

Preface

Schools and universities are traditionally spaces where skills are learned and, in some cases, knowledge gained. However, they are also places defined by norms and the need to conform. As a result they often reproduce, rather than interrogate, those power and cultural relations. Risk taking in classrooms is increasingly curtailed by emphasis on high stakes testing and policy pressures. Habituated practices, combined with common sense approaches, have tended to reinforce outmoded beliefs and assumptions, with such beliefs being deeply connected to identity formations around teaching and learning.

To animate change in ways that we can reconfigure what we know, there is a need to critically reflect on personal and cultural identities built up over time. Such an interrogation may lead to disruption, and disruption may produce a sense of unease. Learners often resist tension and discomfort which might emerge from confrontation with the unknown, and the fallout from this can land heavily on teachers. Ethical questions arise around responsibility for shaking presumptions learners hold dear, and educators need to become mindful of the complex power relationships in and outside the classroom. Nevertheless, failing to interrogate routine or habituated thinking leads to no change at all. In times of increasing governmental control and regulatory compliance, critical exploration of new paradigms is now a pressing educational issue. In some cases, pushing boundaries and agitating for change are essential to challenge questionable policy and argue future directions. Moreover, robust debate serves also to enlarge and enrich the cultural contexts in which people work.

In *Feeling Power* (1999), Megan Boler coined the phrase “pedagogy of discomfort,” or critical enquiry into one’s own values and beliefs by recognizing how thinking and seeing is culturally constructed. Disruptive pedagogies enable educators and students to understand their own reflexivity more deeply, “learn[ing] to trace how one’s subjectivities are shifting and contingent” (Zembylas & Boler 2002. p. 3). The chapters in this book examine a range of disruptive approaches: attempts to shift taken-for-granted attitudes and beliefs held by both educators and learners to redesign current practices. Australian and international contributors investigate the origins and frameworks of such initiatives, seeking to understand how they are realized across various learning settings.

The questions for critical educators centre on how challenge, dissonance, and disruption might be mobilized in educational contexts to bring about constructive change. Educators might value resistant thinking, but often the concept remains elusive, an abstraction, perhaps even an impossibility to teach and enact. However, the writers in this collection have entered the debate with philosophical and strategic deliberation. They consider the nature of disruption and wrestle with questions interrogating the rationale, ethics and responsibilities of implementing related pedagogies. How might disruption be defined and negotiated? How might disruption break habitual cycles and foster the unlearning of conservative norms? What forms might such pedagogies take and among what kinds of disciplinary areas? Can disruption become synonymous with indoctrination or develop its own orthodoxy?

Critical responses range across sites such as college composition courses, a virtual school, and the Thailand-Burmese border. Concepts such as humor, heteronormativity, and feminism are interrogated, while romantic love is positioned as a site for critical praxis. Mathematics, art, traditional Jewish text study, ESL, and digital classrooms are examined for their potential to shift traditional thinking. Gentle approaches sit beside more deliberate ruptures in contested ideological and political contexts. Inhabiting different roles, learners and teachers occupy dialogical spaces of possibility for change. Although all contributions are from English-speaking countries, they range across three continents, and early childhood, secondary, tertiary, and adult learners are considered, as writers question their own practices, asking how learning and teaching might be challenged and reinvigorated.

To theorize disruptive pedagogies, critical literacy traditions have been drawn upon from the work of Foucault, Freire, Habermas, and Giroux. Resisting dominant ideologies to liberate thinking from hegemonic structures has long been a feature of critical, radical liberatory pedagogies. Foucault's (1980) concept of governmentality explains how we are produced by power even as we resist it; power and resistance are mutually constituted. Freire's (1970) emphasis on dialogue as a way of learning and knowing emerges in this collection as significant to the role of collegial encounters with critical thinking. Reflection and disruption are linked by Habermas in relation to reflection as a form of self-construction that emancipates as it releases the subject from dysfunctional beliefs (Habermas cited in Mezirow, 2000). Moreover, self-understanding enables "full potential as active, reflective scholars and practitioners" for Giroux (1985/2010, p. 202), while critical reflection around liminal spaces and praxis disrupts the "quest for certainty" (Dewey, 1929). Zembylas and Boler (2002); meanwhile, in their study of disruptive pedagogy as a methodology to reframe post 9/11 patriotism, emphasize the power and complexity of emotional investments in critiquing ideology. Their recognition of emotions as discursive practices differentiates pedagogies of discomfort from critical media literacy, as they argue for "a collectivized engagement in learning to see, feel, and act differently" (p. 4).

Adding their voices to Zembylas and Boler are a number of writers who examine disruption in the context of research-based diverse practices of community building. Assumptions inherent in teaching and learning practice that remain unexamined are highlighted in Suzanne Knight's chapter, "Locating and loving the personal: Risk and vulnerability in a secondary English language and Arts methods course." Exploring vulnerability and risk-taking as disruptive behaviour, Knight looks into competing expectations on the part of teachers and students through narrative analyses and affirms the value of building a connected knowing group.

Also supporting collective ways of knowing, Vicki Stieha and Miriam Raider-Roth examine partnered teacher work through "relational rupture." Examining the complex development procedure of unlearning through *Hevruta*, or traditional Jewish text study, they observe how shared exploration strengthens deeper understanding in "Disrupting relationships: A catalyst for growth." It is in the liminal spaces where collegial questioning can function to move educators to more transformative possibilities, claim Susan Adams and Ross Peterson-Veach in "'Critical friendship' and sustainable change: Creating liminal spaces to experience discomfort together." The authors underline the value of willing professional learning communities, suggesting protocols to maintain a critical focus.

Also investigating the role of collaborative learning in supporting change, Edith Rusch describes her work with educational leaders. "Smart people learning: Self-knowledge that disrupts practice in meaningful ways" uses the Interactive Learning Model to examine the role of retrospective sense-making to enable more effective learning.

Rhetoric and composition studies prove a rich area for contributions to the disruptive pedagogies conversation. Erik Ellis deconstructs the power of metaphor in shaping rhetoric in university composition courses. Examining the agendas and tropes of scholarly writing, “Shushes in the parlor: Reclaiming the ‘conversation’ metaphor” argues for more diverse forms of inquiry and writing to embrace, rather than fear, the irreducibility of the conversation metaphor. In “Tracing the trope of teaching as transformation,” Julie Myatt Barger also examines composition’s dependence on critical pedagogies. Constructing students as incomplete and in need of transformation, a trope she argues can be taken too far, teachers concerned with social change represent students as “other,” thus limiting agency and complexity in student identity.

Heidi Skurat Harris takes the Freirean concept *conscientização*, consciousness of consciousness. Linking discomfort of aporia, she argues in “Web 2.0 and *conscientização*: Digital students and critical reflection on and in multimedia” that educators can longer continue to privilege print-based texts in the face of a generation who work differently. Educators need to teach critical thinking within digital contexts. Also exploring young people’s preferred media modes and texts, Julie Faulkner and Bronwyn Williams collaborate on a cross-cultural project involving Australian and American students exploring a satirical television series. In the case of “‘I’m not always laughing at the jokes’: Humor as a force for disruption,” parody is the vehicle for demonstrating that normative cultural patterns have no necessity; people are amused partly because their culture has taught them *how* to laugh.

Abby Knoblauch notes that disruptive pedagogies could spark resistance in students who might well feel protective over family and community loyalties. “Disrupting disruption: Invitational pedagogy as a response to student resistance” looks carefully at students leaving behind comforting certainties and asks whether they might see disruptive approaches as a form of indoctrination to liberal politics. Knoblauch builds a case for invitational rhetoric to encourage stronger questioning of students’ deeply held beliefs, especially when those students find themselves distanced from supportive contexts.

Jennifer Elsdon-Clifton’s “Negotiating disruption in visual arts education” focuses on art, particularly the visual arts, an area which can offer fertile spaces for moving away from safe thinking in schools. She asks how students use bodies and sexualities as a medium for disruption, and what kinds of emotions are evoked around this process. Her chapter picks up Zembylas and Boler’s argument that paraphrase effective analysis of ideology requires not only rational inquiry and dialogue but also excavation of emotional investments (2002, p. 2).

“Setting the stage for professionalism: Disrupting the student identity” by Lynn Hanson and Meredith A. Love brings drama techniques into the professional writing classroom. Compressing the space between the workplace and classroom, students are required to resist familiar patterns of learner interaction and assume professional identities.

Mia O’Brien and Shelley Dole further explore questions of identity in the process of becoming a teacher in “Pre-service learning and the (gentle) disruption of emerging teacher identity.” In the conceivably daunting areas of mathematics and the arts, they look at how student discomfort might be managed by experiential learning and specifically designed assessment. Their focus is on teacher education pedagogies in conjunction with pre-service learning, and the relationship of these processes to teacher identity formation.

In “The emotional labor of imagining otherwise: Undoing the mastery model of mathematics teacher identity,” Elizabeth de Freitas also examines how mathematics positioning pre-service teachers. Arguing that the language of mathematics is neither context-free nor ahistorical, she analyses ways that language connects to power in the classroom. Teachers of mathematics need to experience more ambiguity and understand the microdynamics of the classroom, she argues, in order to more deeply control learning and teaching processes.

Greg Curran writes from an ESL context where heterosexuality is presumed as part of the normative expectations of classrooms. Conscious and respectful of cultural difference, “Are you married: Exploring the boundaries of sexual taboos in the ESL classroom” examines sensitive issues around sexuality and explores ways that disruption might productively play out when supported by an aware and reflective teacher. Also exploring boundaries between the personal and social, Rick Carpenter in “Disruptive Relation(ship)s: Romantic love as critical praxis” problematizes romantic love. He provides a critical methodology to interrogate received notions of self, opening avenues of inquiry and transformation. Challenging binary thinking complicates either/or approaches, enabling expanded ways of knowing and being in the world.

Kaitlin Briggs’ chapter disrupts the very form of the conventional academic chapter. She asks “proprioceptive” questions to challenge taken-for-granted ways of thinking and writing. Highlighting and calling into question one’s own words, phrases, and images, this kind of question breaks up the rhythm of the writing by asking “what do I mean by ...?”, thus calling attention to language and meaning. “Performing dissident thinking through writing: Using the proprioceptive question to break out of the classroom” explores this method of unpacking thinking as a political intervention.

Drew Kopp begins with a theoretical exploration of the concept and process of disruption. Also focusing on rhetorical inquiry processes, Drew Kopp’s detailed analysis in “The risk of rhetorical Inquiry: Practical conditions for a disruptive pedagogy” critiques the teacher’s role. He examines the increasing complexity of performative and dialogic encounters within increasingly unfamiliar and complex contexts in order to willingly embrace discomfort and enrich people’s experience of the world.

In *Early Childhood Education*, Susan Matoba Adler and Jeanne Marie Iorio demonstrate how Socratic questioning can serve as a pedagogy to create new perspectives. Through blogs and discussion board postings, pre-service teachers move toward more critical positions in relation to young learners. “Teachers of young children: Moving students from agents of surveillance to agents of change” asks how students can question and resist habituated assumptions around issues of academic pushdown, teacher identity, standardization, and developmentally appropriate practice.

A virtual school is the site for Gloria Latham’s provocation in “Creating tension: Orchestrating disruptive pedagogies in a virtual school environment.” Pre-service teachers placed in this school experience surprise and dislocation as they attempt to negotiate the environment without a site map. The process invites critical reflection of normative school practices, practices strongly embedded in students’ schooled pasts and which constrain ways beginning teachers might imagine the future.

Working within a real and already disrupted environment, cross-cultural (mis)understandings provide the impetus for Susie Costello in “Coevolving through disrupted discussions on critical thinking, human rights and empathy.” Building social work curriculum with health care refugee workers on the Thailand-Burmese border, she encounters a range of unshared cultural concepts. Her chapter narrates six stories from her research which discuss the impact of Boal’s theatre of the oppressed strategies to promote alternative thinking.

Theorising disruption in terms of current political ideologies, Heather Brunsell-Evans examines the New Public Management in the United Kingdom (“The new public management of higher education: Teaching and Learning”). Using Foucault’s concept of genealogy, Brunsell-Evans invites readers to critically examine new university pedagogies’ claims to grant learners agency within the normalizing powers of the knowledge economy. Similarly exploring tensions linked to disruption and contemporary political conditions, Pamela Bolotin Joseph analyses the power of utilitarian discourse to enculturate

educational thinking. Her chapter, “Disrupting the utilitarian paradigm: Teachers doing curriculum inquiry,” calls for teachers to become curriculum workers in challenging “top down” curriculum planning and standardized testing. Identifying reflection, transformative learning, and affect as pathways for teacher change, Joseph’s curriculum workers question and modify mandated curriculum.

At the time of writing (November, 2011), significant political shifts are occurring in the Middle East. Hosni Mubarak’s thirty- nine year dictatorship in Egypt has ended, while Libya’s political control has finally shifted hands. Twitter and LinkedIn because of their role in organizing anti-government demonstrations. Digital technologies and social networking have changed the face of political resistance, and the imperative to think critically is now more urgent than ever. This book offers a range of philosophical and strategic approaches to explore dimensions of belief systems and their relationships to social hierarchies and technologies. It explores articulations and change within feelings of entrenchment and vulnerability. The authors scrutinize the social and political relations in which individuals are positioned, asking how such relations influence values and practices. The contributors speculate on the boundaries between risk taking and the need to conform, framed by inevitable complications of culture and power.

In this collection, these tensions emerge at different stages of learning and teaching. For some writers, the aim of shifting learners’ beliefs and attitudes is the motivating force for pedagogical design. Others begin with the idea of disruption, then pause at points in the process to question the implications of what they have embarked upon. Yet other authors are almost caught by surprise by dislocation and find that conceptualizing practice then serves to enable deeper understanding.

The chapters that follow offer a spectrum of possibilities for practitioners to explore their capacity to challenge and transform learner perceptions. These forms of critical inquiry encourage readers to explore the limits and possibilities of disruption, comprehensively examining the teacher’s role and offering a range of creative, philosophical, and social approaches. At the core of the authors’ various responses, however, lies the vital, transformative challenge from Zembylas and Boler. A pedagogy of discomfort is an invitation not only to challenge our thinking but to re-invent ourselves (2002, p. 14).

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