Against the Tide: Working with and against the affective flows of resistance in Social and Global Justice Learning

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"Ideologies happen. Power snaps into place. Structures grow entrenched. Identities take place. Ways of knowing become habitual at the drop of a hat. But it's ordinary affects that give things the quality of *some* thing to inhabit and animate. Politics starts in the animated inhabitation of things, not way downstream in the various dreamboats and horror shows that get moving. The first step of thinking about the force of things is the open question of what counts as an event, a movement, an impact, a reason to react. There's a politics to being/feeling connected (or not), to impacts that are shared (or not), to energies spent worrying or scheming (or not), to affective contagion, and to all forms of attunement and attachment"

(Stewart, 2007, p. 15).

In arguing that ideologies "happen," Stewart and other social affect theorists urge as educators for social justice to understand hegemony at its most visceral, granular and dynamic. Gone are the days when those working for political change took refuge in a brainwashing model of power that imagines free-floating ideologies manufactured by powerful elites and slipped in the drinking water of the nation like a drug or virus to hoodwink an innocent population. Gone are the assurances of continental enlightenment models of political education as a critical awakening from the distortions and delusions of this hoodwinking—the false consciousness or emotional manipulations that will only lose their hold on us through cold rational critical thinking and irrefutable evidence.

This is not to deny the central importance in social justice education of students developing a critical analysis of the systemic and not simply individual manifestations of discrimination/privilege, analyses of structures of opportunity and condition reproduced through intersecting systems of power that position and map onto different bodies—including the processes of representation and knowledge construction that include curriculum, teaching and learning. It is not to deny the

importance of students' developing a historically grounded analysis of underlying forces of global inequality and injustice rooted in the capitalist patriarchal European modern/colonial project (Mignolo, 2000) and its ongoing structuring of the "coloniality of power" (Quijano, 1997). It is not to deny the critical thinking central to analyzing the way particular perspectives become institutionally enshrined and reproduced as authoritative, universal, neutral and thus scientifically trusted within respected academic disciplines and societal institutions in ways that invite learners to identify with and adopt these perspectives as an "us" consolidated in "our" superior knowledge about "them." [1]

In arguing that ideologies happen as ways of knowing, feeling and being (and being-in-relation to differently constructed populations) become familiar, Stewart and others push educators to understand hegemony as processes of habituation and inhabiting. Within such processes, our concern and indifference, our action and inaction as global citizens are inseparable dimensions of the ways we make psychic and emotional as well as rational and material *homes* within hegemonic world views with their associated values and repertoires of identities, communities, their discursive and imaginative limits. Flying below the radar of critical thought, hegemony in this sense includes the ways a Eurocentric colonial imaginary and West- centred global order structure both student desire as well as the terms and limits of "thinkability" (Britzman, 1998) when citizens of the North turn their attention to those of the South.

Exploring in our pedagogical practice the ways power works through our habitual processes of making emotional, ontological, and epistemic homes within hegemonic ideologies implies recognizing learning as both a discursive and psychic event (Britzman, 1998: 118). Recognizing learning as an event situated "where the crisis of representation that is exterior to the self meets the crisis of representation that is interior to the learner" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003: 756) also implies teaching in ways that engage the opaque but intransigent forces of the inner worlds of learners as inherent to all learning.

This means bringing a more nuanced analysis of the psychic challenges involved in students' adopting perspectives that radically shift (neo)imperial relations of power/knowledge, that de- centre and implicate them in relation to the planetary South. I have argued elsewhere (Taylor, 2011a) that the challenge in global citizenship pedagogy lies in interruption that opens for learners a time and space of epistemological and ontological disorientation between the apprehension of others "whose differences survive our attempts to deny, change, assimilate, demean …

control", to know, help, rescue or develop them (Ellsworth, 2005: 89), and the rushing in of colonial and neo-imperial imaginaries to re-order power relations of knowing and being. This space and time of crisis can be provoked by what Britzman (1998) and Pitt and Britzman (2003; Britzman & Pitt, 1996) call "difficult knowledge": knowledge which interrupts and implicates the learning self (Britzman, 1998:117-119); knowledge which "references incommensurability, historical trauma and social breakdowns [in ways that] open teachers and students to their present ethical obligations" (Pitt and Britzman, 2003: 756). Difficult knowledge demands that learners exceed the bounds of the thinkable upon which their subject position and self-knowledge are predicated (Britzman, 1998): "[i]n order to learn something new, as in previously unthought, we must lose that part of ourselves whose identity depends on not thinking that thought … that depends on not being the kind of person who entertains such thoughts or understands such thoughts" (Ellsworth, 2005: 89).

Such an understanding of the psychic and affective forces in which our pedagogy traffics centres processes of resistance in learning. In the metaphor "against the tide" I certainly don't wish to naturalize the hegemonic forces that social and global justice education asks students to explicitly swim against. While the affective resistance to relinquishing and rebuilding familiar schema—especially those world views that situate the learner innocently outside the systems of power they are studying—reflect what might seem predictable ego- defence mechanisms and the conservative habits through which we carve out a psychic life within the social worlds of meaning that ideologies invigorate, the business of feeling- and meaning construction is inseparable from cultural and material power relations. My use of this image aims rather to capture the feeling of the experience of deconstruction—of "pulling the rug out from under oneself while standing on it" (Schick & St. Denis, 2005)—in ways that make resistance utterly unsurprising, a question of constant friction and surface tension, a palpable medium and dynamic of learning communities worthy of our creative attention.

In this article, I explore the forms of learning that are made possible when resistance is explicitly situated at the heart of social and global justice pedagogy not as a problem to be solved or managed but as a site of reflexive individual and collective inquiry and insight. I situate my exploration in the qualitative analysis of student reflection journals within a preservice course on social and global justice education. I hope this description of a particular pedagogical tool is useful to educators in other contexts of counter-hegemonic formal and informal education.

Context

This article reports on a larger qualitative study of samples of student writing over 5 years from a mandatory preservice course on social and global justice education at the small liberal arts university where I teach [2]. The course is a mandatory component within the preservice programme of a small English-language liberal arts university in Quebec, Canada. The majority of the 200-300 students in this four-year B. Ed. programme are white Canadian-born Anglophones aged 19-24 from ethnically homogeneous rural communities [3]. The sample in this study is largely consistent with the predominance of Euro-Canadian middle class candidates in teacher education programmes across the country (Levine- Rasky 1998). My experience teaching this course also confirms multicultural and antiracism educational research findings that non-immigrant, white-identified preservice students tend to bring a poverty of cross-cultural understanding and experience, stereotypic beliefs about children from urban, under-represented or marginalized populations, faith in dominant individualist ideologies of North American society as an immigrant meritocracy, a lack of awareness or analysis of structural discrimination and privilege, and a conception of multicultural education as a fairly straight-forward programme of interpersonal well-intentioned liberal colour-blindness, ‘open-mindedness’, generosity, politeness and occasional additions to the mainstream curriculum (Banks 2004; Harper, 2002; Levine- Rasky 1998, 2000, 2002; Solomon 2000; Sleeter 2001).

The course asks students not only to develop an analysis of social injustice but also to experiment with pedagogies addressing injustice with an agenda of social change. In one assignment, groups of 6 – 9 students are expected to preview and research issues of inequality, power and resistance raised by one of five dramatic or documentary films viewed in the course, and then design questions for and facilitate small-group, post-screening discussions (as single or pairs of facilitators). The film in this case, “Life and Debt” by Stephanie Black (2001), documents the history of postcolonial Jamaica’s struggles for economic autonomy since independence as it is faced with the predatory financial, trade, commercial and labour practices of international lending institutions, trade agreements and multinational corporations. The documentary explicitly addresses audiences in the North in the moral condemnation of its narrative voice: “If you come to Jamaica as a tourist, this is what you will see.” [4] It pairs footage of pleasure-seeking, oblivious tourists at an ‘all inclusive’ resort with an examination of the social and economic devastation sustaining but hidden from tourists’ experience. Students are expected

to supplement the film and accompanying readings with their own research into other examples of the impact of late capitalist, militarized globalization. Some also research the environmental and social impact of tourism, labour practices of Canadian corporations, neoliberal restructuring policy, forced migration driven by growing global economic gaps, domestic ideological reactions to economically and politically-driven immigration and asylum-seeking.

Guidelines for the assignment explicitly encourage facilitator groups to use this exercise as an opportunity to experiment with planning and facilitating encounters with the kinds of difficult knowledge the film offers. Facilitator groups must meet separately to consider questions of difficult knowledge, resistance and pedagogy in preparation for facilitation (for assignment instructions, see Taylor, 2011c). After the activity, each facilitator writes a 1-2 page reflection on their intentions, experiences, observations and challenges facilitating the small-group discussion after the film screening. The focus of the exercise is for students to reflect on their experience of planning for and facilitating the difficult knowledge their peers might encounter while studying global injustice, their own implication in and agency towards systemic relations of power producing it.

The ‘Ds” of Resistance: Naming and observing our learning dynamics

Good pedagogues know the power of transparency. Rather than limiting my concerns—concerns regarding student resistance to the difficult knowledge as well as the susceptibility to moralism inherent to social justice education—to my own curriculum planning and pedagogical facilitation, I prefer to put these to students as questions worthy of our collective observation and analysis as a learning community. I ask students to recall experiences of being pushed beyond their comfort zones by unfamiliar contexts in which their most fundamental assumptions about the world, human nature and themselves—assumptions usually implicit in our lives in ways that allow us to act with a certain confidence regarding what things mean and how to respond—were not shared or were problematized as requiring conscious skepticism or revision [5]. I offer personal examples of being on my “learning edge” (Griffin, 1997, p. 68): my first time living and working outside Canada teaching English in Nanjing, China in 1986; a long-term relationship with a partner of a dramatically different national, global, class, political and cultural life history; my first recognition while working in coalition with First Nations activists of the violence of this settler colonial state I call ‘home’; and perhaps on a less

politically charged level, the experience of total immersion in a non-native language.

Brainstorming the symptoms of such experiences allows us to recognize a central paradox to deep learning: the revisions or transformations it demands of intimately integrated schema and modus operandi—the ways we make a home within particular world views and epistemological traditions—run counter to the conservative bias of our hard-won strategies of psychic and cognitive conflict management. Focusing on the kinds of difficult knowledge triggered as we learn about social injustice, mass suffering and our own implication within their conditions—knowledge that contradicts values and self-images that allow us to pursue our lives and sleep well at night—situates this resistance in learning within the friction of countering our quotidian inhabitation of authoritative discursive formations and flows of hegemonic social affect (Taylor, 2011b; forthcoming; Taylor, Rwigema & Sollange, 2013).

Normalizing and contextualizing the dynamics of resistance in learning offers it as both a site of collective pedagogical inquiry and a tool for my preservice students, one that may serve them over long careers as social and global justice educators. This tool is summarized in Figure A that lists the “D’s of Resistance” brainstormed together in class:

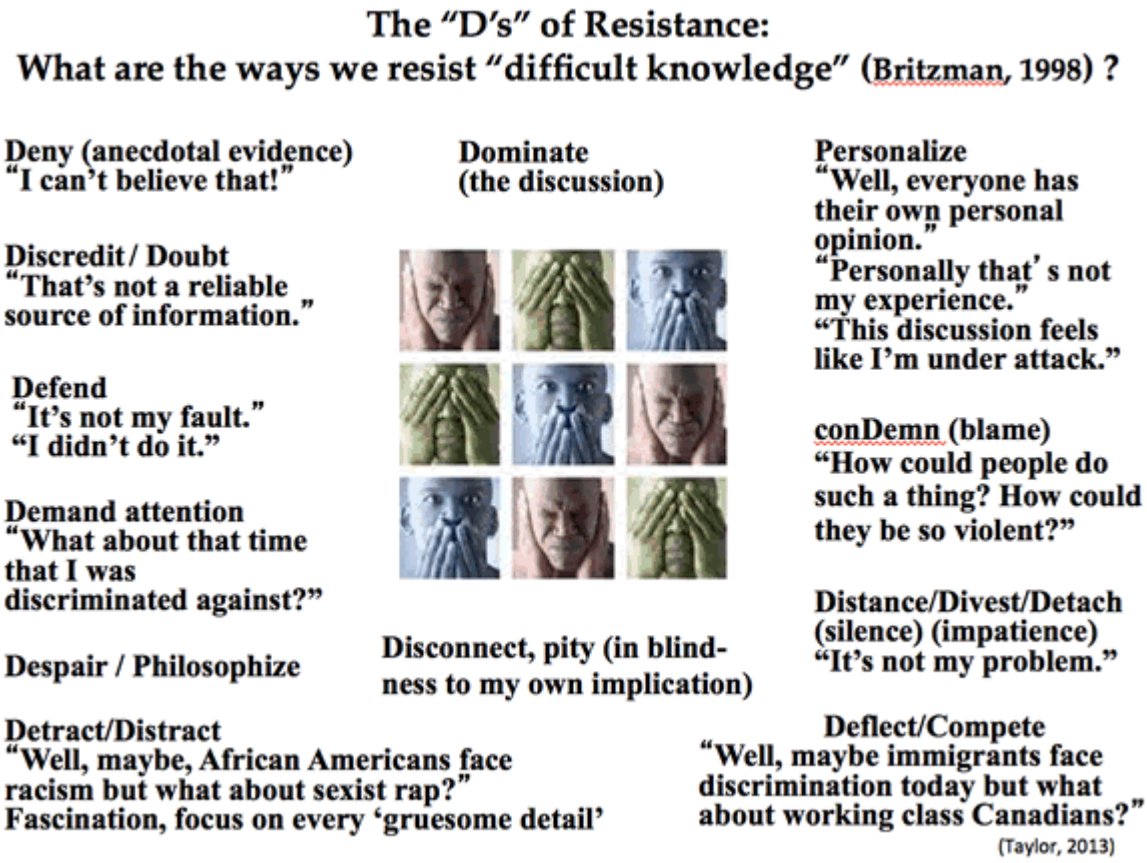


Figure A

As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2011) argue, evidence of inequality and discrimination is most commonly resisted in social education through the citation of anecdotal evidence, a practice that defines discrimination in solely individual terms and presumes these individual cases' generalizability or fails to contextualize them within larger statistical trends and structural relations of power. Such is the logic when discussions of racism or sexism are countered with examples of financially comfortable divorced women abusing alimony law or when the case a white student's failed university candidacy is cited as proof of 'reverse discrimination' in ways that presume a larger context of racial equality (to contextualize the 2013 US supreme Court ruling, see Dworkin, 2012; Fischer, 2013). I ask my students to identify and observe this everyday practice of resisting difficult knowledge within our classroom discussions as a basis for developing insight into the ways a certain veracity accrues to anecdotal cases particularly for privileged subjects in a racially and economically segregated society and world. I explain that in the absence of

cumulative lived or observed examples of racism, classism, xenophobia, ablism and the kinds of gender inequality exacerbated by intersecting forms of discrimination—an absence that is the product of the geographic segregation of our residential and working lives explicitly created by policies such as First Nations reservations in Canada—privileged youth can grow up not only insulated but particularly susceptible to the normative dominant gaze and selective, stereotypical representations by corporate mass media as well as to the discourses of white defensiveness and anti-poor class resentment that circulate within privileged communities as a practice of membership and internal solidarity (highly accessible examples are provided by Levine- Rasky and Tim Wise amongst others). Evidence that contradicts such defensive mythologies and hegemonic discourses is subject to heightened doubt and discrediting of sources, a phenomenon exacerbated by the marginal and precarious independent spaces that can be secured by counter hegemonic media within a mass media landscape of increasingly consolidated corporate ownership and control. Even more effectively, power snaps into place when anecdotal evidence come to circulate within segregated privileged communities as self-evident truths, when they become a way of knowing and practice of belonging that police the limits of thinkability. If my family, friends and favourite news channels portray George Zimmerman as a defender of White rights (de Vega, 2013), why should I believe a marginal black author cited on Facebook?

“White supremacy has taught him that all people of color are threats irrespective of their behavior. Capitalism has taught him that, at all costs, his property can and must be protected. Patriarchy has taught him that his masculinity has to be proved by the willingness to conquer fear through aggression; that it would be unmanly to ask questions before taking action. Mass media then brings us the news of this in a newspeak manner that sounds almost jocular and celebratory, as though no tragedy has happened, as though the sacrifice of a young life was necessary to uphold property values and white patriarchal honor. Viewers are encouraged feel sympathy for the white male home owner who made a mistake. The fact that this mistake led to the violent death of an innocent young man does not register; the narrative is worded in a manner that encourages viewers to identify with the one who made the mistake by doing what we are led to feel we might all do to ‘protect our property at all costs from any sense of perceived threat.’ This is what the worship of death looks like.”

(bell hooks, 2000, cited in Goodreads, 2013, cited on personal Facebook feed).

The logic of individualizing systemic processes extends beyond the use of anecdotal evidence to the moralistic attribution of intent. In part, this move to personalize discussions of inequality and injustice stem from common sense understandings of discrimination that ignore institutional and systemic processes, limiting discrimination to interpersonal, intentional and malevolent actions (irrationally malevolent when not contextualized within an analysis of the degree to which we live in Eurocentric, racist, classist, heteronormative, patriarchal, misogynist, ablist cultures). Again, I ask students to focus their attention not solely on the inaccuracy of these individualized and personalized conceptions of discrimination but to observe their unsurprising-ness—the ways they make sense of the kinds of experiential knowledge that accrues for citizens insulated from the negative impacts of institutional discrimination—as well as the political work they do when they become entrenched as ways of being and knowing. If institutional policies and practices benefit me as part of a normalized population for and by whom institutions have been designed, it requires swimming against my attunement and attachment to these institutional practices to examine them as systemic dimensions of the construction (and not the *de facto* existence) of inequality. The world appears a very free place for the financially comfortable White Judeo Christian tourist of the global North and border guards appear as only occasionally ill-tempered functionaries, not the front lines of the global security state and imperial War on Terror. When personal experiential knowledge is constructed in isolation and insulation from an awareness of 'everyday' discrimination (Essed, 1991) and state- and institutionally sanctioned cultures of normalization, denigration and impunity, discrimination 'rears its ugly head' as the exception, not the rule (this is the point argued by Coates, 2013). The only examples of discrimination that surface within hegemonic, amnesiac mass commercial media are hate crimes that appear isolated and quirks of individual irrationality: this selective reporting personalizes hate crimes and reduces someone like Breivik to the 'one bad apple' theory.

I also ask students to observe the political work done by discourses of discrimination-as-irrational-hate-crime within the volatile context of classroom discussions seeking to open up resistance as a medium of difficult learning. Collectively debriefing the post-screening small group discussions, we return to this 'D' of reDucing and personalizing discrimination (or discussions of them) to examine the ways it can close down rather than open up exploratory learning: for example, it

can silence discussions of discrimination as students sharing a dominant ascriptive identity with the hate criminal reject this identification with what has been represented as Manichaean evil.

Patiently paying attention to feelings of being personally attacked within discussions of social injustice and discrimination/privilege raises key insights into the forms of normalization and privilege breached by such conversations that render powerful identities invisible on a daily basis. If I'm accustomed in my daily life to being treated as an individual and not a racial, class, gender, sexual or ethnic category (based on the normalization of my identities within institutional policy and hegemonic cultures), then texts or discussions that explicitly identify my privileged subject position and trace my implication within systems of inequality will be experienced as a denial of the normative status I generally enjoy and the self-image of individuality or normalcy these afford me (invisibility as a habituated way of being and knowing).

This exercise in identifying the D's of resistance also invites students to observe what happens when discussions of social injustice and inequality are personalized—when the urge arises to close down and reduce debate to a product of incommensurable 'personal opinions.' This focuses their attention on (neo)liberal discourses of moral relativism that deny the collective dimensions of individual beliefs, values and affiliations—that deny the possibility of a politically effective public sphere—but assert a postmodern mosaic of individual subjective realities.

Moralistic discourses of discrimination-as-random-hate-crime offer a frame of reference for a host of defensive strategies against the demands of difficult knowledge: upon examination, we can see these discourses as part of a larger liberal jurisprudential framework of discrimination and culpability. For example, I have elsewhere argued that studying the history of Indian Residential Schools in Canada is greatly hampered by ahistorical liberal jurisprudential models of individual rights that reduce this history to one of specific crimes committed by specific individuals against other individuals (Taylor, forthcoming). This risks reducing singular testimonies of residential school survivors to a series of child-centred narratives of undifferentiated victimhood that invite the distancing emotions of pity or moral condemnation of specific perpetrators of concrete interpersonal brutality (such as the residential school teachers and priests). Moral condemnation may be a performance of an emerging political stance; as such, my enumeration of the D's of resistance asks students not to rush to correct this response but to ask what happens when moral condemnation becomes a point of

closure and not departure (“I didn’t do it. I wasn’t even born. It’s not my fault. I can’t be held responsible”). Liberal jurisprudential discourses can silence collective analysis of complex relations of implication within systemic and institutional processes by reducing classroom discussions to courtroom-like battles of guilt or innocence. Faced with this stark dichotomy, the resistance inherent to the challenges and provocations of difficult knowledge can be multiplied by a learner’s desires to defend against charges of culpability.

By examining quotidian examples of resistance listed in the tool above my goal is not to criminalize them (“These are the wrong responses to our study of global injustice; avoid these and you’ll be fine”). Rather, the film discussion project is designed to launch an ongoing practice of self-observation and close listening within group discussions that both expect and seek to learn from these everyday practices of resistance.

Conclusion: Grappling with the perpetually unfinished nature of learning

Teaching for resistance means coming to see the latter as a symptom of a kind of learning that is a crisis of the embodied and psychic as well as intellectual bargains we each make as we inhabit the social worlds in which we seek to belong. Taking an interest in resistance in learning is particularly valuable for preservice teachers, pressured as they are to demonstrate their professionalism and responsibility as a pre-requisite to graduation, but also because of their focus on mastering planning and the performative dimensions of pedagogy tends to overshadow an interest in what students ***do*** with their carefully crafted “lovely” curriculum (Pitt & Britzman, 2003). At the same time, hegemonic discourses of agism, classism, racism, heterosexism, ablism amongst others are both readily available and institutionally sanctioned as strategies to criminalize student resistance.

I find encouraging a growing trend amongst film discussion facilitation groups to commence small group discussions after the screening not with questions of pinning down meaning but an interest in what might be learned from initial viewer reactions:

“We asked them to sum up how they were feeling after the film in one word to start the discussion: ‘angry, guilty, responsible, frustrated, taken advantage of, manipulated, powerless, hopeless.’ But then we needed time to take that apart: did

those feelings come from the film or the issues or themselves?”

(individual reflection, Elena, Year L [6])

Elena’s proposed project of collectively taking apart initial affective responses to the film approaches these responses not as transparent end points, but as produced through a complex of forces irreducible to a single origin. The order she enumerates is important here: viewer emotions might be an effect caused by the qualities of the film itself, by the intolerable and perhaps persistent injustice under consideration, or by the difficult knowledge triggered in the challenge to understand one’s own implication within systemic processes reproducing the conditions of this intolerable injustice and to discern any possibilities for intervention and transformation that do not simply perpetuate relations of inequality. She places these three possible origins in an order that may reflect a chronology of her own learning experience of resistance and insight based on self-observation.

Another student summarizes the conclusion of her facilitation group’s analysis of the forms of resistance they observed in the course of small group discussions:

“We followed the professor’s suggestion and paid attention to the use of the words ‘we’ and ‘they’ in the discussion. It took a while and it felt like real research because we realized that there was the same old Us and Them from the dominant gaze that we read about: that everything that gets written about the developing world gets written by an Us talking about a Them. And it happened in our groups even when it didn’t seem like that was what was going on. The group might be talking about how hard-working We are as tourists who deserve a vacation and how Their country seems like a basket case. Or they might be talking about how guilty We are and how We are colonizing Them and They’re just victims. Or the group might be brainstorming all the things We can do (fair trade, ecotourism etc.) but it’s All About Us!

So my suggestion of another D [of Resistance] is Deafness!! It was like people were trying so hard to find out what We can do (or what We shouldn’t be blamed for) but no one was asking ‘What do people in the developing world think? What do they want?’”

(Individual reflection, Pierre, Year M)

Despite the focus in the course and the film on centring knowledge traditions and proposals from the global South, Pierre observes in the classroom discussions a passionate ignorance (Felman, 1987) rooted in entrenched Eurocentrism. His insight echoes Spivak's famous question regarding whether the subaltern's speech can be heard and harkens to many decolonial scholars' calls for epistemic diversality as a central practice of global justice education (Andreotti, 2011; Dussel, 1998; Maldonado-Torres, 2004; Mignolo, 2000; Santos, 2010).

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Notes

[1] For an elaboration of the ways I approach and situate global justice education (GJE) within the larger field of global citizenship education (GCE), see Taylor, 2011a.

[2] For a discussion of broader findings from a larger sample of student work from this course, see Taylor, 2011a; forthcoming.

[3] 11.7 per cent of the students in the B. Ed. program are francophone, less than 3 percent are allophone (their first language being neither French nor English), 35.6 per cent are from outside Quebec, and less than 10% are visible minority.

[4] This is based on Jamaica Kincaid's (1988) *In a Small Place* that begins: "If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see."

[5] My earliest development of this pedagogy was directly inspired by the model of curriculum design outlined by Pat Griffin in chapter five of Adams, Bell and Griffin (1997). My use of the terms "comfort zone" and "learning edge" draw directly from her module (pp. 68-9).

[6] To protect confidentiality, all names are pseudonyms and all identifying information including year of data collection is coded.