

## **Head, Heart & Hands: Three Conversations about Equity Education**

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### **Abstract**

*This article outlines three key conversations about equity education that foster the perspective transformation of university pre-service teachers. The first conversation is about the head and relates to how we make sense of the world and how we have been socialized. The head conversation encourages us to learn differently and to question how we know what we know. The second conversation is about the heart. This conversation asks us to critique power and privilege in our classrooms. The third conversation is about the hands. This conversation provides a way for teachers to be inclusive by providing education for and about those who may be marginalized in our classrooms.*

### **Introduction**

I teach inclusive education in a small faculty in Southwestern Manitoba, Canada where I teach about how to support students who are outside of the mythical norm. These conversations are necessary and important, given the growing disparity between the “haves” and “have nots” in Canada (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). During all of my courses, I try to have three conversations with my students about equity that are based upon the metaphor of head, heart, and hands. The head conversation encourages us to learn differently and to question how we know what we know. The second conversation is about the heart. This conversation asks us to critique power and privilege in our classrooms. The third conversation is about the hands. This conversation provides a way for teachers to be inclusive by providing education for and about those who may be marginalized in our classrooms. All three conversations about creating equity in the classroom require that students understand how oppression functions. The purpose of this paper is to discuss three conversations about equity education that are important for educators to hear so that they will have more insight into how oppression operates and how to lessen it. It is my hope that these new insights will assist teachers to generate effective strategies for creating equity in classrooms, schools and society.

Oppression may be understood to be the “unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules” (Young, 1990, p. 41). Equity education may be understood to be a broad collection of pedagogies constructed from a wide array of critical influences including critical race theory, feminism (poststructural and psychoanalytic strands), cultural and multicultural studies, post-colonial theories, and queer theories (Kumashiro, 2001, 2006). There is not just one type of inequity and, therefore, there is not just one type of equity education that serves to dismantle it. In this paper I speak from my own understanding of equity education and draw extensively from Kevin Kumashiro’s (1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012) work. Through equity education, different research orientations and pedagogical approaches are brought together by the borrowing of parts for the purpose of understanding oppression and eliminating hegemonic injustice by committing to “social change through education” (Schick, 2010b, p. 47). That being said, careful attention is paid not to group all marginalized groups under one banner; the key is to provide a way to understand oppression that honours each marginalized identification and critique.

Equity education is not about a belief in identifying and changing the defective character of advantaged students, but rather about challenging “hegemonic meaning-making and socialization processes” that are problematic (Montgomery, 2013, p. 15). In this way, equity educators emphasize an “inside-out” approach. This approach works first through interpersonal change, how we regard others and make sense of the world, and then through systemic change, changing the social structures, rules and procedures, all the while being aware that societal change also fosters interpersonal change. Ultimately, the goal of equity education is to change “the taken-for-granted manner of unequal power relations that organize and are organized through large and small discourses of social, material and ideological exchange” (Schick, 2010b, p. 48).

However, lessening oppression is a very difficult, if not impossible task to achieve, given the complexity of oppression and our very implication in its functioning. Kumashiro (2004) wrote:

The reason we fail to do more to challenge oppression is not merely that we do not know enough about oppression, but also that we often do not *want* to know more about oppression. It is not our lack of knowledge but our resistance to knowledge and our desire for ignorance that often prevent us from changing the oppressive status quo. (p. 25)

Understanding and challenging our resistance to knowing offers a space to trouble taken-for-granted knowledge and to critique unearned power and privilege. Equity education that seeks to create social change thus has the potential to be transformative for those involved in learning about it.

### ***Conversation One: Our Head***

The conversation that focuses on our head is about understanding how we make sense of the world and how we have been socialized. Understanding the social construction of knowledge and difference, as well as identity and power are important components that lay the epistemological framework for equity education. Although some practitioners are reluctant to value theoretical frameworks, it is vital for educators to understand that equity education is not about simply acquiring more knowledge, but about “troubling” taken-for-granted knowledge that we already that keep inequity in play. Thus, this conversation encourages educators to examine knowledge in a more critical fashion. This conversation is based on a poststructural philosophy and provides a means to understand oppression as situated, dynamic, and evolving; and to understand power as relational; and knowledge as local, partial and historical. It also moves from understanding the individual as a Subject that “exhibits agency as it constructs itself by taking up available discourses and cultural practices and [is] a subject that, at the same time, is subjected, forced into subjectivity by those same discourses and practices” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 500-2). There are a number of concepts that I discuss in some detail because they are important concepts in equity education. These concepts are ‘Othering and interlocking oppressions,’ ‘troubling knowledge,’ ‘power relations, contested knowledge and the social construction of identity,’ ‘creating tension,’ and ‘working through resistance.’

### ***Othering and Interlocking Oppressions***

Those who teach equity education use the term “Other” to collectively identify those who have historically and are currently denied power and privilege and to signify their common connection to oppression. It is the identification of oppression as an “interlocking system of intersecting hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, nationality,” and not as isolated concepts, that is key to the success of equity education (Schmidt, 2005, p. 117). Equity education aims to bring people together to recognize Othering that is troubling for us all; to examine Othering that one may have been unfamiliar with or that may be hidden within our own subconscious (Carlson Berg, 2012; Trepagnier, 2006).

Equity education also insists in honouring each of the socially and historically constructed marginalized identifications while recognizing the interlocking/intersecting complexities of social oppression. In order to ensure that no one loses their “place at the table,” separate time and effort is still needed to teach about race, class, gender, sexuality, and other currently marginalized identifications so that equity education does not fold back into the same hegemonic processes that it seeks to dismantle by amalgamating those who are marginalized into one “essentialized” group.

### ***Troubling Knowledge***

Youdell (2006) wrote, “serious attention is increasingly being paid to the problematic relationship between the ‘knowing’ subjects implicit to empirical research and the ‘troubled’ subjects of post-structural (sic) writing” (p. 514). Troubling knowledge involves a poststructural turn which has us “examine any commonplace situation, any ordinary event or process, in order to think differently about that occurrence – to open up what seems ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ to other possibilities” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 479). Equity education provides students with opportunities to trouble knowledge they already have in ways that disrupt, discomfort and problematize what they take for granted (Kumashiro, 2009). Students are challenged to learn about how they may “resist those discourses that erase difference and naturalize disadvantage” (Parkes, Gore, & Ellsworth, 2010, p. 178).

A familiar thread in equity education is questioning and challenging common sense (accepted) knowledge, and the identifications that are constructed from it.

Kumashiro (2000b) states, “Changing oppression requires disruptive knowledge, not simply more knowledge” (p.34). It is also necessary for people to examine their own self-interests and to acknowledge bias that can be introduced into the classroom in order to engage in “pedagogy about the unequal social, political and economic realities that shape their lives” (Schick, 2010b, p. 51). This is a difficult task, given dominant discourses of meritocracy and the sacrosanct belief in individual autonomy that are a part of students’ social experience, including school, and that keep unearned privilege in place (Schick, 2010b). Troubling knowledge may be accomplished by a “pedagogy of positionality that engages both students and teachers in recognizing and critiquing how one is positioned and how one positions others in social structures” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 45).

For Kumashiro (2009), troubling knowledge means “to work paradoxically with knowledge, to simultaneously see what different insights, identities, practices, and changes it makes possible while critically examining that knowledge (and how it came to be known) to see what insights and the like it closes off” (p. 127). Kumashiro (2004) acknowledges that students need to be vigilant when learning: “How does this reading challenge stereotypes? How does it reinforce it? What does it leave unchallenged? What does it raise critical questions about? Whom does it leave invisible? Whom does it call on to contest their own privileges?” (p. 113). From this perspective, knowledge needs to be contested and continually interrogated. Equity education attempts to challenge our “passion for ignorance” and to facilitate ‘unlearning’ common sense social constructions that continue to do harm (Britzman, 1998, p. 57). This type of education does not require students to ‘think like this’ but instead to ‘think differently’ (Kumashiro, 2009).

### ***Understanding Power Relations, Contested Knowledge and the Social Construction of Identity***

Understanding power relations and truth regimes is an important aspect of equity education (Schick, 2010a). The concept of power relations, in some form or another, informs much of the way that Othering and oppression can be understood to operate, as it can “account for systematic asymmetry between groups of people” (McLaren, 2002, p. 36). The concept of power relations is based on the scholarship of Foucault who understood power relations to be a productive force in creating who we are (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). Foucault saw power as largely relational (St. Pierre, 2000). Foucault also moves away from seeing power as top-down, repressive, limiting and controlling. According to McLaren (2002), Foucault contends that power “cannot be possessed because it is relational, shifting, mobile, and unstable.... Individuals do not *have* power, rather they participate in it” (p. 38).

Foucault (1980) wrote:

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (p. 92)

From the perspective of equity education, power is re-conceived to be ubiquitous, discursive, positive and productive (McLaren, 2002). Of interest to equity educators are asymmetrical relations of power that lead to domination. Domination occurs when “relations of power ossify, lock together and become fixed” (McLaren, 2002, p. 166). Equity education seeks to make these fixed unequal relations of power visible and address them.

Foucault destabilizes our modern structural understandings of power as he connects power and knowledge together. Power/knowledge is used “to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and ‘truth’” (Gaventa, 2003, para. 3). Ideas taken-for-granted as truth (truth regimes) are understood to be socially and historically constructed through the interaction of power/knowledge (McLaren, 2002). From this perspective, power becomes implicated in the production of knowledge and what constitutes knowledge we take-for-granted: “power produces knowledge, and in turn, knowledge produces power” (McLaren, 2002, p. 39). As well, “power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (Foucault, 1980, p. 86).

One’s identity is constituted and constructed in resistance to power relations (Foucault, 1980). We exist together through a multitude of complementing and competing relational contexts, and if relational power is truly effective, then we are likely unaware of its very existence.

We advocate for certain perspectives that serve our desires. However, there are a number of other competing individual, institutional, discursive, practices and objects, which may also become ‘crystallized’ together over time, that are involved in relations of power, which impede or complement our social life. So, although we can act within our own will, we are still subject to the destabilizing effects of power relations. Understanding power relations in this way may lead to disrupting the “taken-for-granted assumptions of students and teacher self-making and self-determinism [where] the problem of inequality is reduced to the bad choices of individuals and groups compared to the good choices and talent of others” (Schick, 2010b, p. 51). The modern notion of individual autonomy is challenged and complicated in equity education in order to understand the social and historical creation of the “subject.”

Foucault’s ideas about the analytics of power, including disciplinary power, form the basis for understanding the social construction of identity. From this perspective, knowledge is constructed through discourse and social practices, and that what is taken as truth is contestable because it is a social and historical creation. This theory explains how “each person perceives the world differently and actively creates their own meanings from events” (Burr, 2003, p. 19). Our identities are always “becoming.” As Burr (2003) wrote, although the person, the subject, is constituted by discourse, this subject is yet capable of critical historical reflection and is able to exercise some choice with respect to the discourses and practices that it takes up for its own use. Within this view, change is possible because human agents, given the right circumstances, are capable of critically analysing the discourses which frame their lives, and to claim or resist them according to the effects they wish to bring about. (p. 121)

The social construction of identity is an important aspect of equity education because its focus is on identity being constructed through discourse represented by texts, images and pictures.

Learning to “trouble normal” may free teachers from their blind adherence to pedagogical dogma based on their underlying beliefs, values and assumptions. Understanding what constitutes and constructs us is important to educators and provides a way forward in the practice of freedom (Parkes, Gore & Ellsworth, 2010).

### ***Creating Tension***

Kumashiro (2009) speaks to the notion of creating tension by troubling common sense learning, as well as understanding knowledge as both partial (biased and incomplete) and political. Students are taught to question what they may have unconditionally accepted as common sense knowledge so that they can question how common sense knowledge makes certain ways of knowing possible and impossible. Equity education seeks to find hybrid zones where “our multiple strands of Self and Other rub up against each other in unexpected ways” (Scholl, 2001, p. 144). Bhabha calls this the “interstitial or in-between perspective” where learning takes place in more discomfiting ways (Scholl, 2001, p. 144). It is about challenging people to “construct disruptive, different ‘knowledges’” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 43). Teaching in this way serves to create uncertainty, difference, and the possibility of finding that change is constant. However, learning that there is this tension can be an arduous journey for the student and teacher.

Educators should expect their students to enter crisis. And, since this crisis can lead in one of many directions--such as toward liberating change, or toward more entrenched resistance, etc.--educators need to provide a space in the curriculum for students to work through their crisis in a way that changes oppression.” (Kumashiro, 2000a, para. 5)

This tension is created because it is generally about breaking people loose from the “natural” and “normal” world to which they are anchored. Equity education may, for some, be a “difficult, stressful, uncomfortable, unpleasant, and perhaps coercive” journey (Pedersen, Walker, & Fine, 2005, p. 23). For this reason it is crucial for equity educators to compassionately monitor the level of emotional discomfort of students because of the potential for emotional trauma as they seek to “establish an equilibrium between the emotional and cognitive components of the learning process” (Adams, 2007, p. 15). Equity educators teach through tension, but must also be supportive through students’ learning crises (Kumashiro, 2000a, 2009). Although these crises may be discomfiting for the learner, resulting in disorienting dilemmas or provoking resistance in the learner, they may also serve an important role in transforming learners.

Creating tension is difficult because modern education is based upon a rational and humanistic context.

There is not much opportunity for other kinds of knowing to be expressed in classrooms, or to place affective learning before rational learning (Britzman, 1998). For example, it is difficult for teachers to leave their role as knowledge transmitters (Freire, 2003). Kumashiro explains that in order to move beyond the rationality expected in classes, he encourages people to be given the place and space to step outside of their comfort zone in addressing what is taken as common sense: “the desire to teach students outside the mythical norm, cannot revolve around solely the desire to reason; it must also involve a desire to attach and touch, a desire to enter stuck and uncontrollable places, and a desire for crisis” (Kumashiro, 2000a, para. 12).

### ***Working through Resistance***

According to many who work within equity education (Brookfield, 2005; Butin, 2002, 2005; Kumashiro, 2000b, 2002, 2009; Schick & St. Denis, 2003, 2005), students can resist learning about the complex and emotionally laden topics relating to social justice. The reasons students resist learning about “socially complex, culturally saturated, and politically volatile content knowledge” are complicated (Butin, 2005, p. 1). For example, the socially constructed beliefs of individualism (DiAngelo, 2011) and meritocracy (McNamee & Miller, 2004) that posit success or failure in society is an individually determined and equitable process, are examples of the underlying belief that “our race, class, or gender, are not important to our opportunities” (DiAngelo, 2010, p. 4). Troubling these and other discourses that many take-for-granted as true, can lead to resistance that may trigger the “outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54).

One of the concerns of those who do equity education is how rationality can be privileged above affectivity (Kumashiro, 2000a). Therefore, a strong emphasis is placed on the affective domain during learning. Weedon (1997) writes that one’s identity (the subject) is constituted by “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to her world (p. 32). To ignore the affective experience would be to perpetuate enlightenment thinking historically privileging rational thought and masculinity above all else (Tisdell, 1998).

Kumashiro (2000b) wrote, “we often desire the silencing of Others, and we desire the continuation of normalized teaching and learning practices” (p. 4). Hegemonic practices in classrooms and society silence the voices and practices of the marginalized and/or amplify the voices of the empowered/privileged. These institutionalized practices work to give voice to and favour those who are already are privileged (Giroux, 1997) and make it more difficult to discuss racism and other forms of systemic inequality (Schmidt, 2005). As well, those in positions of authority, who also hold institutional power, may construct discourses that are academically and emotionally incapacitating for the Other.

The conversation about our head encourages us to examine our own resistance to thinking about our own implication in maintaining inequity that may stem from our unconscious desire to continue to be advantaged. This desire remains hidden from our awareness by the unconscious process of personal subjectivity (Berlak, 2005, 2008). Assisting students to become aware of their unconscious desire to maintain the status quo is a significant aspect of equity education (Kumashiro, 2007).

### ***Conversation Two: Our Heart***

Because we feel inequity through the heart, this conversation frames the ongoing questioning of social and historical factors that keep oppression intact so that we can lessen oppression. This conversation examines power and privilege in classrooms, schools, and society in order that educators may become aware of how difference has been used to advantage some and disadvantage others, and to interrupt its operating. A focus of this conversation is about learning that in order to move our students forward we cannot see them as deficient, flawed, or bad. Rather, we must always want to encourage the investigation of hegemonic meaning-making and socialization processes. As well, the heart conversation creates the impetus for individual critical reflection that may lead to transformative learning.

The heart conversation seeks to make clear and undo inequity and ultimately, generate more activism that leads to less oppression (Freire, 2003). The heart conversation focuses on understanding the structures that support varied hierarchical systems of oppression and how they work to create identities and inequity. Critical theory seeks to “illuminate the ways in which people accept as normal a world characterized by massive inequities and the systemic exploitation of the many by the few” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 2).

The Marxist critique historically involved removing the ideological illusions that created a ‘false consciousness’ that made it possible for people to willingly suffer unequal treatment. It is still about learning to recognize the “couching and masking of privilege, and teaching critically involves unmasking or making visible the privilege of certain identities and the invisibility of this privilege” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 37).

More recent work has focused on critical conscientization, which emphasizes creating personal and collective awareness and seeks to change social and political contradictions that maintain social inequity (Freire, 2003, 2005; Kincheloe, 2008; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). It is the explicit desire to make students aware of hegemonic forces and make “explicit the power dynamics of mainstream society” (Morrison, Robbins, and Rose, 2008, P. 442) so that they can “critique current social inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476).

One of the most influential notions of how modern power operates comes from critical theory through the concept of hegemony (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). Hegemony explains how dominant groups maintain power without having to resort to coercion or violence and subjugates in such a way that those socialized in this way view the dominant perspective as common sense, natural and taken for granted as true. Some pedagogical tools may have hegemonic effects. As Montgomery (2008) wrote, things like “school history textbooks...are also violent in their effects insofar as they disseminate and legitimize hegemonic knowledge about racism, for example, as simply what bad people or bad countries do” (pg.86). Kumashiro (2001) wrote, “history textbooks.... collude in the privileging of hegemonic versions of history” (p. 4).

Some of the most notable examples of critical theory come from those who critique this hidden curriculum (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 2004; Freire, 2003; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994, Kumashiro, 2009; McLaren, 1997). As long as teachers are blind to the knowledge that they are transmitters of both the prescribed and the hidden curriculum, the latter based largely upon a model of inculcation and hegemonic social transmission, they will be incapable of effectively engaging in equity education (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Those involved in this pursuit challenge curricula found in schools in order to critique how teachers and students current educational systems perpetuate oppressive ideologies and practices (Apple, 2004; Freire, 2003; Giroux, 1997; Kumashiro, 2009; McLaren, 1997). This kind of critique helps initiate thinking, in both staff and students, about whose identities and interests are being represented and valued in school.

Conversations of the heart may create awareness of hegemonic ideologies and resistance toward inequitable social structures (Kumashiro, 2000b). Critique from a modern perspective also identifies taken-for-granted knowledge and challenges people to reflect on their own ways of thinking and being, and to take action towards change (Brookfield, 2000, 2005). Thus, there is potential for transformative learning through the heart conversation as individuals critically reflect upon inequities and become active participants who work to change dominant ideologies and support marginalized students (Brookfield, 2005). The heart conversation works from the realization that what is considered to be ‘normal’ is actually contested knowledge. It is this act of raising peoples’ consciousness to taken-for-granted knowledge and the relativity of normal, which is at the centre of the heart conversation in equity education. The heart conversation is also at the heart of personal transformation and social change; it is through people critiquing their power and privilege and recognizing that they are implicated in oppression, that transformative learning may occur.

One of the most challenging aspects of equity education is the facilitation of critical reflection by teachers on their own practice. Hidden in plain sight is the political and social implication of power relations on dismantling inequity. In many ways, peoples’ conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings and attitudes maintain inequitable systems of domination and create resistance to thinking deeply through the heart conversation (Kumashiro, 2009).

### **Conversation Three: Our Hands**

Equity education also manifests itself through inclusive pedagogical approaches as education for and about the Other (Kumashiro, 2000b). Conversation three, our hands, is about doing inclusive education that makes a difference for students who are marginalized. This conversation is used to understand difference and oppression, as well as address issues of safety for the Other, interpersonal interactions, and the school curriculum. This conversation examines our treatment of, and knowledge about, students who may be marginalized. The focus of the hands conversation is on teaching about the situated and dynamic nature of difference, and advocating for those who are marginalized by fostering pedagogy, content, and interpersonal relationships that support student diversity. Here, I teach how meanings that are ascribed to socially constructed difference, both real and imagined, are best-conceived using anti-essentialist approaches.

Teachers are both ethically and legally obliged to teach in ways that support different ways of learning and being in the classroom, regardless of race, gender, social economic status, sexual preference or disability (Ware, 2001). The hands conversation emphasizes traditional inclusive education, which means different things to different people. In this instance it is used to refer to teaching about and advocating for setting suitable learning challenges, responding to students diverse needs, and overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of children based upon student difference (Jordan, 2007).

A common strategy used in Equity education is to provide teachers with opportunities to teach in ways that support those who are disadvantaged. The goal here is to create ways that include dialogue and honest discussions about difference, so that teachers can provide safe and emotionally nurturing classrooms and schools for students who are the Other. Inclusive strategies such as this provide a means for educators to discuss whom the Other is and how they are being disadvantaged, as well as what teachers can do differently (Pedersen, Walker, & Wise, 2005).

As Kumashiro (2000b) reminds us, “lessons about the Other need to include learning to resist one’s desire to know, to essentialize, and to close off further learning. The goal is not final knowledge (and satisfaction), but disruption, dissatisfaction, and the desire for more knowledge” (p. 34). Otherwise, inclusive approaches will lead to more of the same, with the difference being that the oppression may just be more compassionate. As Schick points out, there is a political agenda found in modern versions of inclusive education that seeks to create equitable and accessible schooling for marginalized individuals, all the while ignoring entrenched relations of power that maintain insidious disparity (Schick, 2010b).

There is a strong recognition by those who provide education for the marginalized of how oppressive treatment and attitudes are internalized. Oppressive treatment may manifest itself maliciously to create trauma and illness for marginalized students (Ponterotto, 2006; Young, 1990). For example, students who are marginalized are more likely to be anxious and miss school due to illness (Ponterotto, 2006). This happens when Othering defines and secures the identity of the dominant group through stigmatizing the Other. What is worth noting from this perspective is how being the Other is still seen as maladaptive and not of the norm (Jordan, 2007; Ware, 2001). Othering by those who have power and privilege can, from this perspective, be seen as a symptom of the pathology inherent in the creation and maintenance of inequity (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Even when there is empathy for the Other, the binary that separates and maintains difference, because it is not critically inspected, is left intact (Kumashiro, 2000b). Simply providing more knowledge about the Other does not lessen inequity (Britzman, 1998). Therefore, the most significant weakness of relying on an inclusive approach alone is that Otherness may become the object of inspection, where little attention is placed on how power and privilege operates within those who have unearned power and privilege (Kumashiro, 2000b; Brookfield, 2012). Without critical self-examination, the self-observed desire for those who are privileged to remain privileged remains unchallenged.

There are nonetheless a number of positive aspects of the hands conversation. One of the most beneficial outcomes of the hands conversation is that it is intended to make schools helpful places for marginalized students. This means having a school environment where all students can feel that they belong (Jordan, 2007; Ware, 2001). Talking about the Other’s context may make things better and can lead to more inclusive and supportive classrooms. For example, providing information about various sexualities in health class, as natural and normal, is an inclusive act.

Inclusive and supportive practices in education are strongly endorsed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005). The hands conversation labours to develop the ‘contact hypothesis’ whereby the goal is to have disparate and potentially conflicting groups in close proximity to one another in order to develop stronger intergroup understanding through dialogue and proximity (Kerssen-Griep & Eifler, 2008). Although existing stereotypes may be reinforced and further entrenched if inequity is not critiqued and challenged (Troyna & Edwards, 1993), the contact hypothesis aims to “reduce prevailing intergroup tension” through learning about the perspectives of the Other in hopes of creating greater equity (Pedersen, Walker & Wise, 2005, p. 23).

The hands conversation attempts to provide places and spaces where harmful actions and inactions occur less often against the marginalized.

These strategies focus on educating students and teachers about who marginalized students are, and what their experiences have been, with the intention of bringing awareness and making things better for those students. Inclusive teachers “acknowledge the diversity among their students, and also embrace these differences and treat their students as raced, gendered, sexualized, and classed individuals” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 28).

The hands conversation works toward the creation of safe spaces within the school and classroom, by using pedagogy and curricula in supportive ways (Kumashiro, 2000b, 2009). Equity education that teaches directly about diversity, and does not pretend it doesn't exist, are also examples of this perspective (Kumashiro, 2000b). The goal is to have explicit conversations with teachers about how they can encourage diversity and support student learning. Providing awareness to teachers to support students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth in school would be examples of inclusive strategies (Sexuality Education Resource Centre, 2011; Walton, 2005). Teaching about how to provide culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and differentiated instruction (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010) are also examples of these approaches. Providing a safe place is also an important aspect of inclusive approaches and may be specific areas where marginalized students can go and feel secure and ‘normal’. Examples of these spaces could include “anti-bullying initiatives to create a safe school place, [and] gay-straight alliances that create an affirming space” (Carlson Berg, 2012, p. 15).

One objective of the hands conversation is to build empathy for the marginalized because “invoking empathy can reduce racism levels” (Pedersen, Walker, & Wise, 2005, p. 23). However, “oppression does not reside solely in how individuals think about, feel towards, and treat one another, and thus, empathy cannot be the panacea. It is necessary, but not sufficient” (Kumashiro, 2000b, p. 35).

Practitioners also try to correct harmful, distorted, and misleading stereotypes and myths about marginalized students in order to reduce prejudice (Kumashiro, 2000b; Pedersen, Walker & Wise, 2005). Providing education about those who are marginalized can counter debilitating negative stereotypes and beliefs in assimilation and dysfunction (Freire, 2003; Ponteroto, 2006). Concepts of assimilation and dysfunction are two common concerns in equity education because they refer to the manner in which those who represent the dominant ideology exercise their power over those who are marginalized. In assimilation, dominant ideology exists at a cultural level through ethnocentric beliefs. In dysfunction, dominant ideology is exercised through the medical model as pathologies in abnormal psychology. For example, while the American Psychiatric Association now recognizes homosexuality (as well as lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities) as being “normal” expressions of human sexuality, prior to the 1970s homosexuality was identified and treated as a mental disorder (Eichler, 2010). Any attempt to broaden what is considered ‘normal’ is helpful in supporting the inclusion of students who are marginalized.

### **Conclusion**

Equity education has been divided into three conversations related to the head, heart, and hands. Creating these artificial distinctions has limitations because conversations about equity education cannot simply be encapsulated into the three discrete categories I describe. However, the goal was to provide a simple way to discuss equity education. The first conversation, the head, is about understanding how we make sense of the world and how we have been socialized. This conversation involves examining issues related to the social construction of difference, identity, and power. The second conversation, the heart, has us question the social and historical factors that keep oppression intact so that we can lessen oppression. The third conversation, the hands, is about understanding and implementing inclusive pedagogical approaches that work to provide education for and about the Other (Kumashiro, 2000b). This conversation examines our treatment of, and knowledge about, students who may be marginalized. Having these three conversations in our role as university educators can help create transformative action, which will foster growth and equity acumen for all learners in the classroom, including us.

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