their request not to participate in this school-based reform project” (p. 75) and another that involved a book discussion that, while intended to engender more authentic dialogues, resulted in uneven contributions and the refusal by some faculty to speak at all. Moving dialectically through the data to pinpoint themes that suggest where change agents might make the most effective interventions, Goodman works out of the pitfalls and perils of change work to illustrate the challenges associated with reform when 1) faculty have lost their efficacy to a sense of victimization; 2) leadership questions, if not resists, the idea of sharing authority; and 3) previous reform projects have left schools unchanged or reinforced the least desirable aspects of the school’s culture. Shifting between peculiarities of circumstance and generative themes, the structure of the second half of the text suggests a search for a middle passage between the complexities and nuances of reform efforts and points of emphasis that might offer others strategic direction in their own reform efforts.

What Goodman worries about in examining the debates over public education from the perspective of educators working within schools is that when it comes to how to practice, the paradigm wars might lend themselves more to mystification and abstraction than they do direction on how to act, particularly when drawn into relationship with the everyday experiences of teachers educating our children and youth. Conceptually complex, systematically abstract, globally at issue, the concern is with conservative resurgence so fully infiltrating public education that without efforts to reconfigure the conversations regarding school reform from the macropolitics of control to the micropolitics of responsibility, there will be few spaces for engendering discourses that provide concrete opportunities to reflect and act differently. Accordingly, by offering a reading of school reform at the grassroots, this research intends to interrupt the conservative regimes of meaning that have a stronghold on the educational research guiding school reform for nearly three decades. The challenge to educators, he reminds us, is quite unlike the abstract exhortations found in much of the literature on educational change or the utilitarian perspectives common to contemporary staff development programs. It involves building reform efforts out of conversations with school communities, marking as a starting point the ones they find most compelling, meaningful, and authentic. Spivak (1996) describes this interstice as a form of responsibility where ethics is not just a problem of knowledge but equally a call to a relationship that is not based in narcissism or altruism but non-essential, non-crisis “normality” where “the responses come from both sides” (p. 270).

As a way to close the text, Goodman generates a variety of possible responses to aspects of the conservative agenda with the aim of troubling the anti-democratic structures and practices that negatively impact public education. The through line that marks a passage across these responses involves a concern with offering

counterdiscourses to the speculative and noncommittal character of theoretical abstractions, ones that ultimately seek to complicate our understanding of the successes conservatives have had institutionalizing conventional beliefs about the purposes of public education. Surfacing again, illustrating a pattern in the last half of the text, Goodman takes up the issue of autonomy and its relationship to efforts by conservatives to privatize schooling. The state, he contends, is viewed by many educators and parents alike as establishing an educational program for children and youth that is different from, if not counter to, the interests of a myriad of constituents, particularly those in the local community. Given this historical tension, what is appealing about privatization involves images of increased responsiveness from local schools to the wants and desires of parents and local community members. An interest that is at least in part grounded in market concerns, these are economic rationales driving school-based reform and endorsed by the local community that progressives have historically been incapable of grappling with in their visions of public education. Basic skills, career preparation, and credentialing required for further education constitute for many parents and students the primary roles of public schooling; these roles involve developing habits and crafting opportunities that increase chances for economic success later in life. Responses in the vein of a progressive tradition toward these contemporary rationales for public schooling, he implies, will require the capacity to make noneconomic rationales for public education more than merely important. It will be crucial to illustrate that these noneconomic rationales are central to meeting many of the economic interests of students, parents, and local community members.

What Goodman offers in addressing the conservative agenda has less accord with benevolent models where experts who are in the know intervene on behalf of teachers or develop reform theories so perfectly carved that they are incapable of coping with the grittiness of practice, amounting to little more than what Schubert (1992) points to as a “brittle and dusty image of something finished and on a shelf” (p. 236). Involving an ethical stance, what Goodman illustrates is the compromise-ridden work that comes with entering the terrain of political agency. This is a praxis of making spaces where the aim is the very possibility of bringing marginalized perspectives into existence through shifts in the ways meaning is made within schools. Accordingly, citing a need for authentic community and solidarity, Goodman describes what is possible when a deliberative, democratic leadership body is functioning within settings where decisions that affect school culture are made. When teachers in a high poverty school deliberated over possible explanations for the low level of parental involvement in school operations, a good proposal surfaced on how to improve their knowledge on the topic and they took action. Recognizing how little they understood the lives of their students, faculty committed to visiting their homes and seeking the advice of students and their families regarding what would be necessary to increase their participation in the school community. In another instance, teachers faced with a new superintendent they perceived as an affront to their newly created democratic culture explored possible responses. Equating quality with replication and consistency across grade levels, seeing ultimate success in a time when no matter where students are enrolled they will “be on the same page of the same book” (p. 84), teachers brainstormed possible action plans that might deter the superintendent from infringing on the shared governance structures in place at their school. Sparking democratic visions as change agents, Goodman offers a reading of how HEC consultants worked with teachers on deliberative methods that dissolved

traditional power relations, opening spaces for multi-directional translations and seamless transitions between knower and known.

Exploiting the fissures in common sense to present alternative readings, what becomes available to teachers, many of them for the first time, are opportunities to craft their own visions of what constitutes a substantive education within the context of a democratic, deliberative tradition. When they feel circumstances present themselves, Goodman and other HEC consultants engage faculty in “thoughtful discussions” (p. 86) regarding many possible rationales for schooling. When economic reasoning and workforce readiness seem to overshadow other missions for public education, they challenge the logic of vulgar vocationalism and shortsighted preparation for a market that often undergoes rapid and unforeseen changes. Opening up spaces for thinking differently, this was about teachers using their newfound autonomy to become “creators of curriculum” who strengthen the relationship between “critical viewpoints” and “curriculum practice” rather than merely act as managers in the transmission of preformed content from textbook to student (Goodman, 1986, p. 182).

Opportunities for alternative readings, however, did not prevent tensions from developing among teachers over the best ways to proceed on various contentious educational concerns. Quite the opposite occurred—it brought those tensions to the surface and exposed the complex ways in which individuals conceptualize cultural and material differences. A discussion of Ebonics and Standard English left teachers split over whether they were both dialects. Similarly, when it came to high stakes testing, some teachers felt it eroded opportunities for teachers to help already disadvantaged students while others appreciated the attention and resources it drew to schools that had been failing for some time and that many had thought beyond repair prior to standardized testing. Opening spaces for crafting their own visions meant that often teachers agreed to disagree and handled issues differently. Discussions on contentious topics, however, did sometimes lead to agreements that resulted in school-wide solidarity around an issue. For example, some schools maintained their autonomy by minimizing the impact of high stakes testing (and, accordingly, outside control) on the curriculum through the creation of a “test-taking unit of study” (p. 91). Rather than let the accountability craze destroy the democratic culture teachers worked hard to craft or allow it to further demean already marginalized students, they stressed “putting it in a particular context for students” (p. 91). Offering teachers opportunities to develop their own visions of substantive education moved differences out into the public realm for others to view and yet on many counts these differing perspectives were not resolved.

In relation to the first three chapters, in which Goodman focuses on developing a historical and theoretical foundation within which to position contemporary liberal reformist scholarship, the last three chapters focus on educational change as a praxis-oriented, deliberative art. Here reform is not a change in lesson plans, a structural reconfiguration, or the experience of individuals thinking education differently; rather it is all of these as he works with teachers to define educational problems, discuss their characteristics, and develop possible remedies. A progressive pragmatist, Goodman shares with structuralists and deliberative democratic theorists, such as Habermas, the recognition that reforms must involve institutional reconceptualization and with existential philosophers the realization that a praxis-oriented approach to school-based reform must involve

the study of individual experiences with the objects of education. With these claims, it makes conceivable, although possibility no less acceptable, why Goodman offers such stinging critiques of radical leftists, as they are interested in the effects of reforms, rather than the dilemmas and struggles unique to the site of each reform project. Considering what Schwab (1983) pointed to as curriculum decisions that cannot be “certified in advance of trial as the best decisions” (p. 240), even with all the effort Goodman expends positioning reform within the disciplinary body, he privileges concrete cases in ways that greatly temper any claims to trans-historical principles or the importance of philosophies of control. Attention to the unique attributes of each reform project seems to lead Goodman directly down the path toward Schwab’s description of the practical, quasi-practical, and eclectic—what Reid (1990) recognizes as Schwab’s claim that theory and practice hold their own modes of inquiry. It is assumed educational change agents cannot know a priori what definitions of reform are necessary and instead rely upon the functional aspects of deliberation to reveal what constitutes vital alterations. For knowledge to point us toward possible remedies, Goodman assumes, the issues must be deliberated among various constituencies.

In the last half of the text, we are faced with a reading of the possibilities and perils of compromise. Working in a deliberative tradition, Goodman’s claims are tempered by institutional constraints and what is deemed feasible by faculty members, even as he and his fellow reformers maintain commitments to a democratic agenda. The radical leftists Goodman is opposed to might find in these compromises too much concession and not enough critique. Similarly, some democratic philosophers, particularly those dealing in functionalism and law, might find these concessions yield too much to the particularities of circumstance and context and desire increased exploration of transcendental notions of human interest and socially just rules of conduct. Goodman holds that this deliberative space between generalizability and particularity is both more rigorous and effective than what is offered by radical and functional leftists alone. Here expertise is neither with the theorist or the practitioner but comes from cycles of action and reflection that lead to practical remedies. Although Goodman and his fellow researchers have a model of reform involving leadership teams and study groups and have principles that they are sometimes unwilling to compromise, little about the reform projects can be drawn up in a technical or theoretical framework beforehand. As a precondition for deliberation, Goodman asserts the reforms must be made relationally in exchanges between members. Given the increasing interest in accountability and instrumental reasoning, deliberative practices are most likely exceedingly rare occurrences in contemporary public schools. Because reasoning is always “becoming,” the forms of deliberation Goodman seeks cannot occur within school communities where faculty members are expected to know beforehand the particular form of remedy they will conclude is necessary. In the reading Goodman provides, educational reform acts as the site where deliberation over teachers, administrators, curriculum, and students takes place as an art, where educators refashion themselves in solidarity by attending imaginatively and purposefully to their circumstances.

READING AGAINST A READING: REFLECTION ON PART III

How convincing are the rationales and analyses that make up the second half of the text, particularly given Goodman’s dislike of the

“dooms-day vision of the future” (p. 96) offered by some radical leftists? Because the first half of the book, where he develops the liberal reform history, underwrites his reading of educational change, he is confronted in the second half of the text with the challenge of illustrating why such a history is important to contemporary school reform. Given that his initial reading positions him as continuing the progressive tradition, the framework and discourse he puts forth is particularly important to understanding the rationalities at play in his attempt to persuade the reader of the positive impact democratic education reform has on public schools. Reading for ambivalences and breakdowns without synthesis into categories might position Goodman as no more effective than the radical leftists he critiques. Accordingly, the corrective readings in the first half of the text lead to increased pressure to illustrate the importance of control, pragmatic reasoning, and subject-centered agency, as opposed to relinquishing control, nonreason, and critique of the subject, as the pathways to any change that might be desirable.

The primary strategy Goodman employs to arrive at participatory governance involves numerous variations on the idea of organizational change: external change agents, dialogue for cultural change, promoting new forms of community, devising different rituals, and fostering communication patterns. Taken up in relation to the notion of democratic foundations, the idea of cultural reconceptualization, as Goodman develops it, acts as a metaphor and a specific image of the stages of school reform, one in which the history of the progressive tradition is revealed in contemporary strategies for reinvigorating education towards “a social, liberal, critical democracy” while concurrently creating spaces that allow for “‘bottom up’ educational transformation in which teachers and principals assume the primary responsibility for reforming their schools” (p. 109). As Goodman describes, relying upon Fullan (1993), “the substance of education depends upon creating an organizational culture that fosters faculty ownership over and commitment to whatever changes are made through honest, open, and comprehensive dialogue” (p.78). Key reform ideas originate for expected sources, including Dewey, Rorty, Bobbit, and Charters, as well as some not-so-expected sources that include Bakhtin, Foucault, and Giroux. Here the effectiveness of organizational change is measured by the extent to which experiences with reform in schools uphold the categorical imperatives of democratic education.

As Goodman sees it, although “on a grand scale this assessment might be correct,” scholars who theorize that “unless there is some sort of major revolutionary change” there will be few “opportunities for progressive education” might be doing little more than “breeding a sense of powerlessness among school communities” (p. 96). Accordingly, his interest is in reinvigorating a leftist reformism “as a form of educational praxis” (p. 101) with the hope that leftist radicals might join him in a deliberative tradition that involves more than mere critique and deconstruction. Given my affinity for Keith Morrison’s (2004) position that leftist curriculum scholars, including those claiming to work out of a progressive tradition, have provided “successor theories” and “contemplative theories” rather than involved theory with “practical intent” that “catches the dynamics of life” and “celebrates its throbbing vitality” (p. 491), my passion has involved thinking through critical theory and poststructuralism for the very ideas they might offer in the struggle for educational justice under terms that do not reinscribe philosophies of mastery, control, and proceduralism. Goodman’s claim that deconstruction and critique leave us in a relativistic and

nihilistic void without principles of operation regrettably also leaves out a discussion of the dangers of proceduralism, universality, and certitude; these principles are particularly vulnerable to successive reinscription of oppressive forms in spite of libratory intentions. Also regrettable, his emphasis on rolling up the dilemmas and contradictions of school reform into generalizable categories effectively erases ambivalence and rupture by subsuming difference into the same, and his use of a highly abstract, in the know, prescriptive voice of reform at many points throughout the text suggests the research project might benefit from Goodman's interruption of his own work to examine what Spivak (1994) points to as "academic resistance to acknowledgement of complicity" (p. 27). The issue at hand is what might be available if scholarship that brings question to the progressive tradition is not dismissed but engaged by HEC consultants. What might reform look like if its deliberative tactics were confronted with the insights of poststructuralism and critique?

As a final point, after examining Goodman's text, my interest is in what might be available in the extension of the HEC school reform efforts if Goodman's emphasis on distinguishing between the discourse of graduate seminars and school reform, the latter which "must be focused and lead to definite decisions" (p. 79), were repositioned to allow for storytelling and theorizing out of his experiences with the breakdowns and pitfalls of attempts to practice. This is a sort of reading difference differently that involves "reading against ourselves" in ways that assumed "incompetent readers reading for difference . . . to be unsettled by otherness" (Lather, 2000, p.158). Yet, whether or not one agrees with Goodman's distinction, the politics of deconstructive and critical work on the register of educational reform might be decidedly too ambiguous for some, particularly someone still committed to salvation through the necessary and yet imperfect social contract. This is unavoidable given the emphasis on performance over object, difference over origin, mutation over type, indeterminacy over design, and the refusal of "definite decisions" that are seen as too rigid and hierarchical in critical and poststructural thought. Lather refers to this as the "stammering and stuttering" that occurs in thinking through "the constitution and protocols of knowledge" (1998, p. 490), the urgent and indeterminable disjunctures that arise when reading suspicious ambivalent postdiscourses across the faithful sureties of disciplinary knowledge.

PART IV: POST-RECONCEPTUALIZATION IN POST-POST TIMES: THINKING THROUGH INCONCEIVABILITY AS A PERFORMATIVE SITE

Both Wolcott and Goodman are doing something significant in regards to the pressing need to rethink our ideas of what constitutes adequate education, reform, and research methods in new and different times. Yet, while Wolcott troubles the very idea of mimetic representation and Goodman challenges educational theory to reconceptualization at the site of practice, both seem to struggle with what concepts look like within disciplines after the postdiscourses have leveraged their attacks on the plentitude of knowledge and transparency of experience. This is particularly true when one considers the failure of distinctions to hold across time and space, categories to represent the complexity of human experience, and concepts to offer strategic direction while operating on shifting ground. While tending toward an all-knowing position in his

scholarship, Goodman is quite aware of the pitfalls of false consciousness and the weight symbolism and materialism bears upon the configuration of educators' subjectivities. Different from Goodman, Wolcott—as a longtime ethnographer—recognizes that the folds of abstract democratic and educational reform discourses have historically provided ever more pronounced valleys where dominance can and does remain hidden from view. Given their awareness, however, neither of them escapes the impossibilities of the task at hand. Goodman foregrounds his research into an educational reform project with a theoretical and historical position that accounts for discursive practices, situated truths, and unequal power relations, but still finds it imperative to work with ideas of authenticity, conflict resolution, and correct procedures when theory enters onto the terrain of public schools. Wolcott offers a rereading of his research with sneaky kid, imploring investigators to take off the “rose-colored glasses” to grapple with issues of intimacy and fieldwork, yet he finds that to be “active in field research” (p. 145) researchers must reject, not interrogate, ethics. Anticipating the unavoidable and seeking to do otherwise, what is required has less to do with theorizing one way to practice another or outright rejection than what might serve in excess of and alternative to dualistic thinking. Instead of returning to what has failed us, to embrace the “strong drive to codify knowledge” that “favours procedural thinking . . . while reducing ambiguity and uncertainty” (Roberts, 2001, p. 99-100), the lesson before us involves less one of ceasing efforts at knowledge production than producing knowledge differently given the truth claims that are no longer possible in light of the lessons learned from postdiscourses regarding power and representation and language and excess in the irreducibility of meaning and messiness of interpretation.

If one thing can be learned from the proliferation of postdiscourses—out of queer theory, feminist thought, cultural studies, and critical race theory—it involves healthy skepticism toward emancipatory research projects for their academic rationalism, narrative formulas, transcendental categories, and unrecognized coercion. Thinking through the implications of Foucault's (1977) discomposition of the “deep division that lies between innocence and guilt” (p. 227), Said's nothing is so innocent as an idea, Rorty's conditions of an ironist, and Derrida's radical complicity—what we are confronted with as scholars is no looking in on asymmetrical relations from the outside, no escaping normalizing discourses, and no guaranteeing that aims at empowerment will not tend toward subjugation despite efforts toward social justice. Ideas once thought reliable, essential, and certifiable—agency, objectivity, voice, consensus, consciousness-raising, and authorial narration—are left in ruins (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000), faced with what Russell (2005) and McKenzie (2005) term the post-post approaches to educational research in which validity is viewed as what has been inscribed as legitimate mechanisms for arriving at truth within a particular historical period, rather than truth as merely the right methodological strategy for extracting a “real” snapshot of reality. Working such ruins, in light of what has been rendered suspect, what might be available to us is a postreconceptualist bricolage, clusters of montages that—suspicious of each other and caught in juxtaposition—read one another both intracluster and intercluster as incomplete. These are doubled movements that subscribe to the potentials of educational reform and yet in the very attempt to move toward new and different possibilities mark their limits as agents of truth.

As something other than a return to conventional ethnography, or moving the progressive tradition into new times, and while

recognizing what each domain brings in historical and contemporary insight, my concern is with an educational praxis that addresses trilectical possibilities as ideas that exceed the logic of dialectics and binarisms. This is a tripartite praxis of successive mutations, circulations, and attractions that “opens up a third space of simultaneous interrelation and separation,” one “that is neither self not other, inner nor outer” (Ellsworth, 2004, p. 31). In contrast to Goodman’s study of HEC efforts, this is a different project; this both is and is not about struggling to reconfigure school cultures in ways that allow for democratic school reform; it is about logic that becomes discomposed and fragmented in the face of educational changes that collapse the categories of school reform so that the very difference of reform is thought and experienced differently. In Beach’s article “The Problems of Educational Change: Working From the Ruins of Progress Education” (1999), he notes a series of troubled categories: base, superstructure, social order, decentralization, normality, identity, ideological reproduction, comprehension, transcendence, meaningful change, status, and prestige. Thinking Beach’s deficient concepts in relation to Spivak’s (2005) “plea for the patient work of learning to learn from below” as a “species of ‘reading’” (p. 100) and both of these scholars point to concepts that can no longer bear the weight of the exclusions that provide for their intelligibility and, so finding themselves displaced, are confronted with the borderlands of cultural and material realities. Wang (2005) notes, in her Derridian reading of borders and responsibility, that it is “in this openness to the other” where “the boundary is not overthrown” and yet is not experienced as “settled territory” where the “both-and,” rather than either-or, situation can be located (p. 46). Put differently, the inherited structures and practices of knowledge production—intellectual advancement, utopian futures, and societal redemption—are fundamentally inadequate in light of the leaks, through lines, and passages that interrupt the contrasting concepts that shape contemporary thought and action. Exceeding boundaries and impossible passages, these are aporias that cannot be escaped, ones that nevertheless require “active engagement with the impossible” for the purpose of “creating new forms of life” (p. 47). Trilectical praxis is a mapping of new practices toward as-yet unknown spaces of theorizing, reflecting, and acting at the site of impossibility.

Warding off all that must be resisted in the seduction of the either-or of dialectics or deconstruction is a difficult move given all that must be read together as reconceptualized and disconceptualized: ideas of transcendental knowledge, pure data, and educational change; action and reflection; facilitator and researcher storytelling, representation, and identity; and language, culture, and power. What might have been previously read as opposites, if always already holding traces of the other, suggests that that which seems unimaginable within contemporary academic reasoning, be it educational reform or adequacy, always already holds enfolded within it the trilectical third space of any meaning making with the capacity to inform educational practices toward freedom. As Goodman illustrates, implementing major, transformational educational changes within public schools is inconceivable. Seeing inconceivability as a performative site, however, enabled a mode of grassroots struggle as a way to work through the proposition of reform. In his work on the culture of method, Doll (2005) describes this as events through which “a matrix of connections (rich, recursive, relational, and rigorous) emerge” and where “curriculum has no pre-set beginning” (p. 55). While similar in their rereadings of the mode of struggle, what Doll gives up in certainty, linearity, and stability is in stark contrast to the definitive decisions and categorical certainty that underwrite Goodman’s efforts

at progressive educational reform in contemporary times or Wolcott's rejection, rather than complication, of ethics in educational research. Neither of the two latter authors deals extensively with representation as a production rather than simply a reflection of an authentic original. The issue becomes one of an educational praxis that is uncertain, undefinitive, and undecidable; constituted by its exclusions; and interrupted by its own translations, an amplified praxis that declares the potential of action and reflection while retaining necessary suspicions in view of the shifting terrain of given arrangements.

In post-post times, or what has been termed the post-reconceptualization of curriculum theorizing, binaries, boundaries, subjects, and spaces are being reconsidered. Hongyu Wang (in press), for example, crafts a "co-creative curriculum" that offers analytical contours quite different from those of the deliberative tradition. Susceptible are humanism, theoretical singularity, categorical oppositions, subject-centered agency, nationalism, neologisms, and dialectical separation, each troubled in a way that points to the range and complexity of the reconfigurations underway. As something other than what Goodman terms "educational praxis" as a process involving educators in a "conceptual analysis of pedagogy and society" that gets used "to inform their practice, followed by reflection," (p. 101) this is a praxis distrusting of collecting and sequencing categories; questioning of philosophies of presence and self-knowledge; blurring lines of thought separating objects and subjects; and translating within attempts at nonmastery, in a general orientation toward passages through current regimes of meaning where inconceivability becomes a site of thinking through as-yet inconceivable conditions and possibilities within contemporary structures and practices.

Finally, diverging and converging with Goodman, seeing the potentials and limitations of reading Wolcott across Goodman for what might be productive in working the ruins of transformation as something beautiful (see Butler, 1999), this is an educational praxis suspicious of reform rationalities, universal categories, transparent understanding, and attempts to represent the "real" of experience as evidence that this can be done again elsewhere. Operating out of trilectics, this is an educational praxis that sees in a neo-class outlook, with its emphasis on essential links between electoral politics and symbolic and material fairness, Enlightenment rationality and material and cultural equity, and coalition building and social justice activities, problems with the following:

- representatives who claim to have the capacity to speak for others;
- consensus that refuses difference as essential to the practices of freedom;
- social contracts that fail to account for the proliferation of multiple, dynamic competing and coalescing public spheres; and,
- ideological explorations that assume shared knowledge outside of discursivity.

The work before us might be less about bringing the past into contemporary times or inventing something wholly new than what is possible in working impossibility as the interstices of any force of interrelation and translation that might help us produce and learn from the breakdowns and pitfalls of educational reform. This is an educational praxis that is less interested in redeeming a progressive tradition than in what might surface in reading dialectics and deconstructions into a third position as both other and more than

disjunctive and integrative readings. Here the lessons on producing and learning from ruptures, breaks, and transmutations are plenty: amateur insights in juxtaposition with expert understanding leading to different forms of knowledge; continuities and possibilities in position alongside inconsistencies and limits offering unexplored ways of reading similarity and alterity; necessary categories taken on terms other than their own providing the conditions for examining the exclusions they produce; and interpretations that are necessary failures at replicating their original offering chances at reimagining translation as a creative act. In each there is the opening of a third space that offers varied translations and interpretations. Lather (2000) speaks to this from her Benjaminian vantage point, specifically “how that which escapes knowledge, the authority of the object, can be gestured toward by looking at the detour of performance” (p. 154).

CONCLUSION

My reading of educational reform on four registers, shared from the perspective of a white male academic who is interested in the state of the field of curriculum studies and tied to the study of “the variable and contingent nature of systems” (Slattery, 2006, p. 195), might indeed be too little too late. Counting myself among the curriculum scholars who “are as deeply suspicious of relativism” as they are “the universalizing and totalizing claims that are made in the name of modern science” (Gough, 2000, p. 332)—predisposed to all I do not know as an educational scholar who senses the “gap between ourselves and many of the teachers in those schools” (Greene, 1991, p. 541) and yet is occupied here with the issue of school reform—it is possible that I still have much learning to do in regards to irreducibility, language, and school reform where theory must “make useful recommendations” (Anyon, 1994, p. 117). Finding my writing works best when it renders suspect the ideas put forward and interrupts any sense of certainty on how to proceed, functioning as a doubled gesture that brings difficult questions to bear upon Goodman, myself, and the writing we produce, this essay necessarily exceeds and fails my aims and exceeds and fails the readers’ wants and desires for the text.

I have, however, developed “ears to hear” on at least one register that matters: what Cusick & Borman (2002) point to as poststructuralism’s “inherent distaste for status and authority”; any attempts at “finally analyzed and correct interpretations” (p. 773) cannot be so easily dismissed in their implications for putting knowledge, language, and truth to work differently within education scholarship. Criticism of conventional efforts to be “truer to lived realities” (Saukko, 2003, p. 58) demands alternate ways of accounting for the ambiguity of interpretation and the problems embedded in each position that enters the field at the point of writing. And, troubling its own counterstructural realities, it must also interrupt the inclination toward nonpragmatic “elite translations” in the spaces opened up through its antiessentialism. As Derrida (1981) put forth, offering a doubled reading without guarantees, deconstruction is both problem (poison) and resolution (remedy) (see also Keller, 2001). Discomposing foundations, situating knowledges, and unfixing identities, there are countless hazards in writing deconstructively without a foundation as there are in conducting school research that assumes reforms “can be implemented in any school, any where, at any time, in exactly the same way” (Datnow & Springfield, 2000, p. 193). Miller (1996), for example, warns that the situatedness of school reform not be erased

by change agents who get caught up in providing “quick, visible ‘evidence of improvement’” and disregard that it is also about continuously changing conceptions of reform involving unstable, unpredictable, and nonlinear realities. Such a take on situated knowledges is a rude awakening for those who want to retain a focus on “capturing the ‘lived experience’ of school reform” and accordingly disavow the need to “rewrite and rework discourses of reform that would generalize and universalize” (p. 91).

Popkewitz (2000) would like to displace the “seductive rhetoric of school reform” with critical examinations of the “categories, distinctions, and differentiations of schooling that govern problem-solving efforts to improve education” (p. 17). What kind of knowledge might be adequate to such a request? Reading research as something other than copies of original events, what Benjamin offers involves the ways in which writing itself is a theatrical event. Editing, translating, interpreting, each foregrounds the need to read research on educational reform situationally, within social, economic, and political contexts, and with an ultimate undecidability as to the correct reading and even the possibility of reaching a final conclusion on what it all means. The lesson Goodman might offer the reader in his most recent text, whether or not he intended it, is that research into educational reform is not about the reality to which it makes reference as much as it is the responsibility to recreate academic discourse as part of contemporary political efforts. Maybe in an era of culture wars and conservative restoration, school reform gives us an opportunity to bring many of the complex and divergent discourses of curriculum studies to bear upon a shared topic, not for the purpose of easy answers, but to complicate the discourses, processes, and research perspectives at hand. As a stage for practice, democratic school reform might function as a reevaluation of educational praxis under terms that allow it to become neither reductive nor incapable of providing strategic direction while operating under continuously changing terms, interactions, and relationships.

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