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Revitalizing Critical Discourses in Social Education: Opportunities for a More Complexified (Un)Knowing

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Abstract: The author seeks to revitalize the interests of social educators in the value of using critical, postmodern discourses for rich comprehension of and productive scholarly research in our field. These discourses (a) challenge existing understanding within social education and the knowledge and knower they help produce; and (b) imagine more complex, nuanced, and critical ways with which to conduct research and narrate findings. The primary foci include an examination of the role and impact of prevalent grand narratives, myths, discourses, and practices, as well as their underlying power relations. This raises questions about forms of knowledge, knowing, identity, and the subjectivity they help engender and celebrate—whether in disciplinary, curricular, and pedagogical encounters in classrooms or in research conducted in/about them. An overview of critical discourses is followed by an examination of their potential engagement in disciplines comprising the social studies. The author then moves to issues of gender and race, concluding with an exploration of critical methodologies and a discussion of the possibilities and implications they afford scholars in critical research.

Keywords: postmodernism, poststructuralism, feminism, history, geography, economics, critical methodology

In his farewell Winter 1982 issue as editor of *Theory & Research in Social Education* (*TRSE*), Tom Popkewitz devoted the themed issue to *theory*. Included were critical essays by Cleo Cherryholmes (1982) and Henry Giroux (1982), who used Foucault, Habermas, and a variety of Frankfurt School theorists to explore the nature and purpose of critical continental theory and its value in theory and research in social education. Three years

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later, under the guest editorship of Jack Nelson (1985), *Social Education* published its first and only critical studies themed section on, "New Criticism and Social Education," including short essays by Michael Apple and Kenneth Teitlebaum, Henry Giroux, Philip Wexler, Cleo Cherryholmes, Robert Gilbert, and William B. Stanley. As a sampler of critical views of society, schools, and social studies, these essays critically examine political, social, economic, and cultural bases underlying conditions of schooling, teaching, and learning as well as the taken-for-granted ideologies that give rise to them.

The relevancy of critical discourses in/for social education has since been the subject of a variety of scholars (e.g., Au, 2009; Chandler & McKnight, 2009; DeLeon & Ross, 2010; Johnson & Morris, 2010; Kincheloe, 2001; Richardson & Blades, 2006; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Schmidt, 2011; Segall, Heilman, & Cherryhomes, 2006; Trofanenko, 2008; Vinson & Ross, 2012). This substantial literature follows a strong intellectual tradition and demonstrates how critical discourses clarify and complexify the roots and branches of social education. But surprisingly, that scholarship has been mostly published in journals other than *TRSE* and *Social Education* or in book form. *TRSE* has, through the years (particularly, but not exclusively, under the editorship of E. Wayne Ross and, more recently, Patricia Avery), published a number of individual conceptual and empirical articles that invoke critical lenses (e.g., Carey, 2001; Garrett, 2011; Gibson, 1999; Houser & Kuzmic, 2001; Schmeichel, 2011; Schmidt, 2010; Segall, 1999, 2003; Shinew, 2001; Trofanenko, 2010; Vinson, 1999). However, an issue entirely devoted to critical social theory has not appeared in either of the two official publications of the College and University Faculty Assembly (CUFA) or the National Council of the Social Studies (NCSS) for about 20 years. To have such an issue finally come to fruition is not only exciting but also long overdue.

In the spirit of the initial essays written years ago by Cherryholmes, Giroux, and others more recently, the purpose of this article is to reinvigorate interest in critical discourses by social education scholars, re-introducing some of the underlying issues uncovered by critical discourses and suggesting possibilities for scholarship. A brief introduction of a few relevant ideas and concepts in critical social theory—primarily from postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism—indicates the potential they offer to scholars. Examples highlight ramifications and possibilities for moving theory and practice in social education in different directions from the traditionally more popular modes. Following this overview, the author discusses the concepts of grand narratives, myths, and discourse and explores the illustrative issues of gender and race. Finally, a look at critical methodologies encourages scholars in social education to pursue these avenues of research.

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CRITICAL DISCOURSES: AN OVERVIEW

Many critical discourses circulate in the academy (e.g., critical pedagogy, queer theory, cultural studies, race-based theories, Whiteness studies). Concepts borrowed primarily from postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism, prominent since the 1980s, question and disrupt the prevailing modern, structural, phallocentric, colonial (and colonizing) discourses of knowledge and knowing. Differences exist among these discourses, emanating from their histories, contexts, constituents, issues, and goals (for elaboration see Best & Kellner, 1991; Stanley, 1992; Zavarzadeh & Morton, 1994), as well as within the discourses (for feminism, see Evans, 2004; Hill Collins, 2000). Nevertheless, they share critical foci and dispositions, including issues of power, language, positionality, subjectivity, and voice. These discourses challenge existing Enlightenment grand narratives and traditional claims to universality, transparency, objectivity, and truth. Central to these discourses is an interrelated, historicized analysis of social organization, of meaning, and of collective and individual consciousness.

Critical discourses do not see knowledge and the practices legitimated by them as disinterested, natural, objective, or neutral. Instead, knowledge and ways of knowing are already positioned and positioning, embedded with ideologies, assumptions, values, and worldviews. These preconditions help position, epistemologically and ontologically, those who encounter that knowledge, limiting their consideration of the world in certain ways rather than others. Critical discourses are interested in the process through which knowing, subjectivity, identity, and voice are constructed. This entails understanding the power structures underlying them, and the means by which societal narratives and disciplinary knowledge work to construct understandings about the world, its people, and the possible and imagined relationships among humans and their environment.

Embodying the essence of the *reflexive, linguistic*, or *critical* turns, critical discourses, however, explore these issues not simply as *topics* to be critically examined but also as categories of analysis with which to historicize and explore the distribution of power, access, and privilege that help maintain a status quo that privileges some over others. In that sense, critical discourses are not only about infusing existing academic conversations with new topics. Rather, they are also about engaging—deconstructing and reconstructing—traditionally unquestioned disciplinary topics with/through new critical lenses. Their approach is primarily reflexive. While calling into question the very foundations of the disciplines, such an approach, to borrow from Felman (1982, p. 32), turns back on the practices produced within and by those disciplines, exposing the fallacy of their purported neutrality. Contrary to normal/normalizing science, which seeks to reduce the unknown to the known, a critical stance attempts to estrange that which seems

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familiar, comprehensible, and easily readable. Such a stance, then, is not about constructing coherent, linear narratives about the world but about blasting existing narratives open, rupturing their silences and highlighting their detours (Giroux, 1994). Exploring the interests embedded in academic disciplines, these discourses question prevailing dogma governing scholarship and pedagogy and how that obscures the relationship between knowledge and power (Giroux, Shumway, Smith, & Sosnoski, 2013).

DISCOURSE, POWER, AND KNOWLEDGE

Three interrelated concepts utilized in postmodern/poststructural thought are generative in creating more robust and nuanced understandings of what social education *is,* what it *does,* and what that "doing" helps produce. These concepts are not simply theoretical musings about our field but an exploration of the very forms of identity, subjectivity, agency, and voice the traditional field invites, celebrates, and dismisses, and the mechanisms through which those are circulated, governed, and maintained.

The first concept is *grand* (or meta or master) *narratives* (Lyotard, 1984): encompassing, totalizing societal storylines that order and explain knowledge and experience, providing frameworks, structures, and forms of logic with which to make particular meaning in/of the world. Such narratives define what and who we ought to value and celebrate and/or dismiss and ignore and, as such, embody the stories we, as a society, tell ourselves in order to legitimate particular ways of life. Similar, but on a smaller scale, is what Barthes' (1972) termed *mythologies* or *myths*. Myths are socially constructed plot lines, ideas, and assumptions that are unquestioningly accepted as natural in a given society. Like extended metaphors, they express and organize shared ideas in a given culture, making dominant values, assumptions, and beliefs appear self-evident and timeless, as if they are above and beyond ideology—or scholarly questioning—simply presenting things as they are.

Closely related to the concepts of grand narratives and myths is Foucault's (1972) concept of *discourse* and its associated relations to *power* and *knowledge*. Discourses are systems of thought comprising ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and practices that systematically construct subjects and the worlds in which they live and of which they speak (Lessa, 2006). Like grand narratives and myths, discourses help maintain the power relations underlying them, producing "truths" and subjects who speak them. Discourses provide "conceptual order to our perceptions, points of view, investments, and desires" (Britzman, 1991, p. 57), organizing structures that make the world intelligible and possible. They (re)present and are (re)present(ed) in the ways in which the world is perceived, shaped by, and acted upon through the various meaning-making resources of one's community—the "grammar and lexicon of language, the conventions of gesture and depiction, the symbolic and functional values of

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action" (Lemke, 1995, p. 19). "Systematically form[ing] the objects about which they speak," claims Foucault (1972), discourses are "the maker[s] of the world, not its mirror" (p. 49). Ordering and sustaining socially preferred forms and norms of thinking and being, discourses are always and simultaneously both repressive and creative as they mask and illuminate, affirm and challenge, restrict and enable particular knowledge and knowing. By marking the boundaries of permissible thought, discourses do not simply produce particular truths but, through inhibiting alternatives, also tend to reproduce themselves.

These concepts, grand narratives, myths, and discourses are created and reinforced by dominant power structures to help legitimate existing ideologies, customs, power relations, and forms of privilege and subjugation. Their power is achieved not only through coercion—disciplining thought and its boundaries—but also through their acceptance as innocent, common-sensical, simple reflections of the world as it naturally is. Discourses, however, don't only operate top-down. The bottom-up process by which they are subverted and played with as people interact with them demonstrates their multidirectional process, power, and impact.

Such understandings apply directly to social education. After all, there are no natural historical or geographical or economic discourses "just out there, just growing wild" (Jenkins, 1995, p. 15). Rather, they are all socially constructed and cultivated to achieve specific societal and disciplinary ends. Grand narratives, myths, and discourses are most often regarded as depoliticized speech, appearing to be stripped of ideology, politics, and history. Thus, recognizing them as highly political and ideologically charged, serving particular interests and perspectives, becomes the first order of business for critical scholars. That is, however, complicated by the fact that we are all also already embedded in them. A pressing goal of critical theories, then, is to identify these discourses; to explore their operating mechanisms; and to expose their underlying assumptions, the kinds of ethics, morality, meaning, and experience they promote, and the forms of inclusion/exclusion they foster. The intent is not to determine whether these narratives/discourses are true by examining their internal and external congruency (Foucault, 1983) but, rather, to expose the very process through which some discourses (or myths or grand narratives) become considered as true and, thus, as Truths, as well as the kind of knowledge and experience they help produce.

What might this mean and entail in scholarship exploring social studies as a field and/or for the K–12 social studies classroom? The areas of history, geography, and economics provide examples.

Today, much of history education encountered in classrooms still focuses on conveying history as fact, objective, and real. What postmodernism and poststructuralism help us see is that modernist ideas, such as "facts," "reality," and "objectivity," are problematic, and reality and interpretation can no longer be regarded as separate and separable entities. Critical historians and historiographers, such as Hayden White (1978, 2010), Dominick LaCapra

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(1985, 2013), Joan Scott (1999, 2011), Robert Berkhoffer (1995), and Keith Jenkins (1995, 2009), among others, call upon history to become more reflexive, exposing its socially constructed nature and the political viewpoint from which history is seen, made, and communicated to others.

Rather than a clear window to the past, this approach regards history as a producer of discourses and narratives about the world and, thus, a constructor of particular forms of collective and individual identity and affiliation. And as a producer of knowledge, the kind and nature of history taught in classrooms helps position and direct students as knowers and narrative actors. This determines the degree to which they view themselves as objects of history or as its subjects and whether students learn to accept existing societal structures, arrangements, and meanings as given, or to challenge that discourse. Foucault (1972, 1977) famously noted that disciplines are not only schools of thought but powerful instruments that patrol their boundaries to exclude anything outside their domain and, in the process, discipline knowledge and knowers, inviting those they encounter to pursue the world in some ways while avoiding others.

A critical approach in/to history, then, is not simply about studying the past for itself. It is mostly about how and why particular pasts are constructed, legitimated, and disseminated and with what effects. As such, a critical perspective requires that we tie individual historical texts explored in the classroom to the broader narratives/discourses that give rise and meaning to them. This means paying less attention to the *what* question (What is the meaning of a particular statement in a text? [or the text as a statement]) or what it might tell us about the past and focusing more intently on the *why* question (Why this text/statement?). And, following poststructuralism, focus should also be with the *how* questions (Andersen, 2003; How is the text/statement constructed to engender particular outcomes?). In history education, this could entail, for example, examining a variety of grand narratives, myths, and discourses underlying the study of the past and its relation to the present and the future or to citizenship more broadly. How do the prevailing discourses and the discursive practices regarding narratives such as the *Nation, Democracy, Freedom, the Rise of Civilization, Capitalism, Individualism, American Exceptionalism, Patriotism*, or *Globalism*, among others, frame and direct students' engagement not only with those concepts in and of themselves but with any other curricular content related to them (and one would be hard pressed not to see most social studies content as unrelated to the above concepts). How, for example, might any of the above help position students as they explore topics such as Westward Expansion or the Civil Rights Movement? What storylines do they provide for students to consider 9/11; the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; or U.S. policies toward Latin America, China, or AIDS in Africa? What worldviews, attitudes, dispositions, and power relations do those narratives generate and foreclose? What other narratives do they support, sustain, or ignore? How do teachers and students respond—accept, incorporate,

subvert, or reject—the invitations offered by these discourses/practices, to what ends, and with what consequences?

Similar questions ought to be asked of geography and its education. Despite geography's tendency to present itself as scientific and objective, the idea that geography is value-free or that there is an epistemological vantage point from which the world can be described objectively has been widely refuted by critical geographers (e.g., Gregory, 1978, 1994; Harvey, 1973, 2009; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1994; Rose, 1993; Soja, 1996, 2011). What these scholars suggest instead is that, much like history, geography is socially constructed and that each interpretation carries with it a series of assumptions, values, and perspectives about what the world is and should be (Battimer, 1993; Davies & Gilmartin, 2002). To explore geography as a socially constructed enterprise requires asking questions that get to the heart of that construction: What worlds does geography education make possible and intelligible, to whom, how, to what ends, and with what consequences? What understandings and power structures underlie the discourses, narratives, and myths made available in geography education? Who gets privileged by them, and who does not? Such questions require attention to how ideology, language, and forms of representation work to construct the world and its people.

More specifically, we ought to explore the ways geographic discourses, important tools of Western colonialism (see Bhabha, 1994; Gregory, 1994; Pratt, 1992; Willinsky, 1998), still activate particular Western, colonial understandings in classrooms: How do these Western orientations—and, in the case of some, the related notion of Orientalism (Said, 1979)—guide both U.S. policies in/toward the Middle East, Asia, Africa, or Central and South America and public responses to them? Or how do our constructions of the "global" as a narrative focusing primarily on economics, competition, and dominance render students' understandings of their role in, and commitments to, an interconnected, mutually dependent world that requires cooperation and collaboration? Addressing these questions highlights the idea that geographic discourses are not innocent but, rather, are complex systems encoded with meanings that need to be examined to better understand how societies construct and reproduce places and those inhabiting them. Examining the discursive practices through which space, place, power, and identity come into being helps us evaluate geography as a subject and, at the same time, examine how it operates to construct its students as subjects (Segall & Helfenbein, 2008).

Issues of such nature ought to be raised regarding economics as well, particularly about the ways in which narrow economic models portend to explain humans' complex economic choices as individuals and within the larger context of society, many of which lie outside the realm of what such models explore. Similarly, one might examine the gendered, raced, and classed nature not only of our economic system but of the explanations provided about it in textbooks and in the pedagogical encounters through which students are invited to think about what economics is and could be. Of importance is an

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examination of which "economic" voices are given prominence—industrialists or the working class, employers or labor unions—and the ways in which the economic discourses of capitalism, and the myths of upward mobility, individualism, and the American dream, have managed to "hide" their social consequences (for example, Occupy Wall Street, healthcare, or "the 47%" might help initiate that conversation). Such investigations help focus attention to the ways in which capitalism and consumerism have maintained a mostly unquestioned status and a form of ideology that structures how we think of society and, more broadly, the role of the individual in it.

Equally important are questions about what economic success is, how it is measured, and what (and who) gets left out of those calculations. To that end, and in order to re-focus the relationship between economics, politics, ideology, and the social realm, we might ask why the United States factors so highly on international rankings regarding the standard of living but ranks lower than most industrial countries on scales of quality of life that also include rates of literacy, infant mortality, and access to health care, good public education, recreation, etc. Indeed, what makes the United States, the richest country in the world, deny millions of its citizens access to health care? How is obesity as much an economic problem as it is a health issue? Or why, to rephrase Mother Teresa, is it harder to feed the hungry in a rich country than in a poor one? Such questions highlight the idea that societies make choices based on factors that are not inherently economic. It is such choices—political in nature—that a critical stance in economics attempts to bring to the fore.

Whether one's interest is history, geography, economics, or any other discipline comprising the social studies, it is necessary to explore the discourses, grand narratives, and myths that underlie them. This is because the longer we leave them unexamined, the less we become aware of the ways in which they "foreclose the work of thinking about our thinking" (Britzman & Gilbert, 2008, p. 202) as we engage disciplinary knowledge, and disciplinary knowledge engages—and thus disciplines—our thinking.

GENDER AND RACE

Among the issues critical discourses—especially feminism, queer theory, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, race-based theories, and Whiteness studies—bring to the fore are those pertaining to gender and race. Rather than consider gender and race as natural/neutral categories, critical discourses highlight the degree and ways in which race and gender are performative (Butler, 1988, 1993), not fixed, and are socially constructed within relations of power and domination. Like the notion of discourse explored earlier, they operate both top down and bottom up within relations of power that help produce particular (though always mutable) forms of identity and subjectivity. Inherent in critical

discourses is a questioning of the very nature of the categorization of gender and race as a form of difference, as "different," and as an "other."

When one explores the implication of such understandings in the context of social education, questions arise not only about how gender and race are taught/learned in classrooms but also about how that teaching/learning is informed and informs particular understandings about what it means to be male or female, majority or minority. It also means examining gender and race not only as curricular topics of/for study but how learning is funneled through the raced and gendered bodies of teachers and students, how the body performs gendered and raced identities, and how all the above plays as various forms of power and identity simultaneously cohere and unravel.

To consider geography or history or economics as socially constructed discourses (or sets of discourses) that help sustain existing race/gender division also means asking questions about the gendered and raced nature of the disciplines themselves and the pedagogies used to engage students with them in classrooms. This could mean examining how gender, race, and other categories of difference are produced and reproduced through dominant understandings of what the world was, is, or should be: In what ways, and how do geography or history education work to inscribe, maintain, and/or challenge existing race and gender inequalities? How are they historicized and/or contextualized and with what ramifications? How does the traditional disciplinary quest for abstraction and a disembodied objectivity—most often categorized as White masculine sensibilities (Rose, 1993)—encourage particular gendered and raced disciplinary forms of knowing among students? What kinds of knowledge and knowing do they exclude? How and with what consequences to students' learning is the privileging of public over private history/spaces (Cope, 1997; Scott, 1999, 2011) or the exclusion of the body as a legitimate category of experience and analysis (Butler 1993; Weedon, 1999) maintained by ideas and practices prevalent in social studies classroom? To what degree and how do heteronormativity, Whiteness, and middle class ideology engender a particular "normal" that compels all to confirm and conform? How do those, as well as prevailing understandings about the nation, borders, and civic spaces, work to separate groups, marking and stereotyping some, while rendering others invisible (Johnston, 2002)?

As one questions the idea of a constructed "normal," questions might be asked about the prevalent portrayals of the other—of "other" perspectives in sidebars and marginal "boxes" peripheral to the traditional, White, male perspective at the center of the page: In what ways is this positioning already a form of "othering"? Who currently has the power to "other" others? How does that mechanism operate? Such questions are important not simply for the study of geography or history or economics themselves but also for a consideration of how notions of gender and race are constructed both in and as forms of knowing and being. They also help us explore how prevailing notions of "normal" and "other" help engender spaces—temporal, physical, and social—that too often produce and re-produce inequality, marginalization, and discrimination.

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CRITICAL METHODOLOGIES

As in the discussions above, our choices of topics, methodologies, and reporting approaches for scholarly research have consequences: Will our work reproduce or challenge existing grand narratives, myths, discourses, or categories of difference? Contrary to much of the "scientific" research currently presented under the umbrella of social studies, critical methodologies critique the dominant discourse of objective, disinterested scientism, and truth and focus instead on the exploration of research as an inherently and unavoidably political, contextual, textual, ethical, and relational endeavor. Seeing both research and researcher as inherently subjective and always political entails attendance to our personal subjectivities and politics as researchers and to those underlying our methods. This also means attending to the complexities of studying an/other and the nuances inherent in the places we study, as well as an acknowledgment of the inherent forms of power and authority—even violence—embedded in any research act (Lather, 1991, 2007). This is particularly important in a "moment" defined by a threefold crisis of representation, legitimation, and power (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) that requires more than simply "keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, and 'writing up' results" (Clifford, 1986, p. 2). McLaren and Lankshear (1993) argued that it requires us as researchers to be explicit about the epistemes guiding our studies and the particular worlds they invite us to see and/or ignore. It necessitates that we narrate the contingent, situated, and tentative nature of our research and findings, as well as locate them (and ourselves as researchers) in power/knowledge relations and in what those help produce/silence.

Questions researchers should consider include: What ideologies, grand narratives, and myths underlie our studies, and in what ways do our studies help perpetuate and reify them? What (and who) do our methodologies make significant? What and who do they "invite" us to forget, to marginalize, to silence? How do the methodologies we choose encourage us to speak with/to/about/for/ others? How and what do they "other"? Addressing such matters will not only provide more complex, nuanced, and situated understandings of *what* we study but also, and importantly, make more explicit the connection between *how* we study and the knowledge we produce. Highlighting such connections is a significant move from what we have come to know as a cursory emphasis on method—techniques for gathering empirical data—to a full engagement with methodology. Engagement incorporates exploring the epistemologies and interpretive frameworks that guide our studies and what we can therefore make of them (Lather, 1992, 2007).

Similar considerations to those posed herein on gender equally apply to research in social education, which could benefit by more closely adopting some of the methodological approaches proposed by poststructural/feminist researchers. While some of the major issues feminist methodologies bring forth are exemplified in the paragraph above, Butler's (1988, 1993) notion

of gender performativity and Deleuze's (1997) concept of "becoming" (as well as Deleuze and Guattari's [1987] concepts of "desire" and "rhizome") could be used both conceptually and methodologically to explore the contingent notions of identity and subjectivity and how those manifest themselves through the processes of performativity and becoming, as students construct and are being constructed within/through the various forms of curricular and pedagogical practices in social education. Such a focus, by definition, also requires an exploration not only of how gender, race, or class is explored as topics in the social studies classroom, but, additionally, the ways in which they underlie our own research endeavors. In this context, more should be done to reconcile the field's expanding interest in race with corresponding conceptual and methodological approaches to the study of race already incorporated in the academy for quite some time through critical race studies or White studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Jensen, 2005; Rothenberg, 2011; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Other critical approaches help challenge the naturalness of the given in social education. These include genealogy (Foucault, 1977) or deconstruction (Derrida, 1976). Genealogy, as a form of understanding (or "writing") the present, explores how institutions and systems of thoughts—regardless of their initial intent—produce and use mechanisms to discipline and govern knowledge, knowing, and the body. A genealogical methodology examines how such institutions and systems are not only a manifestation of the limits of what they can do or how they think but also examines the limitations of thought and action they help produce for those under their control. Deconstruction, a method of criticism and semiotic analytical inquiry that questions assumptions about objectivity, certainty, identity, and truth, attempts to undermine the logic of/within discursive practices by examining, undoing, and overturning binaries and oppositions not simply to identify them but to explore their "difference" and the forms of interplay that underlie or are fostered by them. Equally productive for other methodological explorations are critical hermeneutics (Caputo, 1987; Derrida, 1978; Gadamer, 1975) or cultural studies and critical theory/pedagogy (for an overview see Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Steinberg, 2012) that assist in the critical examination of pedagogical encounters—their processes of production, the ideologies and politics they serve, and their consequences in the formation of particular forms of identity, subjectivity, and agency (or its lack) among different constituents (for issues of ethics and responsibility, see Fine, Weiss, & Wong, 2002; for advocacy research, see Shields, 2012). Such methodologies trouble, clarify, and complexify the power relations underlying educational practice. They also explore the historicity, complexity, and nuances of educational/disciplinary interactions, curricular, and pedagogical decisions made and withheld; connections between speech, action, and intent; between the said and the unsaid; and the ways knowledge, bodies, identities, and subjectivities are produced.

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Postmodernism's invitation to question the grand narratives of social studies—progress, individualism, democracy, the American dream, and the like—or the poststructural exploration of how those and other discourses circulate to maintain and affirm such narratives, as well as the spaces they afford for contestation and subversion, have yet to be fully explored in our field. Yet these are highly deserving topics for scholars. Exposure of the politics and mechanisms of how we construct students as citizens can illuminate the horizons such constructions open and close for them. Critical discourses elucidate the degree to which these mechanisms invite us, as researchers, to explore the world through them, allowing us to see some things while ignoring others. To better understand the ways in which convention in social education becomes "real," critical research ought to provide interpretations that move away from mere descriptions of those that are "real" to ones that deconstruct it, tracing how power "circulates and surprises [and] theorize how subjects spring from the discourses that incite them" (Britzman, 2000, p. 38).

CONCLUSION

This article briefly touches on multiple issues brought forth by critical discourses and suggests some of the possibilities those open up for scholars for/in social education. Common to these discourses is the questioning of the disciplinary and disciplining nature of curricular knowledge and pedagogical knowing in social education as well as of the kind of scholarship generated in/about it. In that regard, critical lenses help foster a space in which existing forms of understanding are critically examined and their habitual nature is exposed and unsettled.

To focus not only on what the world (whether in social studies classrooms or beyond) means but on how it comes to have its particular meanings requires critical stances that make visible the construction of such meanings and what and who they legitimize. This invites us to better understand what and how disciplines in social studies construct as their subject matter as well as how the above help constructs its students as subjects. Learning to attend to the relationship between subject matter and the forms of subjectivity it engenders also renders visible the forms of citizenship it celebrates or renders problematic.

In all, critical discourses ask us as scholars to theorize. Theorizing does not necessarily entail producing abstract, esoteric papers. Zavarzadeh and Morton (1994) suggested that it means critically inquiring into "the grids of social intelligibilities produced by the discursive activities of a culture. Theory is a critique of intelligibility" (p. 53). Rather than unproblematically describe meanings conveyed through traditional social education—endorsing, legitimating, and reifying them—critical work attempts to challenge confidence in the obvious and "common sense" and to problematize social education as a

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discursive, political, and cultural apparatus. It is an approach that, exploring the relationship among the explicit, implicit, and null curricula of social education, examines the relationship between how social education is conceptualized and taught and what students learn. Critical scholarship in social education does not study and replicate the field merely for its content and pedagogy but for the cultural forms, subjectivities, and power relations they make possible and real and for how the latter simultaneously are shaped by and shape each other. It is time for a revitalization of critical discourses in our scholarly work in social education.

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