Using Alain Badiou's Ethic of Truths to Support an 'Eventful' Social Justice Teacher Education Program

KENT DEN HEYER
University of Alberta

DIANE CONRAD
University of Alberta

Personal-Professional Context of This Essay

BOTH RECENTLY PROMOTED to the ranks of Associate Professor in a Canadian university with a large undergraduate teacher education program, we are nonetheless ambivalent about our task of educating teachers. We were caught, on the one hand, by our experiences of teaching (let alone teaching teachers) as an impossible profession (Freud, 1937/1968); on the other, by our persistent faith that education still has something to contribute to improve shared social and material lives (however variously defined). Our lived experiences as teacher educators fell, however, decidedly short of our expectations for what teacher education could be. Beyond our own ambivalence, moreover, we felt there were significant flaws with the program in which we taught. We were not alone in our discontent.

With an existing program structure more than two decades old, our Faculty resolved to engage in a comprehensive program review. Through faculty consultation and research, a committee devised a set of five foundational principles for our teacher education program. These principles became a framework to guide program revision. To promote a degree of coherence across departments, however, we felt these principles also needed an explicit purpose. For example, one of the principles concerning scholarship states that current research should be consistently represented in undergraduate courses. But what current research given the volume of work yearly produced? Eager to contribute to the possibility of positive change presented by the opportunity of a program review, we proposed that "social justice" could provide a worthwhile purpose for the program and guide its principles while also giving integrity to our roles as teacher educators. To promote this idea, we created a presentation for our Faculty colleagues.

We began by exploring what a social justice orientation to teacher education might entail. We developed a rationale for social justice as a focus for teacher education and explicated its possible definitions and models by drawing on relevant research related explicitly to social justice in addition to work in curriculum theory and philosophy. From this scholarship, we developed a thesis. As we address in this essay, social justice education uses the subject matter of particular courses as a means to examine the ways in which our nexus of privilege and ignorance both contributes to and emerges from broader struggles over purposes and identifications around which cultural practices (such as education) coalesce. As explored, this privilege-ignorance nexus constitutes an educational site for the possibility of an "event" and subsequent "truth-processes" (Badiou, 2001) that is in itself an education in its most honorific sense.

Our thesis was met with several objections from colleagues. The term "social justice" itself was contested as an empty signifier devoid of disciplinary content. The multiple types or expressions of justice (see for example, Fraser, 1997; Gerwitz, 2006) and the particularities of various contexts and conditions were seen as obstacles. Some colleagues viewed social justice as fitting only with a "leftist" political agenda. There were also concerns for students' discomfort with such a focus as it requires grappling with "difficult knowledge" (Britzman, 1998). Another objection emerged from the perception that social justice advocates critique existing conditions without offering any positive alternatives. Though never seriously considered by our Faculty, we further develop our proposal here with our colleagues' objections in mind and return to those objections in the final section of this essay.

As in our presentation, we take up social justice in this essay as a curriculum issue in contrast to, for example, advocating for a specific social justice course or as a question related to particular topics (as relates to a range of topics such as urban education, masculinities, or disability studies; see for example, essays collected in Ayers, Quinn & Stovall, 2009). While we recognize the importance of context and specifics, we also see an equal need for a theorization of social justice as a more general curricular question of knowledge, knowing, and those student subjectivities we as educators presume to teach. Such theorizations must both traverse particular contexts and provide categories that allow people in differing contexts to see themselves as implicated.

There are several dangers to try and avoid in thinking through social justice education. One lies in the danger that social justice itself becomes another master signifier that is either ideologically closed to diverse particularities of context or, alternatively, as an empty signifier, simply a rhetorical appeal to something 'good' (Bracher, 1993). We must also take care to avoid the set up of schools and those in them as responsible for creating better social futures. The illogic of this formulation has been well argued elsewhere (see for example, Britzman, 1991; Pinar, 2004). Finally, there is an obvious danger in being insufficiently disagreeable to reigning doxa. As relates to curriculum theorization, we interpret difference, alterity, or appeals to an Other as the categories of ethics and justice dominating curriculum theorizing as understood in postmodern, hermeneutic, and Deweyian pragmatic orientations along with advocacies for curriculum inclusions based on communitarian filiations (e.g., multicultural education). We turn now to a theorization of social justice that we hope avoids these dangers.

The Privilege-Ignorance Nexus

We define social justice as the public act of challenging personal and structural privilege as it manifests in our classrooms, personal lives, and the formal political sites of our various collec-

tive constituencies. Privilege in our discussion below refers very specifically to both issues and people about which one is ignorant or about which one believes there is no need to be concerned (see also Carr & Lund, 2007; McIntosh, 2008; Tisdell, 1993; Wildman & Davis, 2000). Social justice works against the privilege that is our ignorance.

As with identifications, the nexus of privilege-ignorance is multifaceted—situated, historical, and contingent—with different aspects of our privilege and disadvantage invoked depending on context. Therefore, teacher candidates, like each of their instructors, have their own instantiations of privilege-ignorance to investigate and challenge.

As with other scholars in education (Bracher, 1993; Britzman, 1991, 1998; Felman, 1987; Taubman, 2006), we use ignorance in the psychoanalytic sense of the word. In this work, ignorance differs from, for example, being rude or unaware of something. Psychoanalytic theory posits that we actively choose—indeed, have a passion for—our ignorance. From this perspective, people avoid that which challenges cherished visions or ideals and or implicates us as agents directly involved in and benefiting from, albeit in unequal ways, the many horrors of the present that privilege saves us from experiencing daily. Ignorance then is the shadow side of knowledge as each constitute a familiar subjectivity and identification whose security requires that we continuously strive to strike a balance of proximity and distance to difficult issues. A passion for ignorance emerges from and serves to reinforce these familiarities.

Ignorance is neither innocent or accidental, nor does it reside solely in individuals. It is shaped rather through the institutionalization of our sensibilities and intelligibilities (Simon, 2005). Institutions (e.g., schools, textbooks, corporate media, museums) not only provide content for our knowing, but shape our emotional resistance to unknowing as well. As with the 'official' knowledge found in programs of study resulting from and contributing to struggles over cultural practices, ignorance and resistance serve some groups' interests at the expense of others' (Apple, 2000). Being *educated* does not mean, therefore, simply having achieved knowledge or the ability to do something. To be educated is also to have simultaneously acquired a somewhat predictable ignorance along with an emotional tendency to avoid issues that do not conform to the "instantaneous uptake" (Aoki, 2000, p. 354) of our immediate understandings; that is, issues, people, and or behaviours that defy our efforts to immediately apprehend them (and about which we thereby often become apprehensive).

In Alberta, for example, many teachers and teacher candidates are experiencing stress about a new K-12 social studies program that requires teaching the story of Canada and Alberta from Aboriginal and Francophone perspectives. These perspectives are to be added to the dominant Anglo-Canadian historical and nationalist narrative unnamed in the program but from and about which content for the provincial standardized test is drawn. Setting aside the fact that there is no singular perspective for either group now added in the program, the stress is understandable. As successful students, the vast majority of teacher candidates (and their instructors) are ignorant about *any* perspective these communities themselves offer. This is the case despite the easy availability of immense resources in terms of books, people, courses, exhibitions, and so on from which one could learn.

The challenge here is not one of simply information. Issues related, for example, to Aboriginal Alberta elicit difficult emotions that reflect a colonial legacy, ongoing land disputes (including land from which great oil and gas wealth is currently being extracted), and material and symbolic divisions at the heart of the Canadian nationalist project. As Daniel Francis (1992, 1997) points out, most non-Aboriginal Canadians—including those who arrive in our teacher education classrooms—posses inherited information about an "imaginary Indian" (Francis,

1992). This imaginary is reflected and reinforced in mainstream media when the challenges that many Aboriginal communities face are reduced to discussions about *their* "special privileges" (e.g., status members of First Nations do not pay federal taxes) or claims that *their* cultures of poverty create cycles of failure.[1] Usually unaddressed in such discussions are the ways *their* poverty provides the foundation of *our* wealth. Also commonly ignored are the educating forces that produce the predictable non-Aboriginal trans-Canadian imaginary of the Indian (Francis, 1992; see also Tupper & Cappello, 2008). This division and stress exemplify the ways in which privilege-ignorance is, on the one hand, personal and emotive, while on the other, socially-institutionally shaped. Unsurprisingly, therefore, we encounter a strong resistance from many teacher candidates to questions about what non-Aboriginal Canadians might possibly learn from investigating either that which their privilege allows them to ignore (i.e., from where their "imaginary Indian" comes and whose interests it serves) or what we can learn from Aboriginal epistemologies and experiences on terms that differ from what our privilege allows us to set.

Taking up and learning from different forms of resistance in the space of teacher education requires a concerted and shared effort to engage our own shadows as teacher educators:

> Lacking in insight into the ego's defence mechanisms of denial, rationalization, projection and so forth, teacher education is poorly equipped to help student teachers learn from the inevitable resistances to difficult knowledge. (Carson, 2007, p. 3)

The key point in this discussion to emphasize is the necessity to learn from knowledge already possessed and to learn from resistance to questions, issues, or alternative perspectives that potentially put at risk what (and on what basis) we can claim to know. To engage these spaces at the heart of our privilege-ignorance nexus is not only a question of social justice. Such encounters with what we have the privilege to ignore (and the attendant stress involved) may be a precondition for learning itself (Britzman, 1991). This is especially so if we think of both justice and learning as an ethical journey rather than achievement or acquisition of a pre-determined thing (be it information or skill). We now turn to engage Badiou's (2000, 2001, 2003) articulation of an *ethic of truths* as an ethical basis upon which we might engage learning and social justice as just such an uncertain journey.

Badiou and an Ethical Subjectivity of Truths

Badiou (2000) interprets education in general as never having meant more than this: "organiz[ing] knowledge to the extent that a certain truth can break through" (p. 17). From where does a truth break through? According to Badiou's formulation, a truth emerges from the "void" at the heart of all "situations" or "states" of being, from a rip in the tissue of "opinions" (received knowledge) under which we take shelter from the void's foreboding infinity (Badiou, 2001). Related in our discussion above, one site where teachers and students potentially encounter this void is their privilege-ignorance nexus.

Badiou's (2001) first philosophical assertion is that truth ought to be the primary category of philosophy and that ethics, in contrast to its concern with "abstract categories, (Man or Human, Right or Law, the Other…), should be referred back to particular *situations*" (p. 3). By situations Badiou names those concentrically overlapping social territories through which we gain an identity and orientation towards the world. These influential sites range from family to State to

economic relations where we learn to act, desire, and dream appropriately or identify ourselves as belonging to one but not another grouping.

Badiou argues that when the contemporary situation of philosophy (postmodern and hermeneutic orientations being his favorite target) abandoned truth and elevated language as the object of its inquiry, it could no longer name or support an agent in the world to militate for justice. In a complementary role, the de-contextualized "best practices" that exemplify the Anglo-American modernist education project assume an overly individualized and cognitive approach to the those subjectivities we presume to teach (see for example, the focus on "disciplinary habits of mind" in Gardner, 1999; Mansilla and Gardner, 2008). Extending Badiou's point, we argue that neither the disciplinary best practices orientation nor postmodern inspired education adequately accounts for people's adventurous subjectivity or their capacity to affirmatively invent new social situations. The first chooses to ignore the creative energies of a subject's emotional and imaginative fluidity while for the latter the subject is primarily the shadowy effect of discourses ruled by interlocking regimes of pre-existing power. Each is the mirror image of the other. Their arguments rest on a mutually supporting logic of student-human deficit on the one hand and the philosophical abandonment of human inventive creativity on the other. To reclaim a more affirmative ethics, Badiou (2003) articulates an ethic of truths premised on "the strong, simple idea that every existence can one day be sized by what happens to it and subsequently devote itself to that which is valid for all…" (p. 66).

For Badiou, truths—or, rather, generic "truth-processes"—lack pre-specified content (as articulated by any number of religious orders) or destination as with, for example, a 'scientific' Marxist interpretation of history. This interpretation of truths is also unrelated to any communitarian identification. Rather, truths consist of the material traces that a "becoming subject" produces in fidelity to a unique and singular truth-process instigated by an "event." Such material traces consist of speech acts, art, social movements, or indeed any configuration and affirmation of thought that thinks the situation from the perspective of the event. It is for these truth-processes instigated by an event that Badiou argues ethics and philosophy—and, we assert, a justice oriented teacher education—must lend support.

The status of an "event" is, of course, a matter of much philosophical debate. As Mariam Fraser (2006) writes,

> as a philosophical concept, [an event] exists in relation to a specific set of problems, including the problem of how to conceive of modes of individuation that pertain not to being, or to essences and representation, but to becoming and effectivity. (p. 129)

For Badiou, events and subsequent truth-process potentially occur in four fields of human endeavor— politics, science, art, and love (Badiou, 2001, 2003). To this we add 'education' as a fifth field where an event can occur if, and, when educators arrange their courses to engage the privilege-ignorance nexus. Love, however, provides perhaps the most poignant and familiar example of Badiou's notion of an "event" and "truth-process."

All lovers are simultaneously subject to both the particular and the universal. All lovers—however particular the people and the circumstances—are "becoming subject" to an event—falling in love—that is also universal in that love-as-"event" respects no pre-set rules, pre-existing identities or differences, and as we must assume, is potentially available to all. In addition to other implications, encountering an event such as love subtracts from (or "pierces" a hole in) what one thought to be the case of one's situation. This subtraction also creates the

possibility of a supplement or addition we enact in becoming more than the 'one' we thought (were 'opinionated') we were. It is in this sense that a "becoming subject" is a collective subjectivity—between lovers, between artist and observer, between the works of scientists, teachers and students— whose continuance is entirely dependent on a fidelity to the event. Badiou's is also not an argument for enlightened "free will" or for an individualism that is fully in charge of itself. As with love, the unpredictable occurrence and implications of an "event" mock such assertions.

The task of fidelity requires a discipline, for to what the subject is to remain faithful no longer exists. In other words, the whole of the "event" (the 'falling' that is an event in the field of love, a 'voiding' of the known by the not-known in the field for education) consists of its disappearing: "But this disappearing […] is also the occasion of a 'radical power of affirmation' insofar as it 'bequeaths the imperative to weave a truth' from its trace" (Badiou as cited in Hallward, 2005, p. 18). In short, an event occasions a possibility for a becoming subject to weave a truth-process whose content or final form can never be pre-determined or controlled.

Shakespeare provides a classic example of an "event"-ful subtraction from—and possible supplementation of—the identity-based formulations of loyalty that constituted the situation in *Romeo & Juliet*. The tragedy conveyed in this story results not from the lovers' fidelity to their truth event of love, but the adult refusal or inability to see beyond their own limited interests defined by "Montagues" and "Capulets." Under the flags of their proper nouns, the situation dominated by patriarchal opinion destroyed that which made the young most human, humane, and becoming. As with this classic case, all lovers constitute a "becoming subject" by embodying a disinterested interest in inherited opinions:

> I cannot, within the fidelity to fidelity that defines ethical consistency [of, and, to, an event and subsequent truth-process] take an interest in myself, and thus pursue my own interests. All my capacity for interest, which is my own perseverance in being, has poured out into the future consequences of the solution to this scientific problem, into the examination of the world in the light of love's being-two, into what I will make of my encounter, one night, with the eternal Hamlet, or into the next stage of the political process, once the gathering in front of the factory has dispersed (Badiou, 2001, p. 50).

More directly related to education, we might add 'what I thought was *my* commitment to or understanding about (e.g., education policy, history, mathematics, art, critical thinking) is not only not mine at all but possibly contributes to the problem I seek to alleviate.' Or, more simply, "I had/have no idea." We can describe these moments in many ways, such as a moment of "biographical crises" (Britzman, 1991, p. 8) or as a piercing of the "fictional assemblages" by which we organize "a self-representation" (Badiou, 2001, p. 55).[2] However described, encountering this event we are confronted with the question and task of "fidelity" which is where, for Badiou, the ethic of truths begins: "A crisis of fidelity is always what puts to the test, following the collapse of an image, the sole maxim of consistency (and thus ethics): Keep going!" (Badiou, 2001, p. 36). Badiou (2001) believes:

> There is always only one question in the ethic of truths: how will I, as some-one, continue to exceed my own being? How will I link the things I know, in a consistent fashion, via the effects of being seized by the not-known? (p. 50)

The proper verb tense, therefore, with Badiou's event and truth-process is neither the present nor the past, but rather the future anterior. In essence, by maintaining fidelity to articulating the implications of the event in a consistent fashion, a "becoming subject" declares "this will have been true" pursuing exactly "what it will be absurd *not* to have believed" [italics added] (Gibson, 2006, p. 88).

Encouraging his ethical maxim of "keep going!" Badiou warns against the "Evil" (translated from his term in French, "le Mal") made simultaneously possible only because of human potential to engage in the "Good" of truth-processes (Badiou, 2001). For Badiou, le Mal/Evil comes in three forms: *simulacrum* (of an event and truth-process)/*terror,* or embracing a teleological fantasy of an existing situation's promised fulfillment rather than our relationship to the void at the heart of all situations; *betrayal,* which is to either give up on a truth-process or to mistake one's truth-process for Truth; and *disaster*, when, mistaking the content produced by a singular truth-process for the Truth, Truth justifies the destruction of the material conditions people require to potentially enact their truth-processes or *terrorizes* them into silence. Obviously, both present and past are full of examples of truth inventions distorted into situations of "disaster" and "terror." For Badiou, the ethical response is not to deny or abandon the affirmative human Good that is a truth-process, but the necessity for vigilance against the distortion of this Good that is Evil.

From this formulation of ethics it follows then that the proper subject of teachers' work is not primarily history, language arts, mathematics, or a best practices approach to teacher education; it is, rather, a "becoming subject" whose discipline is called forth by an event that renders as insufficient the inherited opinions that shape our privilege-ignorance nexus. As relates to teacher education as social justice work, this nexus exists in courses that range from educational policy to subject method too often resting on unexamined opinions that sustain the enterprise as 'just the way it is': that public education is, for example, a meritocracy or that individual courses should be concerned simply with the transference of opinion rather than turn attention to the void at the heart of any subject's organization of ignorance.

Following Badiou's ethic, the content of these courses would be organized so as to encounter that void which is a space-without-name at the heart of a predictable ignorance that sustains what it is we claim to know, "organiz[ing] knowledge to the extent that a certain truth can break through." We can re-work this exhortation more mildly in the form of a question: What can we learn about teaching from re-reading both what and how we have been taught about education, policy, disciplines, Aboriginal perspectives, ourselves and so on (den Heyer, 2009a)? In organizing courses around such re-readings of that which our privilege allows us to ignore, we might encounter an event.[3]

It is as possible, of course, to plan an event as it is to schedule when one falls in love—a fact at the heart of education as a most impossible profession. However, like love, organizing curriculum for a truth to break through honours a "truth of human aspiration and dreaming" (Smith, 2000, p. 18) as becoming subjects struggle to link the known to the unknown in a consistent fashion while maintaining vigilance against the distortion of this good that is "le Mal." Badiou's formulation thereby traverses two dangers in thinking about social justice—avoiding a closed reading of a situation in which a particular inspiration of justice (e.g., Marxist derived critical theory) forecloses alternative articulations, and, avoiding a vision of justice as an un-situated ethical idealism that constitutes nothing more substantial than a empty signifier of something 'good' for otherwise unjustifiable situations.[4] We now turn to being more explicitly disagreeable to reigning doxa.

Badiou's ethic of truths stands quite distinct from calls for justice premised on a defense of difference, alterity, or for a phantasmal Other. In contrast, Badiou's suturing of ethics to the subjectivity of a "becoming subject" is premised on an ontology of the ''without-one'' at the heart of all situations: ''The multiple 'without-one'—every multiple being in its turn nothing other than a multiple of multiples—is the law of being. The only stopping point is the void'' (Badiou, 2001, p. 25). Extrapolating from this formulation leads Badiou to conclude that ''there are as many differences, say, between a Chinese peasant and a Norwegian professional as between myself and anybody at all, including myself''(p. 26). As such, where all, ontologically speaking, is difference then difference is of no significance at all to an ethics or education concerned with justice: ''Since differences are what there is, and since every truth is the coming-to-be of that which is not yet, so differences then are precisely what truths depose, or render insignificant'' (p. 27). The proper object of ethical and justice-oriented analysis then is not a defense of difference but a situation that denies difference as an ontological reality and ignores truth-processes as a becoming human endeavor.

Despite the insignificance of difference as an object of ethics or justice, clearly both contemporary politics and curriculum are organized around the forceful exclusion-of-difference (see for example, Apple, 2000; Donald, 2009; Stanley, 1998). We argue, however, that this situation of exclusion suffers no threat from multicultural calls for justice premised on the very "opinions" qua categories (e.g., race-thinking) that the status quo itself uses to justify its existence. Likewise, we argue that postmodern orientations to justice offer nothing more than the (ontologically) obvious when content to affirm—while duly abandoning any collective cause—the fluidity of language's trickster nature, power's disciplining of language/body/gesture, or the arbitrary collation of elements or characteristics by which a state counts as an ensemble of 'one' of those who belong and another as 'one' who does not. Rather, a distinction is required between calls for justice that seek greater inclusion in situations premised on hierarchy and exclusion and calls that both generalize the claim against hierarchy and exclusion and particularize their every limitation of "event"ual possibilities. This is a crucial claim to recognize.

To return to a relevant example, Aboriginal and Francophone perspectives are now included in the program of social studies in Alberta. We now have a more 'inclusive curriculum.' Yet, to what they are to be added as additional perspectives remains un-named. This un-named perspective is the norm and, like all examples of the type, manifests its privilege in its invisibility; a perspective that requires no name but to which the legitimacy of others (beyond a cadre of fellow travelers) must make an appeal to be heard or considered. Without attending to the privilege-ignorance nexus—that is, to examine and name both the content and sources of what one already knows or knows but does not recognize as implicated in social struggles over who we are and will become—keeps Aboriginal or any other perspective as an add-on, a surface engagement without reflection. To engage our privilege-ignorance nexus, in contrast, is

> to help Canadians realize that their formal education and socialization has, both subtly and overtly, presented them with a theory of Indigenousness that has shaped and conditioned their ability to respond to Aboriginal presence and participation encountered in their daily lives. (Donald, 2009, p. 38)

This nexus then is the source from which two crucial and related justice goals emerge. First, a consideration of what our privilege allows us to ignore potentially supplements the terms in which any alternative perspectives will be cast, viewed as reasonable or as having something to

learn *from* rather than *about* (Felman, 1987, p. 74). Second, this nexus is a site of potential events and subsequent truth-processes for teachers and students to consider 'what is' as we pursue 'what might become' "valid for all" as relates to both the particular and universal of our personal and social situation.

In this formulation of the enterprise, education is premised on an axiom of equality, equality of human capacities for becoming, truths, and fidelity. This position stands starkly in contrast to the deficit-reasoning underwriting contemporary enactments of education premised on the transfer of "the thing" (be it information, opinion, skills or disposition) from one presumed to possess to one presumed to be lacking (Aoki, 2002, p. 30; Freire, 1970). In addition to being ill-founded, this rather arbitrary and self-serving presumption (after all, when does anyone know enough of anything) serves only to re-create the unjust conditions of schooling many educators appoint themselves to solve with more schooling, better curricula, more research, and so on (Apple, 2008).

For example, readers of this journal are well aware of the harm of arbitrarily assigned differences by which access to material and social resources is regulated. Why, then, continue to provide sustenance in our teaching and research to the very same categories that serve to further objectify into abstracted sociological categories those already objectified and discounted by the situation? We could start at the void at the heart of the formal education project and our privileged investments in it. Only an education and research program that begins with the premise of an actually already existing equality of all—of capacity for love, learning, becoming, and truth—can we "void" the self-serving and entwined logics of deficit-reasoning and the abandonment of creative human capacities at the heart of contemporary forms of mainstream formal education.

A Summation of the Argument and Response to Objections

In articulating the arguments above, we have attempted to negotiate several insights that emerged in our review of the social justice literature: (a) Avoid replacing one master signifier with another, including the term *social justice* itself (Bracher, 1993, 2002); (b) Attend to the particular contexts created through the interactions between people and affecting conditions (Gerwitz, 2006); (c) Recognize that there are multiple types or forms of justice (Fraser, 1997); and (d) Consider instructional conversations as moments of praxis open to an event that calls for fidelity to a truth-process. Thus, although it is always particular to instructors and students, who, amongst other conditions, together create a context, we argue that the privilege-ignorance nexus should be a central subject of study that we use the differing content of courses to address. This requires we begin with the question of whether our curricula limit or promote the possibilities of an event-ful "becoming subject." We now return to some of the objections raised to this call.

One objection is that social justice is a cover story for a 'leftist' political agenda. Although social justice commitments most definitely have political implications, we believe that it does not belong exclusively to any single political party or political leaning. Despite (Canadian) associations with the political left, every political party invokes social justice rationales as they have for centuries. Today, for example, Canada's ruling federal Conservative party justifies military intervention in Afghanistan as a social justice mission wherein the death, disfiguration, and destruction ("collateral damage") to particular people in particular places must be overlooked as an unfortunate but somewhat unavoidable cost of doing such justice work. Likewise, past Canadian governments and religious orders have couched the need for Indian Residential

Schools in resonate terms. Thus, many different political camps invoke social justice as a purpose to frame their policies and actions. As these examples illustrate, we require a definition of social justice that is first and foremost situated while also able to traverse diverse contexts. The definition of social justice that we offer is: "The public act of challenging personal and structural privilege as it manifests in our classrooms, personal lives, and formal political sites of our various collective constituencies." Following our review of Badiou's ethical subjectivity, to this definition we now add "so as to remove particular limitations to all people's capacity for truth-processes."

Another objection to social justice as an animating purpose for teacher education concerns students' reactions. Of course, we should expect discomfort and resistance from all who grapple with the "difficult knowledge" (Britzman, 1998) involved in an encounter with their privilege-ignorance nexus. There is, and this should be made explicit across our programs, no salve for the difficult grappling involved in learning. As Bracher (2002) notes, this engagement "is fraught with multiple obstacles, most notably the presence, in all parties concerned, of identity components and desires contrary to those motivating and directing the educational enterprise" (p. 93).

Bracher suggests that such resistance is symptomatic of people's desire/need to protect their always vulnerable identities and commitments. Badiou's articulation of the need for ethics to support fidelities to truth-processes encourages all to face up to the resistances that are invitation to move beyond one's "perseverance in being" within the categories of inherited opinions to "becoming subject" to our learning lives.

A final challenge to address lies in the perception that social justice critiques existing conditions without offering any positive alternatives. On the contrary, the social justice orientation for which we advocate seeks to affirm everyone's potential to fall in love or to be caught up along with another in an intractable problem as a result of encountering the void at the heart of our privilege-ignorance nexus. Through these relationships we enact our inventive capacities for "truth-processes" by which every collective present is supplemented with the potential for something new. The goal is clear: to promote the capacity of all to affirmatively invent new situations so as to potentially live a better, more humane, and socially just future (variously defined). We speak here of the future not as a prediction, hope, or place of projected fantasy. Rather, it is a contingent and always-already time space whose reality requires of us an ethic of the future-anterior: that is, that we maintain fidelity enough to live its preferable manifestation as if it already exists. Indeed, this is the stance we have maintained in our own courses and with colleagues as we continue to make the case for social justice in the face of objections, resistance, and inertia.

About the Authors

Kent den Heyer is an Associate Professor of social studies education and curriculum theory in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Albert. His recent published work examines the intersections in historical consciousness of Empire logics and truth processes as articulated in the work of Alain Badiou, appearing in Educational Theory, Curriculum Inquiry and, as editor, Thinking Education Through Alain Badiou, Wiley-Blackwell.

Diane Conrad is Associate Professor in Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. She teaches and researches in the areas of drama/theatre education, applied theatre, at-risk youth, curriculum studies, participatory and arts-based research. Recent publications include In Search

of the Radical in Performance in *Youth & Theatre of the Oppressed*; and Making Space for Youth in *Education, Participatory Action Research & Social Change*.

NOTES

1. See, for example, "The Left's Aboriginal Blind Spot" (Kay, 2008)

2. This notion of "fictional assemblages" by which we organize a self-representation provides a wonderfully nuanced synonym for any program of studies or teacher education syllabus.

3. Likewise, there is no preset method or curriculum of truths. Rather, and as we suggest, there are context specifics in our curriculum and learning spaces that we each can identify as supporting or limiting the possible occurrences of an event and subsequent truth process. That said, attempts have been made to envision an example of a curriculum in support of events and truth-processes, see den Heyer, 2009b.

4. For an exemplary argument contesting insufficiently open ideological readings of the situation, see Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989), ''Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy.''

REFERENCES

Aoki, D. S. (2000). The thing never speaks for itself: Lacan and the pedagogical politic of clarity. *Harvard Educational Review*, *70*(3), 347–369.

Aoki, D. S (2002). The price of teaching: Love, evasion, and subordination of knowledge. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*. *18*(1), 21–39.

Apple, M. W. (2000). *Official knowledge: Democratic education in a conservative age* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Apple, M.W (2008). Curriculum Planning: Content, Form, and the Politics of Accountability. In M. Connelly, M. F. He, & J. I. Phillion (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction* (pp. 25–44). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Ayers, W., Quinn, T., & Stovall, D. (Eds.). (2009). *Handbook of social justice in education*. New York: Routledge.

Badiou, A. (2000). Art and philosophy. *Lacanian Ink*, *17*, 48–67.

Badiou, A. (2001). *Ethics: An essay on the understanding of evil.* (P. Hallward, Trans.). London: Verso. (Original work published in 1998)

Badiou, A. (2003). *Saint Paul: The foundation of universalism*. (R. Brassier, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Original work published in 1997)

Bracher, M. (1993). *Lacan, discourse, and social change: A psychoanalytic cultural criticism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Bracher, M. (2002). Identity and desire in the classroom. In j. jagodzinski (Ed.), *Pedagogical desire: Authority, seduction, transference, and the question of ethics* (pp. 93–121). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Britzman, D. (1998). *Lost subjects, contested objects: Toward a psychoanalytic inquiry of learning.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Britzman, D. (1991). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Carr, P., & Lund, D. (Eds.). (2007). *The great white north? Exploring whiteness, privilege, and identity in education.* Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.

Carson, T. R. (2007, November). *The time of learning: A dilemma for teacher education's response to diversity*. Paper presented to the CATE Invitational Conference on Research in Teacher Education, Winnipeg, MN.

den Heyer, K. (2009a). Sticky points: Teacher educators re-examine their practice in light of a new Alberta social studies program and its inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives. *Teaching Education*, *20*(4), 343-356.

den Heyer, K. (2009b). Education as an affirmative invention. *Educational Theory*, *59*(4), 441–463.

Donald, D.T. (2009). The curricular problem of Indigenous: Colonial frontier logics, teacher resistances, and the acknowledgement of ethical space. In J. Nahachewsky & I. Johnston, *Beyond 'presentism': Reimagining the historical, personal, and social places of curriculum (pp. 22–39)*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishing.

Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review, 59*(3), 297–324.

Felman, S. (1987). *Jacques Lacan and the adventure of insight: Psychoanalysis in contemporary culture*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Francis, D. (1992). *The imaginary Indian:Tthe image of the Indian in Canadian culture*. Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Francis, D. (1997). *National dreams: Myth, memory and Canadian history.* Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Fraser, M. (2006). Event. *Theory Culture & Society 23*, 129-132.

Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus: Critical reflections on the "postsocialist" condition.* New York: Routledge.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum.

Freud, S. (1937/1968). Analysis Terminable and Interminable. *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud Volume 23* (pp. 209–253). [J. Strachey, Trans]. London: Hogarth Press.

Gardner, H. (1999). *The disciplined mind: What all students should understand*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Gerwitz, S. (2006). Towards a contextualized analysis of social justice in education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 28*(1), 69–81.

Gibson, A. (2006). *Beckett and Badiou: The pathos of intermittency*. Oxford: New York; Oxford University Press.

Hallward, P. (2005). Depending on inconsistency: Badiou's answer to the 'guiding question of all contemporary philosophy.' *Polygraph, 7*–21.

Kay, J. (2008, February 3). The Left's Aboriginal blind spot. *National Post.*

Kincheloe, J. (2008). *Critical pedagogy* (2nd ed.). NY: Peter Lang.

Mansilla, V. B., & Gardner, H. (2008). Disciplining the mind. *Educational Leadership, 65*(5), 14–19.

Pinar, W. F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Earlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Simon, R. I. (2005). *The touch of the past: Remembrance, learning, and ethics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Smith, D. G. (2000). The specific challenges of globalization for teaching and vice versa. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *46*(1), 7–25.

Stanley, T. (1998). The struggle for history: Historical narratives and anti-racist pedagogy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 19*(1), 41–49.

Taubman, P. (2006). What is to be done in the age of accountability. In S. Leafgren, B. Schultz, M. O'Malley, L. Johnson, J. Brady, & A. Dentith (Eds.), *The articulation of curriculum and pedagogy for a just society: Advocacy, artistry, and activism* (pp. 1–13). Troy, NY: Educators International Press.

Tisdell, E. J. (1993). Interlocking systems of power, privilege, and oppression in adult higher education classes. *Adult Education Quarterly, 43*, 203–226.

Tupper, J., & Cappello, M. (2008). Teaching treaties as (un)usual narratives: Disrupting the curricular commonsense. *Curriculum Inquiry, 38*(5), 559–578.

Wildman, S., & Davis, A. (2000). Language and silence: Making systems of privilege visible. In M. Adams, W. Blumfeld, R. Caseñeda, H. Hackman, M. Peters, & X. Zúñiga (Eds.), *Readings for diversity and social justice: An anthology on racism, antisemitism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism* (pp. 50–61). New York: Routledge.