"CELEBRATING THE OTHER": POWER AND RESISTANCE AS PRELUDE TO BENHABIB'S DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

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INTRODUCTION

Each semester during a discussion of socialization in my Introductory Sociology classes, I write on the board "silence=agreement" and invite students to discuss their initial responses to this statement. Inevitably, there are students who agree with the statement outright, claiming "if people have something to say then they have the responsibility to say it." These students generally warrant their responses by referring to democracy and adamantly asserting "that for a democracy to be successful, individuals have to take responsibility for speaking their minds." Other students argue, however, that though some people might indeed have something to say, "There could be lots of reasons for why they don't speak up." These students generally offer reasons that revolve around the "shy student" or the individual that "might just be scared to speak up." When I press students to explain what they mean they offer that "some people just don't want to be laughed at," or "some people just don't know what they want to say."

Recently, while facilitating a Social Foundations of Education class, the topic of patriotism and education arose, and as questions around democracy and responsible citizenship ensued, the issue of silence resurfaced. Similar to the responses of my Sociology students, these students suggested that others' silences were simply demonstrations of apathy or "shyness," and applauded the "courage" of the "loudest voice in the room" as exemplary of responsible democratic citizenship. What is curious to me is students' assumption that those who are silent do not have anything to say, agree with what has already been said, are content to defer to others who "want" to speak, or are scared to speak their minds, for reasons that my students cannot seem to conjure.

My project here is to consider Seyla Benhabib's espousal of *deliberative democracy* as a provocative frame for (1) articulating the fundamental conditions necessary for egalitarian opportunity and participation in the college classroom and (2) challenging students to consider the deeper meanings and implications of their assumptions regarding identity, silence, and dialogue. As evidenced by students' comments, it seems that deliberation and democracy in American public education have somehow become debased to the level of "curious luxury" or "fanciful idealism." Thus, I seek to enliven a discussion about how we might better challenge students to consider and engage deliberation and democracy in the college classroom under the guise of preparing them for more democratic and dialogic considerations of their own imminent futures as citizens and possibly educators.

In preparation for initiating deliberative democracy in the college classroom, I will explore the groundwork I surmise may be necessary for educators to lay before expecting students to grapple with contested issues like voice, diversity, dialogue, deliberation, and democracy. I submit that before a deliberative democracy can be explored and enacted in the classroom, educators must first attend to the vulnerabilities, experiences, and socialization of students regarding what bell hooks identifies as "coming to voice." Having spent the better part of their educational careers being dictated to, directed, or simply ignored, many of my students seem to have little if any appreciation for what it means to speak their truth, offer their ideas, and genuinely listen to the thinking of others, beyond "being the loudest voice in the room" or "looking attentive." As hooks suggests, "coming to voice is not just the act of telling one's experience."[1] Rather, it is the complex mingling of exploring one's experiences and how they came about, considering other's experiences in relation to one's own, and engaging and grappling with what Bell describes as an ideal situation wherein "social actors…have a sense of their agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole."[2]

Ultimately, as I seek to enliven for my students what Benhabib means by deliberative democracy occurring as the result of a process, wherein "decisions affecting the well-being of a collectivity can be viewed as the outcome of a procedure of free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as *moral and political equals*,"[3] I advocate that the process of understanding and enacting this *procedure* is one that must be predicated on a new and different ontology of relationship. For me this means exploring, modeling, and supporting alternative ways of thinking and being in the classroom for both the educator and students. In her analysis and application of Michel Foucault to education, Gail Jardine suggests that power is embodied by each actor in the classroom. Thus, according to Jardine, it becomes incumbent upon the educator who cares about students and issues of justice to facilitate awareness, consideration and analysis of the different ways that each actor within the classroom might resist the disciplining, normalizing, and objectifying effects of certain educational practices.[4] Against the backdrop of Benhabib's deliberative democra*cy*, I hope then to provide a clear justification for what I view as imperative to considering (1) the work of the educator as an agent in the *resocialization* of students toward the end of a more participatory democracy, (2) power and resistance for educators and students as important antecedents to this *resocialization*, and (3) a "celebration of the other" as relevant and vital in the myriad conversations that enliven a strong and robust deliberative democracy.

Benhabib's Deliberative Democracy

For Benhabib deliberative democracy requires the conditions of "egalitarian reciprocity, voluntary self-ascription, and freedom of exit and

association." Essentially, Benhabib is advocating for equal access to resources and the equitable treatment of those groups identified as subgroups/minority groups, in relation to the dominant group/majority in a culture; the right of individuals to self-identify themselves, even as that identification might transcend the boundaries of a state-defined/recognized or even group-defined/recognized identity; and, the individual's enjoyment of the freedom to associate with or leave the group into which they were born, or possibly forced to ascribe to, at their whim. Benhabib supports the public autonomy of the individual within a constitutional democracy, and she maintains that dialogue about public issues must be open and not limited to a political arena or agenda, for example, wherein strict boundaries exist around who can speak, how, for whom, and when.[5]

According to Benhabib, "Deliberative democracy sees the free public sphere of civil society as the principal arena for the articulation, contestation, and resolution of normative discourses."[6] Though Benhabib is clearly addressing the realization of an open agenda for public reasoning and civic debate between individuals, social movements, and social institutions on a macro level, I suggest that we consider her deliberative model of democracy within the parameters of our micro-level classrooms by reflecting on how we might open the space for all to enjoy equal access to the processes and projects of the class in whatever ways are most supportive of the conditions Benhabib claims. I imagine that we might begin this process by first exploring how to redefine the intentions and realistic production of Benhabib's three conditions, and then acknowledging some of the parameters that exist around the larger institution of education and the power that it is perceived to wield.

For example, egalitarian reciprocity might be a viable option within the classroom if the educator is willing to open the space within it for students' input and ideas for change. Acknowledging that the teacher may still be the one with the institutionally-backed power to grade students, for example, it could be incumbent upon the teacher to explore with students a feasible alternative to the evaluative process. For example, she might invite students into the process itself by requesting that they submit their ideas and engage in a negotiation about what requirements must be met to receive a particular grade. As for *voluntary self-ascription*, this might be addressed by supporting students to distance themselves from the expectations and even identifications of their particular race, gender, familial orientation, for example, as they are willing, encouraging them to step into the shoes of an other without assuming that such a move will endow them with an intimate understanding of the plight of that other.

Regarding freedom of exit and association, as students generally do not have the benefit of walking out of the classroom, it might become the project of the class to creatively explore how such a condition could be enacted. Though literal exit may not be a realistic alternative, inviting and supporting students to experiment with different ways of disassociating from the normalizing effects

of their socialization might provide a provocative opportunity for their existential exit from certain ascribed associations. Additionally, supporting students to speak from their own unique experiences rather than as representatives of their particular identity group(s) might provide for the condition that they can leave those expectations and assumptions at the door as they choose. Ultimately then, by considering Benhabib's conditions for deliberative democracy in the micro-level sphere of the college classroom, I believe that we as educators engage and model the reconstitution of power dynamics as they exist and are generally perpetrated in the traditional, hierarchical and, one might argue, less democratic setting.

James Garrison suggests that "Diversity is the key to creative conversation." He goes on to confirm that "When we add different voices to the conversation the conditions of inquiry will be reconstructed."[7] In other words, when we adhere to strict boundaries of identification, we close off the richness of possibility; we submerge, as Benhabib describes, "the expression of one's unique identity" and the possibility for authentic resolve.[8] If we seek to explore, encourage, and give primacy to diversity within the college classroom, if we seek to entertain alternatives to "the way things have always been done," we are obliged to interrogate the social lessons that our students have learned to perpetrate regarding their own identities and alliances and investigate the normalizing effects that those lessons ultimately embolden. Thus, as no one individual should be expected to speak as a representative for their particular race, religion, gender or sexual orientation, for example, students' tendency toward generalization, both in speaking and listening, must be mined to discover the origination of their assumptions or expectations. This excavation of students' ideas, beliefs, and values requires that students be willing to risk parts of their identity amidst their peers and instructors. And though they may not consciously reveal or even understand the vulnerability that such an endeavor might engender, the teacher is compelled to address it if again a deliberative democracy is to emerge.

A New Ontology of Relationship

Prerequisite to co-creating a space wherein Benhabib's conditions for a deliberative democracy in the classroom might be realized, I offer that attention to students' vulnerability must take place. Too many students come into our classrooms espousing what they believe to be universal truths about others' motivations and actions in the world (for instance, why others are silent in class). I surmise that partly students have been socialized over time to dismiss their emotional connections to ideologies like democracy and responsible citizenship, for example, and thus are unable to bear witness to the relational nature of these ideals.

Ellen Brantlinger explores socialization in the context of the effects of class-based stratification on the involvement of parents in their children's education and the actual education that children in various class-based

categories receive. Speaking directly to the organization and power of the middle class, Brantlinger argues that "both social inequities and social hierarchies result from the personal intention and design of the dominant class." She goes on to say pointedly that "the educated middle class, who are primarily in control of schooling, whether consciously or not, consistently arrange school structures to benefit children of their class." The middle class, in other words, according to Brantlinger, represents the dominant group in the sphere of public education, the people with the perceived power to change, control, and even coerce others toward the end of securing the success of their own children, even if that is at the expense of other children's access to opportunities for success. The middle class, then, represents the people with the loudest voices in the room, the people with the ideas that ultimately control and even stifle the thoughts, emotions, behavior, and motivations of those who are deemed "below them."[9]

It is this kind of socialization that I believe ultimately leads some of our students to believe that they are "entitled" to take up as much space as they desire to articulate their points of view.[10] These are the students who generally interrupt others, talk for extended periods of time, directly judge the ideas, responses, or questions of their peers with comments like "that makes no sense," "you don't understand," or "don't get so emotional," or who believe that they are speaking for large segments of society. Their sense of "otherness" is supported by an ontology of rugged individualism and personal success. They do not need to recognize *an* other because the other is responsible for him or herself. Hence, they perpetrate what they have been socialized to believe: that they must compete to win, that emotions are trivial, and that reciprocal relationships in the academic arena are inappropriate and in fact, futile.

Additionally, as many students are domesticated around the capitalist ideals (which have seemingly become confused with democratic ideals) of competition, hard work, and meritocracy, they have been equally socialized to interpret, accept, and translate these same ideals to their role as "student." They are continually guided by traditional modes of thinking and being that serve to normalize these ideals and reinforce compliance to them with directives like "follow the rules," "do as you are told," and "don't take it so personally." Further, they have been trained to expect that those in power (like the teacher) are the presenters of an agenda and the evaluators of their performance. Thus, in relation to their teachers, students have learned to seek social indexes or cues for what they are supposed to get out of the class, relying on the teacher to identify for them what is important and "what will be on the test." Finally, for many, the social index or cue most often associated with "the good student" and applauded by educators and parents as a show of genuine academic prowess is the initiative taken by the student who speaks up and dominates the class with his questions and exemplary inquisitiveness.

DISCIPLINARY ACTS OF POWER

One response to students' behavior in the classroom, whether it is motivated by a sense of perceived entitlement or emerges from socialized conceptions of what it means to be a student, is to see the challenges of such behaviors as creating opportunities for introducing more content to the academic project of the class. In my early years of teaching I viewed the sexism of a student, for example, as ample reason to redress what I witnessed as inequity in the classroom by showing a film like *Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising's Image of Women*.[11] My intentions were to broaden my students' awareness of the exploitive attitudes which diminish and objectify women in American culture. By sharing this example, I do not contend that such mediums or tools are not useful. What I do offer is that though such a move certainly promoted the transmission of important information and context, by choosing this curricular response as a redress to what I perceived as one student's expression of sexism, I missed the opportunity to model a relational and deliberative stance with all students.

Giroux suggests that such a move subverts our own best intentions by "employing a pedagogy that is part of the very dominant logic" we seek to challenge.[12] Instead of deliberating about the originations of students' notions, facilitating a discussion about their feelings and reactions, and modeling curiosity and compassion toward the student making his claims (and the students having to listen), I ignored and dismissed the relational possibilities for the class. I perpetrated what Foucault might identify as "docile bodies" within the confines of the classroom, utilizing my "disciplinary power" over my students so that they might do what I wished for them to do: to "get" that our culture promotes consumption at the expense of women's dignity and humanity without first exploring the personal and emotional nature of their experiences and socialized understandings.[13] Responding to my own normalized assumptions about what it means to be a "good teacher" and exerting well-rehearsed disciplinary acts of power to educate students to the injustices of their comments and beliefs, I reproduced and fortified the same dynamics that I was intent on dismantling. My response was a monological[14] move meant to direct my students toward a cognitive consideration of injustice at the expense of acknowledging their discomfort and the possibility for modeling a new ontology of relationship between them, myself, and the content of our project in the classroom.

We educators have historically been compelled to envision and enact rational intellectual discourses in our classrooms by providing supplemental content to our students about theories, trends, ideas, and questions relevant to whatever topic we are investigating. Certainly this is the essence of academic pursuit and exemplary of what Foucault refers to as the *objectifying* nature of education.[15] I believe, however, that before we can begin to facilitate a spirited scholarly interrogation of complicated and complex analytic issues and enliven

a deliberative democracy with our students, before we can disrupt the normalized sets of assumptions that our students have come to embody and endorse, we must acknowledge and affirm the affective components of students' personal experiences. We must frame our endeavor as a *process* wherein our primary concern regarding students' experiences of respect, equality, and reciprocity in the classroom means that we help them to approach what is ultimately complicated and contested terrain, what Garrison identifies as a "state of disturbed equilibration,"[16] with navigation tools that will enhance and liberate their intellectual understanding and mediate their embrace of an atmosphere that is filled with and can support trust, discomfort, and compromise.

Celebrating the Other

In order that a genuine deliberative democracy might ensue in the classroom, students must be supported to explore their own affective responses to such a project and then be encouraged to grapple with a certain "celebration of the other." I do not mean by this that students be asked or required to applaud all of the contributions of their peers or that they work toward a consensus of ideas in the classroom. Such behavior in my mind would only serve as permission for students to perpetuate an inauthentic politeness or political correctness in the classroom.[17] Rather, I suggest, with Garrison, that we openly acknowledge the disruption that we seek to infuse.[18] Understanding the ideas, plights, pursuits, and questions of those whom we witness as other-than-ourselves emerges when we openly converse about our experiences and stridently work to hear what is challenging and even disdainful to our central worldview. This process, according to Garrison, of "disrupting our culturally conditioned habits of conduct" ultimately "throws us into openness and leads us to inquire."[19] It is this openness, publicness, and attention to what is "verbal, nonverbal, symbolic and written"[20] in our conversations that lays the foundation for a celebration of another, in the sense of recognition, support, and a new ontology of relationship.

Returning to Brantlinger, considering a plan of action that might celebrate the other as relevant and vital in the myriad conversations within our classrooms means challenging the idea of meritocracy and enlivening a dialogue about how to "create places with a lively intellectual climate in which students consider the issues and develop the competencies to sustain a democracy and decent life on the planet." To do this Brantlinger offers her "ethics of social reciprocity." Specifically, she champions an ethic "based on seeing others as being as valuable as self and in which one's actions toward others are consistent with the way one wants to be treated."[21] Ultimately, she is advocating for an ethic wherein all individuals are respected as unique with diverse views and important qualities, is aware of and open to those outside of themselves, and reach out to communicate with one another. hooks similarly addresses this notion of reciprocity, adding that it is the teacher's work that

might "serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning."[22] Benhabib similarly incorporates this ethic into the fundamental conditions of her deliberative democracy, citing equal access and treatment for all groups to the resources that exist within the shared space of community as representative of her notion of egalitarian reciprocity.

<div align="center">LISTENING AS RESISTANCE</div>

What I am ultimately suggesting with regard to enacting Benhabib's notion of deliberative democracy in the college classroom and "celebrating the other"[23] is that we as educators seek to explore and formulate our pedagogy in such a way that we invite, encourage, and support the interrogation of students' vulnerabilities and socialized tendencies; that we engage the whole student, including those parts that might initially seem divisive and startling; and that we challenge students' ideas and questions, making complicated their taken-for-granted notions about the world.

Paulo Freire proposes that we do this by approaching students and their concerns with openness and good intention, and engage them in their space and their time. He advocates meeting students where they are, engaging what they are interested in, and facilitating a discourse about concerns and interests. For Freire this encounter/engagement is manifested through dialogue and cannot exist without a profound love for the world and people, humility, faith in humankind to create and transform the world, a horizontal relationship of mutual trust, hope, and the willingness to engage in critical thinking.[24]

In *Pedagogy of Freedom* Freire articulates a clear vision of his dialogue and how it would be enacted:

> Whoever has something worth saying has also the right and the duty to say it. Conversely, it is also obvious that those who have something to say should know that they are not the only ones with ideas and opinions that need to be expressed. Even more than that, they should be conscious that, no matter how important the issue, their opinion probably will not be the one truth long and anxiously awaited for by the multitudes. In addition, they should be aware that the person listening also has something to say and that if this is not taken into account, their talking, no matter how correct and convincing, will not fall on receptive ears.[25]

What is apparent and relevant here is Freire's emphasis on mutual respect and listening.[26] Freire passionately promotes the presence of understanding and active listening in his conceptualization of dialogue. For him the purpose of dialogue is to help the dialoguers better understand one another's ideas regarding the "political, economic, and social forces that have shaped their lives."[27] As adults, we have particular perspectives that have been shaped by our personal and cultural biographies. Some of us, according to Freire, might

indeed have cultivated and enjoy a certain critical consciousness about and engagement with our world, and yet our project in working with students must be to remain "open-minded and sensitive to the way" students interpret their reality and their place within it, modeling for them a component of the new ontology of relationship to which I referred earlier: listening.[28] This does not mean that we are necessarily neutral in our dialogues with students. Rather, we are facilitative of their curiosity, compassion, and concern for the process of turning monologues into dialogues, striving to understand the meaning of others' experiences on their terms,[29] and pursuing an ethic of reciprocity that not only celebrates but places precedence on the vitality of diversity and difference. For Freire, this facilitation is how we manifest our authentic love for students, by encouraging and supporting *their* knowledge and understanding about *their* life projects. I submit that this may also be how we as educators might begin to explore our roles in modeling resistance to the traditional modes of thinking and being in the classroom, ultimately resocializing students to be curious and compassionate toward others' knowledge and others' life projects as we reconstitute the relational nature of our interactions in the classroom.

Conclusion

Voice, diversity, dialogue, deliberation and democracy: discussing, engaging, and enacting these things does not come easily for most people socialized in the Western tradition of communication. Too often dictation, and ultimately encapsulation, are the preferred modes of imparting information and decision making, especially regarding the academic arena. In addition, it is also often the case that as change occurs incrementally and generally at the whim of those in power, those with less power are expected to "be flexible" and "go along with" the decisions made by those with a certain perceived power, as possibly exhibited through "voice." So, if we seek to create an atmosphere wherein students feel a part of and empowered by their academic community, wherein they might experiment with and enjoy the conditions of egalitarian reciprocity, voluntary self-ascription, and freedom of exit and association explicated by Benhabib, we as educators need to understand what I have described elsewhere as "the underlying cadence of anxiety that thumps within each of our students"[30] in response to something seemingly unorthodox and foreign. If we are not cognizant of this, then any attempt to facilitate an atmosphere wherein deliberative democracy might become the norm will simply agitate the overall gestalt of the students involved to the detriment of their potential engagement with genuinely dialogic relationships.

Similarly, if as educators we are committing ourselves to dialogic relationships in our classrooms, if we are seeking to explore and engender a more holistic and deliberative approach to our work with students, then we must realize that we are ultimately committing ourselves to honest and authentic interaction, resisting the traditional arrangement of those classrooms.

For example, if we intend to challenge the ways students have been socialized to learn and contribute to society, we need to affirm for them that their anxiety and lack of understanding of that process is both important to us and absolutely reasonable. We must acknowledge that the compartmentalization of emotion, cognition, and action, and the distinct separation of content from process, ultimately contribute to the fragmentation of student power. As Angela Hurley suggested in response to Rosalie Romano's Presidential Address (in this volume), "thought and feeling are not polar opposites…emotion is power."

Finally, by adhering to a deliberative democratic format in our classes, we are responsible for helping our students ratify the relationships between one another, theory and practice, emotion and cognition, reflection and action, as well as the transference and relevance of their experiences in the classroom to their everyday lives. It is my own hope that by helping my own students to experience and enact this process within the democratic and dialogic boundaries of our classroom that they will come to understand the social imperative of their deliberative and active participation within our shared democracy.

NOTES

1. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 148.

2. L.A. Bell, "Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education," in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*, eds. M.A. Adams, L.A. Bell, and Pat Griffin (New York: Routledge. 1997), 3.

3. Seyla Benhabib, *Claims of Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 105 (emphasis added).

4. Gail McNicol Jardine, *Foucault and Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 7.

5. Benhabib, *Claims of Culture*, 19–20.

6. Ibid., 115.

7. Jim Garrison, "A Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening," *Educational Theory* 46, no. 4 (1996): 429–51.

8. Benhabib, *Claims of Culture*, 52.

9. Ellen Brantlinger, *Dividing Classes: How the Middle Class Negotiates and Rationalizes School Advantage* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003), 189.

10. For a more comprehensive discussion of "entitlement" the reader is referred to Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), wherein Lareau explores the resulting sense of *entitlement* children seem to embody from the *concerted cultivation* of life skills by middle-class parents.

11. *Still Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising's Image of Women*, directed by Jean Kilbourne (Northampton, Mass.: Media Education Foundation, 2000).

12. Henry Giroux, *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life: Democracy's Promise and Education's Challenge* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005).

13. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

14. Rosalie Romano, *Forging an Educative Community: The Wisdom of Love, the Power of Understanding and the Terror of It All* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

15. Jardine, *Foucault and Education*, 8.

16. Garrison, "Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening," 450.

17. Susanne de Castell, "No Speech Is Free: Affirmative Action and the Politics of Give and Take," in *Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silence,* ed. Megan Boler (New York: Peter Lang, 2004): 51-56.

18. Garrison, "Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening," 444.

19. Ibid., 444.

20. Edward Sampson, *Celebrating the Other: A Dialogic Account of Human Nature*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 97.

21. Brantlinger, *Dividing Classes*, 191.

22. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 11.

23. Sampson, *Celebrating the Other.*

24. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 70–73.

25. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage* (Lanham, M.D.: Rowan and Littlefield, 1998).

26. The reader is advised to consider Garrison's "essential nature of democratic listening" as a compliment to Freire's *dialogue* here. I believe his analyses of "risk" and the "dangerousness" of listening offer important and necessary insights into a holistic understanding of dialogue and the power of relationship in the classroom. Garrison, "Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening."

27. Joel Spring, *Wheels in the Head: Educational Philosophies of Authority, Freedom, and Culture from Socrates to Human Rights* (Boston: McGraw-Hill College, 1999).

28. Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 119 and 78.

29. Garrison, "Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening," 433.

30. Julia G. Brooks and Karen Hulse, "Learning as a Collective Witnessing: The Emotional Journey of Becoming a Study Group" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Graduate Student Conference in Philosophy of Education, Toronto, Canada, October 14, 2006).