

Beyond Child-Centered Constructivism: A Call for Culturally Sustaining Progressive Pedagogy

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Prologue: Progressive Education for All?

A Black teacher speaking on a panel at the 2015 Progressive Education Network Conference in New York City asked, “Why do so few progressive schools serve *our* kids? Why are most of the educators white when working-class children of color *are* given an opportunity to have a progressive education?”¹ These questions and contradictions are not new. While notable exceptions exist, progressive practices, historically and still today, are not often found in public school settings for children from communities and families marginalized by structural racism and poverty. These schools are disproportionately dispossessed by policies that narrow curricula, mandate high-stakes tests, and police children and teachers (Fabricant & Fine, 2013). Teacher education programs grapple with the realities of preparing a teaching force dominated by white middle-class women (Sleeter, 2001). And skills-based instruction continues to be falsely positioned in direct opposition to inquiry-based learning (Delpit, 1995). The constraints on educators’ abilities, but not their desire, to see and honor each child, culture, and community are real.

A tension between child-centered and social reconstructionist/social justice aims has existed since John Dewey’s time. Believing that our schools can and must build a new social order, George Counts confronted the Progressive Education Association in 1932 about the limited and limiting scope of a developmentalist educational philosophy:

If Progressive Education is to be genuinely progressive, it must emancipate itself from the influence of this class, face squarely and courageously every social issue, come to grips with life in all of its stark reality, establish an organic relation with the community, develop a realistic and comprehensive theory of welfare, fashion a compelling and challenging vision of human destiny, and become somewhat less frightened than it is today at the bogeys of

1 I capitalize Black and Brown but not white in this article in order to call attention to how power and racial in/justice are represented and can be implicitly reproduced or explicitly contested through grammar and language.

imposition and indoctrination. In a word, Progressive Education cannot build its program out of the interests of the children: it cannot place its trust in a child-centered school. (Counts, 1932/1978, p. 7)

And yet, nearly a century later, progressive schools typically—though not exclusively, as this essay will explore—continue to focus their attention on child-centered pedagogies and continue to serve children and families whose economic, social, and cultural capital already serves them well.

In 2016, who has access to progressive education? Where are the schools located that are able to embrace constructivism and reject a skills-only, test-prep approach, and who do they serve? Which communities can take the risk to opt out of high-stakes tests? How do urban progressive schools and educators contend with and contest the false dichotomy of the either/or decisions we often feel forced to make—between teaching skills or critical thinking, between academic rigor or play- and inquiry-based learning? Although early 20th-century progressive theorists and practitioners—including John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jane Addams, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Carter G. Woodson, Caroline Pratt, Elsie Clapp, Horace Mann Bond, Anna Julia Cooper, George Counts, Harold Rugg, and Ann Shumaker—indeed envisioned otherwise, why does progressive education still seem to be reserved for those with wealth and whiteness? We might find an entry point into these big questions through an examination, critique, and visioning of progressive pedagogy and curricula that pushes beyond child-centered, developmentally appropriate practice into the realm of culturally sustaining teaching and learning. As a white progressive school educator and leader, my inquiry zooms in on one question: How might we reimagine constructivist practices and curricula so that we purposefully, consistently, critically engage questions of pedagogy, power, and culture through a sociocultural/sociopolitical lens? The promise of progressive practices in public schools resides in their inherently political and activist potential, in a vision of public education in and for an authentically democratic society.²

2 The challenge is not about making progressive schools “work” for Black and Brown children. In this paper, I’m arguing that child-centered, constructivist pedagogies and curricula cannot be colorblind, or even multicultural, if we want progressive education to live up to its potential for all kids and for our society. Pedagogical shifts that prioritize sociopolitical understanding are needed in every kind of progressive school, with children and families of all races and ethnicities, heritage languages, family structures, and economic backgrounds. With culturally sustaining pedagogies we can take a step closer to truly democratic and perhaps even socially transformative public education.

Why a Critical and Sociocultural Critique/Reimagining of Pedagogy?

Twenty-four kindergartners sit on the large blue rug with clipboards on their laps and pencils in their hands. Seated on small chairs at the front of the group, Xavier, his mom Sandra, and his older brother Mabkyle wait to be interviewed. The five-year-olds take turns asking questions the class has prepared in advance about where Xavier's family lives, how many people are in the family, what languages they speak, if they celebrate any holidays, what they do for fun, and whether they have a family pet. They pause after each question to document the information they've just learned with pictures, letters, words, and symbols. Although this isn't the first interview of their Family Study, it is an exciting one, and the kindergartners are a bit jumpier than usual. Mabkyle brought along his pet snake, and the kindergartners know that during Center Time after the interview they will get to meet the snake and maybe even hold it. Some of them are even already thinking about the page they will write and draw later that afternoon to contribute to Xavier's Family Book.³

Beginning in kindergarten, the students at Town Square School (TSS), a racially and economically mixed public progressive elementary school in New York City, learn how to be researchers of their experiences, their lives, and their worlds. The school's mission prioritizes inclusive and rigorous learning in meaningful, real-world contexts. Alongside reading, writing, and math instruction, children at each grade level engage in long-term inquiry-based interdisciplinary studies in which they research, document, discuss, and create. The terms *research* and *researcher* appear throughout the written curriculum maps and the spoken language used in every classroom in the school. Through constructivist pedagogy—a central approach enacted in progressive schools—these students learn to create their own knowledge. They ask questions, decide how and where to find information, gather ideas and evidence, represent what they've discovered, and ask new questions. Yes, they are learning how to learn.

Family interviews are one part of the kindergarten Family Study, which deeply engages children in researching and reflecting on their family and cultural experiences while guiding them to consider how their identities and experiences may be similar to and different from those of other families. We know that learning does not happen in isolation. As Vygotsky (1978) and others since have theorized, the social context influences how and what we learn; individuals both mediate and are mediated by our environments through the people, objects, symbols, tools, and practices we encounter (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Social, cultural, and historical power cannot ever be

3 The names of all people and the school are pseudonyms. I am grateful to the children, teachers, and leaders of Town Square School for sharing your experiences, practices, and reflections.

disentangled from the ways in which students engage with texts in and of the world, and with each other (Gee, 2012; Freire, 1970/1988). Constructivist pedagogy can and should be intertwined with a sociocultural stance toward children’s learning and development. And the pedagogies progressive teachers take up can either deny and *perpetuate* or acknowledge and *contest* imbalances of access and power in how young people conceive of, construct, and dis/own their learning, literacies, and identities.

How we see our students matters, and a substantive body of both research and practice disputes deficit-based approaches by demanding the recognition of students’ strengths and promoting teaching that builds on their existing fluencies, knowledge, and skills (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Twenty years ago, Ladson-Billings (1995b) challenged the typical developmental and cultural mismatch/deficit views of learning and schooling when she articulated a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), which Paris (2012) has since reconceptualized as culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP).⁴ Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) described culturally relevant teachers as those who view their students as capable and hold them to high expectations, conceive of knowledge in a critical and constructivist Freirean sense, scaffold and critique curricula, and assess learning from multiple angles. These teachers develop a collaborative community of learners in their classrooms, get involved in the larger community, prioritize relationships, and see themselves as learners. This description parallels the most engaged and effective progressive school teaching that I have read about, witnessed, and experienced. In fact, Ladson-Billings (1995b) wrote that she often is asked, “Isn’t what you described just ‘good teaching?’” She then deepened the critique, noting that this kind of “just good teaching” is seldom evident in our classrooms and schools filled with minoritized children (p. 484).

4 The three key components of culturally relevant teaching are: “an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 483). More recently, Paris (2012) introduced the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy as a reimagining of culturally relevant pedagogy. Emphasizing that terms like responsive and relevant are not sufficient, Paris and Alim (2014) “offer a loving critique” of asset-based pedagogies like CRP, and theorize CSP as an approach by which educators and scholars can “perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change” (p. 85). Ladson-Billings (2014) also critiques the misuse of CRP and supports a CSP “remix” when she challenges practitioners to push beyond static and superficial conceptions of identities and culture, to understand their fluidity, hybridity, and complexity, and to “[take] up the sociopolitical dimensions of the work, instead [of] dulling its critical edge or omitting it altogether” (p.77).

It is not a simple task to attain the understandings and skill sets needed to sustain a balance in helping students develop skills and knowledge, cultural competence, *and* critical consciousness. Trying to assess why culturally sustaining pedagogy is not more widely engaged would involve an analysis of K-12 policy, teacher education, the political economy around schooling, and the purposes of public education itself. Structural violence that systematically reinscribes inequity—racialized and economically segregated schools and neighborhoods, the corporatization and privatization of public education, high-stakes accountability, anti-union legislation, zero-tolerance discipline that criminalizes Black and Brown youth—constrains and obstructs educators’ abilities to imagine and enact what’s possible. Curriculum development, teacher education, professional learning communities, and family engagement are necessary but not sufficient facets of a transformative approach to urban school reform (Anyon, 2005b). While I am asserting the undeniable need for a macro lens, we might also begin small and think about what kind of change is possible one child, one teacher, one school at a time.

Transforming Constructivist Curricula into Culturally Sustaining Learning

I have visited and taught in public progressive schools where educators strive to balance skills-based instruction with inquiry- and project-based curricula, an approach that is both strategically and philosophically in line with how Delpit (1995, 2012) conceptualized effective pedagogy for minoritized children. However, even in progressive schools, interdisciplinary studies often take an activity-based approach that does not explicitly address issues of culture, language, and power. A classic example is a typical early childhood apple study in which children create apple print paintings, eat and compare different kinds of apples, draw and write stories about apples, make applesauce, and perhaps even go apple picking. Although the kindergarten Apple Study at Town Square School took a more constructivist and integrated approach, the teachers realized that they could evolve this study to better meet their expectations for developing cultural competence among both children and teachers. Instead of focusing on apples, which the teachers saw as less culturally relevant, children now investigate the breads people eat and where in the world different kinds of breads originate. Since designing the Bread Study, teachers introduce ideas about similarities and differences specifically in relation to the concepts of identity, culture, and diversity that they prioritize.

And yet, culturally sustaining pedagogy is strikingly different from how multicultural education is typically enacted (Ladson-Billings, 1998). More than checking a celebrating “culture” or “diversity” box, CSP necessitates that teachers take a stand and actively engage their students in thinking deeply about how power works in the world.⁵ While teachers are intentionally setting a foundation for learning about in/equity and in/justice in later grades, an important next step for this kindergarten study could be to incorporate local and global issues of food justice in developmentally appropriate ways. As TSS illustrates, ongoing transformation from inquiry-based multicultural curricula to culturally sustaining and perhaps even critical pedagogy⁶ does not result from educators being handed “social justice” curricula and certainly does not happen overnight.

While many TSS interdisciplinary studies raised and addressed questions, concepts, and issues through a multicultural lens, a few years ago teachers began to identify opportunities for growth and change. In the initial version of the second-grade Park Study, the students investigated the physical structure and layout of a nearby city park, the activities of different people who use the park, the people who care for the park, the jobs it provides, and its history. After doing interviews, observations, and book research, the students collaboratively designed and constructed a model of their ideal park. However, the gentrification of the neighborhood and the ways in which differently raced and classed people do and do not interact in public spaces were left unexamined. In this particular study, the constructivist approach came close but didn’t reach the realm of teaching for social action and critical consciousness that Ladson-Billings (1995a) advocated:

Beyond those individual characteristics of academic achievement and cultural competence, students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities. If school is about preparing students for

5 Theoretical frames such as Critical Race Theory (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009) and neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2006) unveil multiculturalism and multicultural education as depoliticized constructs and approaches that typically do not take into account how narratives and myths of diversity, colorblindness, meritocracy and post-racialism support and solidify white supremacy in our societal structures and discourses. Culturally sustaining pedagogy can help educators explicitly address and contest the in/visibility of racialized power with our students on both individual and structural levels.

6 While culturally sustaining pedagogy offers a way in for many educators, we can and should push progressive education even further toward its liberatory potential. Critical pedagogy aims for critical consciousness and, ultimately, social transformation (Freire, 1970/1988), which can feel like lofty goals for teachers working in bureaucratic and inequitable school systems. Real-world examples of critical pedagogy/problem-posing education share applications and implications for those of us committed to working in and changing urban schools, ultimately allowing us to envision what is radically possible (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Landay & Wootton, 2012).

active citizenship, what better citizenship tool than the ability to critically analyze the society? (p. 162)

This seemingly missed opportunity can be contextualized within an emergent shared commitment at TSS to how teachers approach questions of race, power, justice, and equity.

After a few years of guiding seven-year-olds through the Park study, teachers purposefully began to engage a social justice lens by introducing their students to concepts of access, power, and activism. During the course of the study, second graders now also take trips to a variety of different city parks and interview people from a nonprofit parks advocacy organization. Using and strengthening the research skills they have been developing since kindergarten, students begin making connections among community assets and needs, unequal levels of investment and disinvestment in different neighborhoods, where decision-making power is located, and the role community organizations and constituents can play in advocating for change. Questions emerge from experience, and when it becomes clear that some children and neighborhoods have access to great playgrounds and bleachers near their baseball fields while others don't, larger concerns about in/equity and in/justice become part of the conversation.

Teachers' attention to naming access, power, and activism is reflective of a schoolwide shift at TSS, both in teacher-driven professional development and in an anti-bias, social justice approach emphasized in every interdisciplinary study from kindergarten through fifth grade. (*See Appendix A: Webliography.*) Although honoring individual and cultural difference had always been embedded in the work and learning students were doing, a few years ago teachers initiated an ongoing process of reflection, and they now explicitly address social advocacy in curricula, intentionally creating the space in which children develop and speak their critical voices.

And this kind of critique and activism happens with, for, and by children beginning in kindergarten. Taking a critical look at books about family is now an important aspect of the Family Study. Last year, over the course of a few days, teachers distributed books from more traditional classroom libraries and shared photos of the children's families taken during their family interviews, each time asking the children, "What do you notice?" Having already discussed skin color and family structures during their Who Am I? Study, the kindergartners pointed out the differences between the families in the books and their own families. They decided that more books are needed about all kinds of families, and so they wrote to children's book publishers with their request. By facilitating analysis and advocacy about who is and isn't represented in books about families in

relation to the kindergartners' own family visits and interviews, the teachers engaged all three dimensions of culturally relevant pedagogy theorized by Ladson-Billings (1995b). This investigation is only the beginning of conversations about social and racial equity and justice. Indeed, we must reimagine constructivist and developmentally appropriate practices as more expansive than the social-emotional and academic skills, understandings, and experiences our students are “ready” for. As we strive to enact the democratic, and perhaps even social reconstructionist, potential of progressive education (Meier, 2009), we must consciously address sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives as integral to children’s development and their experiences of school, and most importantly, to how children see themselves as active and critical learners, thinkers, and doers.

A crucial aspect of culturally sustaining pedagogy is that educators also critically examine our own assumptions, understandings and practice. A teacher-leader at Town Square School described how, over the past few years, a group of teachers has been creating a trajectory of professional learning and development for the entire staff, one that intentionally “digs deep into our own understanding of our identity, our race, our class, gender, sexuality, religion, amongst other things—those are all things we’re constantly thinking about.” She then explained:

It’s a process of building trust in the group, being able to share these stories, sometimes asking questions that are similar to questions we ask our kids....It’s not an isolated moment but a constant conversation we’re having, whether it’s through reading something and sharing our understanding of it, like thinking about microaggressions and what those mean and how we have either used them or had them used toward us and how we stand up and be an ally – it’s very similar to things we’re talking about with our kids.

In planning and reflecting on their pedagogy and curricula, teachers at TSS regularly reflect on broader questions of identity and power that they’re considering in their own professional development and on how those relate to the terms and concepts they are introducing to children. For example, when the second-grade team now prepares to discuss the concept of access with their students during the Park Study, they draw on their own collaborative inquiry around issues of class to inform the lessons they plan within a framework of what makes sense developmentally. According to this teacher-leader, rather than “now it’s talk-about-diversity time, it just becomes part of our practice because we have that lens on our work.” By cultivating a critically reflective space in which adults can feel a sense of agency around developing their own sociopolitical consciousness, teachers also experience culturally sustaining teaching and learning as dynamic and transformative. Participating in a community of critical educators directly informs our pedagogy, and we then have

the potential to move progressive education beyond the limits of child-centered, project-based learning.⁷

Theoretical Tools to Mobilize a Public Progressive School Movement

Not all progressive school curricula and experiences are deeply rooted in students' lives and communities; in fact, far too few are. Nor do schools intentionally design their academic programs and professional learning opportunities to systematically address multiplicities of cultures and vantage points and the workings of power. There are many good reasons why in public schools—whether progressive or not—teachers do not typically engage culturally sustaining approaches, including the fact that public education has historically reproduced rather than dismantled structures and experiences of power, racialization, dispossession, and privilege (Anyon, 1997; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Patel, 2015). But culturally sustaining pedagogy is not impossible work and, ultimately, can be far more transformative for the teachers, children, and schools who embrace it than a standards-based or even constructivist approach will ever be. And it seems that we have all of the theoretical and practical tools we need to envision and create progressive schools and a progressive education movement that purposefully align culturally sustaining and constructivist pedagogies. (*See Appendix B: Bibliography.*)

In progressive schools, teachers know that children learn in a social context and that their intellectual and social-emotional learning are inseparable (Vygotsky, 1978). We pay attention to all aspects of children's development, recognize the unique strengths and needs each child brings to school each day, and understand how education cannot ever be one-size-fits-all. We know that small class size matters, that small schools promote authentic relationships and increase public education's democratic potential (Meier, 2002; Ayers, Klonsky, & Lyon, 2000). As Ted Sizer (1999) relentlessly advocated, "We cannot teach students well if we do not know them well" (p. 6). Taking up personalized, child-centered learning not as a pedagogical strategy but as an all-out critique of the dominant discourses of standardization and "closing the achievement gap," progressive educators can challenge the ways in which schools are structured to reproduce inequity. By explicitly framing children's learning and development as socially, culturally, linguistically, geographically,

7 During a recent Bank Street leadership forum on social justice teaching, educators articulated two interdependent challenges we must address as we commit ourselves to culturally sustaining practices. One stated, "We focus on questions of power and change; we focus on connections to what's happening in our kids' lives now." Another added, "We can't ask our kids to grapple with these important essential questions if we won't do it on our own."

and historically situated, progressive educators can talk back to the larger narrative of contemporary school reform that continues to demand that benchmarks and standards be applied uniformly to all.

The question of where we locate “expertise” is addressed by sociocultural theory and sometimes, but not always, by progressive schools. A funds of knowledge approach, which identifies and fully integrates family and community assets into classroom learning (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), might feel familiar to those progressive educators who do home visits, construct curriculum around children’s interests and skills, and take a strengths-based stance regarding students and their families. Ultimately, though, funds of knowledge is not simply “a tool for teachers’ toolboxes,” an instructional strategy to be learned and used, but a way of seeing students, families, and the construction of knowledge itself. Children who have been historically marginalized by our schools and society already have critical habits of mind and heart, learned through lived experience. We need to share this strengths-not-deficits way of seeing with larger audiences. Funds of knowledge, as a well-documented research/practice-based theory, can be helpful to progressive educators who sometimes search for language and frameworks that describe to systems-level leaders and policymakers what we already intuitively know and do.

By emphasizing the interrelationship of progressive approaches such as personalization with sociocultural theories and practices like funds of knowledge, we can both strengthen cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness in our classrooms and begin to shift the school reform narrative. While progressive education implicitly confronts and contests deficit-based pedagogies, standardization, and high-stakes accountability by demanding space and time, prioritizing the developmental needs and interests of children over one-size-fits-all, and valuing a multiplicity of answers, approaches, and experiences, our task is to make a culturally sustaining stance explicit.

Epilogue: Justice In and Beyond Schools

Attending to the long view of an ongoing struggle and journey, theoretical tools of analysis and critique can help progressive educators shift the racialized school reform debates from a focus on individual accountability to the structural solutions we need (Anyon, 2005b; Ladson-Billings, 2006). What is at stake is even greater than the ways in which corporate reform of the content, structures, and accountability systems in public education harms the children those reformers claim they want to help. Gee (2012) suggested a way to reframe the “crisis” in education:

On the face of the matter, the real “literacy crisis” would seem to be a crisis of social justice rooted in the fact that we supply less good schools and neighborhoods and less resourced homes to poorer and more disadvantaged people, and better ones to more mainstream and advantaged people. (p. 32)

This assessment of the “crisis” calls up Jean Anyon’s vision of a new social movement. Trying to simply improve schools without addressing the impact of the political economy on urban educational systems will never succeed. Anyon (2005a) described the “synergy” that could happen “if curricular and pedagogical reforms were coupled with financial and social support of students outside of school” (p. 184). She argued that organizing a new social movement with education at the center “can expose the combined effects of public policies, and highlight not only poor schools but the entire nexus of constraints on urban families” (p. 177). Through relationship building and coalition building with other progressive, critical, and radical educators, parents, and activists, we can contest structural racism and poverty and make social, political, economic, and educational change happen on large and small scales.⁸

Radical possibility can begin with one child, one teacher, one school at a time. While progressive pedagogies are not inherently culturally sustaining, the potential is there. As the story of Town Square School shows, progressive educators must actively engage with theories that help us reenvision developmentally appropriate, child-centered, and constructivist practices and consciously reposition how we think about teaching and learning within a sociocultural and sociopolitical frame of understanding. Through collaborative work, dialogue, and reflection that honor the progressive tradition and then push it forward, educators can dare to imagine and enact critical constructivist pedagogies that will better meet all children and youth where they are, honor what they bring, and empower them to change, strengthen, and sustain our cultures, schools, and communities.

Appendix A: Webliography

Webliography of selected social justice/culturally sustaining/critical teaching and learning resources:

- [Rethinking Schools](#) (books and articles about social justice teaching, learning, and curricula)

8 To my colleagues, mentors, and friends from Bank Street and the Graduate Center and to the educators in my family who pushed my thinking and writing in this paper, thank you. You continue to challenge my assumptions and understandings and inspire me to imagine solidarities of radical possibility.

- [Teacher Activist Groups](#) (local and national groups of teachers engaging in educational justice work; social justice teaching materials)
- [Teaching a People's History: Zinn Education Project](#) (books, articles, websites, teaching guides, and more)
- [Teaching Tolerance: Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education](#) (a free online PD seminar with four one-hour modules; many other Teaching Tolerance curricular resources)
- [Annenberg Institute for School Reform Voices in Urban Education](#) (summer 2012 issue focused on Education for Liberation)
- [Teaching for Change](#) (books, teaching resources, websites)
- [The ArtsLiteracy Project](#) (handbook of ideas, protocols, activities)
- [Facing History and Ourselves](#) (teaching materials and PD)
- [IndyKids](#) (free current events/social justice newspaper by kids, for kids with teaching guides and resources)
- [People's Institute for Survival and Beyond](#) (Undoing Racism workshops)

Appendix B: Bibliography

Bibliography of selected articles and books that bridge theory and practice for educators wanting to engage in social justice/culturally sustaining/critical teaching and learning:

- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the Remix (Ladson-Billings, 2014)
- Using Their Words: Six Elements of Social Justice Curriculum Design for the Elementary Classroom (Picower, 2012)
- Five Essential Components for Social Justice Education (Hackman, 2005)
- The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children (Ladson-Billings, 2009)
- Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School (Pollock, Ed., 2008)
- The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008)
- A Reason to Read: Linking Literacy and the Arts (Landay & Wooten, 2012)
- Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves (Edwards & Derman-Sparks, 2010)
- We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools (Howard, 2006)
- Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice (Au, Ed., 2009)

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Alisa Algava strives to understand how child- and community-centered schooling contests structural inequity and creates moments and spaces of radical possibility. A former student, teacher and principal in progressive elementary schools, Alisa connects a developmental approach with a social and educational justice stance in her work with both children and adults. She graduated from and teaches in Bank Street's leadership programs and is currently a doctoral student in Urban Education at the CUNY Graduate Center.