

Practicing Resistance and the Struggle Over Power as Democratic Citizenship

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Abstract: Teaching democratic citizenship has never been more vital, particularly given the dismissive attitude and direct attempts to undermine democratic institutions exemplified by the Trump administration. In addition, traditional approaches to teaching citizenship foreground the underlying values of self-governance, knowledge of the different branches of government, and the skills for behaving within this system (i.e., voting) but lack a broader intellectual framework to guide those actions (Parker, Teaching democracy: Unity and diversity in public life, 2003). Parker, a critical multicultural educator, argued that this approach has rendered participatory citizenship superfluous and ignores more central concerns, namely, how people can live together justly while honoring their multiple individual and group identities (i.e., gender, race, class, religion, etc.). This essay focuses on the task of living together justly and offers one example of how this might be promoted through the communication studies curriculum.

Keywords: pedagogy, democratic citizenship, community, resistance.

The guiding question of this special issue is how to teach around polarizing topics. I begin with the ways that educators work to establish a community of learners within the classroom space itself. A group of 20–30 people of varying ages, from different backgrounds, representing diverse identities, with different motivations and goals for being in the space are the raw ingredients for a classroom community, but those must be combined in some way to form a coherent public body. In my teaching practice, I have endeavored to use relationships grounded in care and concern for each other as the recurring theme or relational binding that functions to hold us together for the term.¹ Another reason to form a classroom community relates to the disconnect students oftentimes feel between what they are learning in the classroom and how it connects to their lives outside of class, in the “real world.” Smith et al. (2010) argued that citizenship education must include more abstract qualities, such as “learning to become more comfortable with ambiguity and complexity, how to disagree without being disagreeable, and ... how to be more empathetic” (p. 2), that every discipline can contribute to this goal, and that such efforts prepare students for lives as engaged citizens. These abstract qualities, and the methods employed to teach them, serve the added goal of connecting course material to lived experience, offering students clear connections between content and practice. It should also be noted that this type of pedagogy is an explicitly political project. Giroux (2005) explained that:

Pedagogy has a relationship to social change in that it should not only help students frame their sense of understanding, imagination, and knowledge within a wider sense of history, politics, and democracy but should also enable them to recognize that they can do something to alleviate human suffering. (p. 83)

¹ My philosophy of teaching practice has developed over the years as a result of engagement with multiple strands of critical pedagogical theory. Specific to the concept of creating a classroom space grounded in relationships of concern for each other within an ethic of care, see Gilligan (1993) and Noddings (2013); for the feminist classroom, see Maher and Tetrault (1994); for teaching how to be a community, see hooks (2003), and for critical feminist communication pedagogy, see Sanford and Emami (2018).

Working in this vein, my goals in engaging students with the material in our course were to build a learning community through which we could address the compelling and urgent issues of our time—the moment of suffering we were experiencing together.

This brings me to the specific course experience that is the subject of this reflective essay, and one that came from teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, after a summer of Black Lives Matter protests and social unrest, and during an election year. Communication is the central means for creating, contesting, and reconfiguring structural forms of power relations among social groups, and this class focused on power dynamics and imbalances across social institutions. Students engaged the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony to consider how people struggle and compete over definitions of reality so as to maintain, resist, and transform persistent inequalities of power and disproportionate distribution of cultural and political capital. Offered against the backdrop of racial justice movements and a worldwide pandemic, the Resistance, Struggle & Power course dealt with themes prevalent globally as well as locally, and we used our time together to craft responses that engaged our campus community. The balance of this essay provides anchoring in multicultural education literature, then describes how students engaged in participatory citizenship (organizing, dissent, public action) in response to high-profile racist incidents, and closes with what lessons can be drawn from this experience, because, as Dewey (1916/1997) explained, “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communication experience” (p. 87).

Teaching Democracy and Citizenship

Starting with Dewey grounds preparation for democratic citizenship squarely within public education, for how can we, as citizens of the United States, realize the participatory governance enshrined in our guiding documents without an informed polis? Dewey’s work laid out a set of arguments for a scaffolded approach to civic education that has since been expanded and updated for succeeding generations. Walter C. Parker (2003) elaborated on critical multicultural approaches to teaching democracy that take into account unity and diversity in public life, arguing that a balance of both is needed to maintain a healthy democratic sphere. His work offers insights that are translatable to higher education and worthy of surveying as a guide for making pedagogical choices when teaching citizenship at the college level.

Parker’s (2003) main argument was that *e pluribus unum* has been misinterpreted as moving *from* the many to one in ways that overwhelmingly favor, or force, assimilation (the cultural melting pot approach), when one should really be examining the tension between the two. He offered, instead, a view that foregrounds political oneness *alongside* social and cultural many-ness. By this, he meant the plurality of social and cultural groups that make up the unified democratic body, the chorus of interests, perspectives, and needs of different groups deliberating among themselves about how to live together justly. He continued by advancing three ideas about democracy that ought to guide educational efforts: participation, path, and pluralism. First, participation in democracy, he asserted, requires enlightened political engagement, or “wise participation in public affairs,” which goes beyond simple constructions of citizens as taxpayers, or civic action as merely voting (Parker, 2003, p. 33). Second, he argued that people need to think of democracy as a path or journey that they are on together, a way of being with each other that is an accomplishment in itself more than any specific destination (p. 20). Third, people need to actually embrace pluralism as central to a vibrant democracy, complete with the voices of many who have been marginalized and oppressed, of those who were left out of the framer’s original conception of plurality, which was operationalized as “differences in opinion” between a single group of property-owning White males (p. 17).

From this brief introduction, one can see that Parker is advocating a clearly articulated approach to teaching students how to become citizens of a modern liberal democratic state. Unfortunately, this approach does not appear to reflect the current state of civic society in the United States, which is moving toward greater polarization and away from truth, fairness, and facts (Cillizza, 2021). The Capitol riot of January 6, 2021 is a stark reminder of how fragile democracy is when thousands of violent insurrectionists can swarm the joint chambers of Congress while they are certifying the votes from a free and fair election. The fact that they failed to stop that process or overturn the election was not a victory for democracy but rather a clarion call for greater education in democratic citizenship and the values that undergird this approach to government.

Education for citizenship is the hallmark of a liberal education. However, this purpose is not universally accepted as a social good, especially when people cannot agree on what content should be included (see Kingkade, 2021; Trent, 2021), and most especially under neoliberal capitalism with its emphasis on hyperindividuation and market logics:

Neoliberalism emphasizes individualism and the “privatization” of responsibility through interpellation of people as individual entrepreneurs of their own selves. People are framed as solely responsible for their own outcomes and positioned as free of responsibility to others and to what might be considered a community or “public good.” (Tomlinson & Lipsitz, 2013, p. 8)

Key to understanding the current highly polarized social-political moment in the United States is to realize that it is not new. It has been building for quite some time, and people are now harvesting the destructive crops sown by decades of neoliberal political and economic policy designed to subvert the common good in favor of privatized, individual gains (Tomlinson & Lipsitz, 2013). Giroux (2005) has called neoliberalism a public pedagogy that relies on the products of culture (i.e., television, film, advertising, video games, etc.) to reinforce its competitive, winner-take-all message. He named “neoliberalism as one of the most powerful antidemocratic ideologies now threatening both the idea and formation of a critically informed citizenry, a viable notion of social agency, and the idea of the university as a democratic public sphere” (p. 77). With this framework as a backdrop to the scholarship of teaching and learning, we as educators cannot ignore the ways in which our classroom spaces are imbricated with these logics and that students come into those spaces heavily, albeit largely unconsciously, influenced by them. Into this context, I offer a description of teaching a social-justice-oriented course concerned with the democratic principles of resistance and struggle in a pluralistic society.

Teaching Resistance and the Struggle Over Power

The fall semester of 2020, shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitated dramatic shifts in educational practice. Educators shifted from teaching in person to online and remotely, trying to maintain a sense of connection and community amidst uncertainty, fear, depression, and death. The U.S. presidential election of the same period was highly contentious and contested and helps characterize the tension that permeated the (digital) classroom and was intertwined with everything we read, discussed, and contemplated. In addition, the political climate on my mid-sized, private, religiously affiliated campus in the Pacific Northwest reflected the larger trends of the states the university draws its students from, encompassing liberal democratic, progressive, radical, conservative, religious, neoliberal, and libertarian ideologies. Notably, however, the guiding mission statement for this institution is grounded in the Catholic, humanistic tradition and emphasizes social justice and the preferential option to serve the poor and vulnerable. In many ways, this context mirrors the larger

national climate of democratic governance and citizenship grounded in the values of liberty and equality, but the best way to achieve these goals is hotly contested. As a microcosm of the larger system, this campus community offers a laboratory for enacting a citizenship curriculum and engaging polarizing issues.

The class itself was an upper division required course in the communication studies curriculum that is cross-listed with international studies and draws students from different disciplines. Our goals were to immerse ourselves in the multiple ongoing discourses of contestation and struggle that are endemic to human life. As social creatures, human beings both *create* the social structures we inhabit together and *disagree* over the nature, direction, and implementation of those structures. Communication is the meaning-making process through which people engage with others, hence it is also the central means for contesting and reconfiguring structural relations of power among social groups. This class focused particularly on power dynamics and imbalances within social institutions (i.e., law, education, religion, and media). Students engaged the concepts of hegemony (the production of consent for dominant power relationships) and counter-hegemony (the struggle against dominant social arrangements). The course invited students to consider how people struggle and compete over definitions of reality so as to maintain, resist, and transform persistent inequalities of power and disproportionate distribution of cultural and political capital. This course, with its focus on understanding contestation between the dominant power relationships and calls for reconstructing those relationships to be more equitable, was both timely and relevant.

Anti-Blackness on Display

We had two high-profile events of racial injustice on our campus during this term: The first was vandalization of a memorial art installation calling attention to the names of unarmed Black people killed in interactions with police; the second was a racially motivated Zoom bombing of a Black Student Union (BSU) meeting.

The renewed vigor of the Black Lives Matter movement continues to be a pivotal social-cultural moment highly relevant to the topic of citizenship education. The social media hashtag #SayTheirNames was circulating as a means of making present the absence of Black people (men, women, children, nonbinary, and LGBTQ+ individuals) who had been killed during interactions with police. The student affairs staff in the Unity Multi-Cultural Education Center (UMEC) devised a weeklong cocurricular art exhibit to memorialize these victims that could be held outdoors to accommodate pandemic social distancing and safety protocols. Working in collaboration with the UMEC, our Resistance, Struggle & Power class partnered to set up and cohost the installation for its connection to our course material and the enrichment of our campus community.

The installation represented only a portion of the names of those killed since 2009, but that number included 120 individuals whose names were printed on markers (8.5 × 11-inch sheets of laminated cardstock) and displayed on wooden stakes across the lawn in the center of campus. Coming as it did on the heels of a summer of protest across the country, the installation offered recognition of the times we are living through as well as an educational opportunity to engage with these events through the lens of multiple fields of study—philosophy, religious studies, history, political science, sociology, communication studies, critical race and ethnic studies, education—to name a few from our institutional context.

The day after the installation was assembled, it was vandalized when someone took the placard bearing George Floyd's name. Reactions to this act were visceral and immediate, particularly among students of color on our campus and the members of our class who had participated in constructing the exhibit. Word spread quickly among campus networks of students and across social media that the one sign taken from the display was the one bearing George Floyd's name and how that could not

have been accidental. The symbolism of his name on a placard at the front of the exhibit was intentional, placed along that first row with other notable and memorable names, Breonna Taylor, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, of people whose deaths had made headlines and whose names were regularly invoked at protest rallies and marches. To take this name was to make its own statement. We could not know for sure what the intent of that action was, but we could guess, and even more importantly, we could interpret the act using our course material, analytical thought processes, and disciplinary training. As a class, we worked to construct meaning from the event and the context together in community.

Important to note from the outset was that we did not all agree about the importance of the act of vandalism, what it meant, who might have perpetuated it, and whether a response was warranted. All of the students of color, feeling the weight of long histories of oppression and marginalization, read this act as a direct threat akin to other high-profile symbolic acts from previous moments (i.e., cross burning, nooses hanging from trees, etc.). Reactions among White students were mixed: Some aligned their perspectives with the students of color in the class, but others questioned the level of intention or were not convinced the goal was to threaten, harass, or terrorize. None of the students were surprised that the name taken was Floyd's. They were quick to declare that the removal of his name was guaranteed to send a very pointed message given the context, events of the summer, and ongoing protests. What that message was, however, was not entirely clear. One explanation asserted the name was taken to send a threatening message to Black students on campus that they are not welcome and should be on alert. Alternatively, another posed the vandalism was undertaken thoughtlessly by privileged students on our predominantly White campus who thought all of the Black Lives Matter rhetoric was overblown, or because it was making them uncomfortable or it challenged their presumed dominance and right to ignore the issue. The university president sent a lengthy message about how the act was not in line with the university's core values or the community that it seeks to be, and that the exhibit was a sacred space meant for mourning, reflection, and growth. Our class conversation provided ample room to explore how resistance, struggle, and power were at work within the movement broadly, particularly with respect to the ideologies of different perspectives, as well as strategies and tactics (de Certeau, 1984) for engaging in the arts of resistance (Scott, 1990). In this specific instance, we all agreed that the installation itself could be read as an assertion of power—taking up communal space with a display of names arranged in rows reminiscent of a graveyard that could not be ignored—or of resistance to the dominant narrative—that these people must have done something wrong to bring this violence on themselves—and, in either case, the exhibit became part of the larger struggle for social justice.

The second incident happened in November, on the Sunday following the election, the day after the results were finally called. The BSU was hosting their weekly meeting over Zoom. Shortly after it began, a number of anonymous people entered the meeting using alias screen names without showing their faces. When asked to identify themselves, the assailants began yelling racial and homophobic slurs, invectives, and threats at the BSU students while also posting hateful comments in the chat feature. One student used his cell phone to record the attack, which continued until the meeting host removed the attackers from the virtual space. The cell phone video of the attack was posted to the BSU Instagram account as well as the personal accounts of all of the students and word spread quickly. Shortly afterward, the university president issued a statement to the entire campus calling it a hate crime, denouncing the behavior as unacceptable for our academic community, and promising a full investigation as well as severe repercussions for the perpetrators.²

While none of the students in our class were present for this attack, they had seen the video and several were close friends with the students who were. Students of color felt traumatized and

² To date, even with the assistance of the local police and the FBI, the perpetrators have not been identified.

unsafe, many reporting they were scared to walk across campus, leave their rooms, or go to class. Because the individuals were unidentified, they could be anyone, and several students reported that they were afraid it was someone they could be sitting next to in a class or at the dining hall. White ally students were also frustrated and empathetic, using their voices to question what was being done to identify the perpetrators and how they would be punished. This second incident prompted more conversation in our class about the meaning and intent behind the attack. Unlike the previous incident, there were fewer interpretations to choose from. Given the nature of the behavior, the words that were spoken and posted, and the vitriol with which they were delivered, we concluded that there was no ambiguity to this message and that Black students were targeted to make them feel unwelcome and threatened. In an already tense and emotional semester, following an historic summer of protest and social movement and a contentious election with falsely disputed results, this hate crime ruptured the fabric of our campus community and demanded a response.

Project Resistance!

The final project for the Resistance, Struggle & Power course was always intended to be a creative engagement with a specific resistance movement. However, after the events of the year and those on campus targeting Black students, I narrowed the focus to engage specifically with the campus community through creative works designed to resist the oppression, marginalization, and abuse of Black students. Based on an Ignatian pedagogical model (Jesuit Institute, 2014) that moves from experience to reflection to action within a specific context, the assignment asked for students to first characterize the context, then articulate their own experiences within it, reflect on how their experiences were similar to or different from their peers', and devise a creative action that would speak to this context and set of events. Here, again, the students did not all agree on the severity of the issue, how to respond, what level of response was necessary, who to hold accountable, or where to direct their messages (outward to the rest of our campus community, or inward to the members of our class). The range of disagreement showed the ways in which the class was representative of the broader populace, and the development of a classroom community rooted in relationships provided ways to “disagree without being disagreeable” (Smith et al., 2010, p. 2).

To characterize the context, students explored the historical trajectory of events leading up to our present. This included a timeline from the webpage of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion marking significant events over the lifespan of the university. Two particular sections were most relevant for the class' purposes, the “Where We’ve Been” section, which highlighted other moments of rupture and change, and the “Where We’re Going” portion, which repeated the institution’s commitments to diversity, equity, inclusivity, and a safe, welcoming climate for all. The students reviewed the website created for the #SayTheirNames exhibit and read through the details provided about the deaths of all 120 people whose names were displayed (and many others), as well as the reactions to and reflections on the exhibit collected by the UMEC. They also analyzed all of the institutional messages regarding these events and the subsequent updates about both investigations, as well as attended a university Town Hall in response to the BSU attack. With these sources of public information and their social and personal resources (i.e., social media feeds, conversations with peers, other classes, etc.), students described the context within which they were conceiving a creative work.

I asked them to reflect on their own experience of our campus from their first impressions and early days on campus to the present. All had been on campus for 2–3 years, but each had unique experiences in that time. They were also prompted to think about how their embodied identities, social identity categories (i.e., race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, ability, etc.) and personalities contributed to their experiences. In particular, I asked them to think about where they have felt *included*, accepted, or comfortable (if anywhere), and with whom. I then asked them to consider *on what basis* they thought

they were made to feel included—because of social identity category, because of similarity in background, experience or interests, or by virtue of membership in a group, club, or sport. I also prompted them to think about when and where they may have felt *excluded* or uncomfortable, and on what basis they thought they were made to feel left out or unwelcome, and to estimate the approximate percentage of their time when they have felt included versus excluded (out of 100%), and to consider how each of their percentages would differ from their peers' and the potential reasons for those differences. Finally, I asked them to pinpoint where they had learned/heard the most about/been exposed to the experiences of other Black students on campus during their time here. This cataloguing of their lived experiences then provided fodder for them to engage in reflection and discernment.

The following prompts were provided to aid students in their reflective process with an eye toward helping them discern their course of action:

- Reflect on your experiences as a member of this community and the ways that you have navigated your time here. Consider how your experiences have differed from those of your peers from different racial groups.
- How does the *context* on this campus affect you/your experience of the university?
- How does the knowledge that everyone has differential experiences at the university based on their race impact your *understanding of self* (your identity in this space and at this time)?
- In what ways does this (new) understanding call you to action for the betterment of the whole community?

The final component was to develop an action, or set of actions, that is, changes in behavior or commitments that students would perform as a result of this educational process. Given the class' focus on ways to develop a communication response to the exclusionary and racist events of the semester and the exploration of various art forms as resistance, I asked students to develop a creative project that offered a response to the culture of exclusion that Black students experience on campus. The goals were to develop a space where they could speak back to an issue and develop a set of symbolic actions that project resistance against unwelcoming and racist behavior. Options we brainstormed included poetry, collage, music, creative writing, dance, graphic novel, script, or minidocumentary. In addition to the art piece itself, students submitted an explanatory artist statement that offered context and explanation for what they made as well as summarized the reflective thought process that led them to create this specific piece. Students were encouraged to work on this in pairs or small groups—community—and some of them did, but with so many of them in different places/time zones during our virtual semester, it was difficult for them to accomplish. We would have liked to host a large public gathering to display our works, but with pandemic restrictions making that impossible, we settled for a virtual community performance of the students' respective pieces.

This resulted in a stunning array of creative works that pulled from students' strengths in other areas as well as pushed them out of their comfort zones to try something new. From digital montage and concept boards to poetry, spoken word, and rap, to an original music score, a short screenplay, an interpretive dance, a board game, a spell book, some recipes, two short films, a painting, and several drawings, the students channeled their passion and experiences into symbolic actions that spoke loudly and clearly to the context and the moment. For example, a Black female student created a board game set on our campus that led the player through different buildings and social settings, offering insights into how the experience differed whether you were a Black student or a White one. A White female student created a calendar of daily educational activities that could be used as a 30-day module (or challenge) to increase antiracist awareness. A Black male student wrote a short play dramatizing the events of one weekend night for a pair of fictional Black brothers, one a star basketball player, the

other a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) student, and the biased stereotyping they endured. And a White male student created a digital “Resist-mas” tree using concept-mapping software that showcased a holiday tree complete with brightly colored ornaments that expanded with a click to reveal information, resources, and actions that could be taken to promote justice and liberation (red = resources for targeted students, blue = moments of activism, purple = places to donate/volunteer, etc.).

In addition to these examples were student works that took a different approach to campus inclusivity. Because we did not all agree on the framing of the problem that led to the racist and harassing behavior, some students were reluctant to create pieces speaking to systems and structures (in society and on campus) that resulted in marginalization of non-White students. The polarization of perspectives was most obvious in our discussions of how rhetoric and communication constructed and perpetuated these systems, with some students asserting that individual choices and behavior were solely to blame. Notably, we did not disagree on the fact that racism exists, but rather on how it is perpetuated. Unsurprisingly, students who experienced the most social support and privilege as a result of their social identity categories were the least likely to see these events as reflective of larger *structures* and more likely to see them as the behavior of bigoted and racist *individuals*. These differences led to the biggest points of tension as students created projects to address the situation. At this point, we returned to Parker’s (2003) argument that people understand their community as being characterized by participation, path, and plurality. Even though some students approached the project from different ideological stances on the problems, they were committed to participating in the overall project. This, in turn, put the class on the path to civic engagement and citizenship where students were learning how to be in relationship with each other even with their plurality of approaches.

Most notable in this category of projects was a decision tree created by a White male student that led the reader through a series of questions and responses to make decisions about participation with different people, organizations (or jobs), and social issues. Based on an if/then framework, the decision tree asked different questions to aid the reader in making decisions about forming relationships or getting involved. For instance, when considering whether to join an organization or take a job, the decision maker should ask if this group demonstrates political goals and moral values that they support. If so, they should continue to another question about whether it supports the varying identities they bring to the organization. If not, they should consider if they have the choice to say “no” to this organization or job. As the decision maker proceeds through the tree, there are articles, resources, and links to more information that can aid them in making their decision about whether to engage (or not) with people, organizations, or issues. This example focused narrowly on individual choices and actions (arguably a neoliberal approach), while at the same time incorporating theoretical literature and resources from the course content.

The class performance festival was necessarily limited to the virtual space, so students used the extended final exam period to perform and share their works. We also invited guests from across campus including the BSU, the student body association, members of the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion office, administration, and student affairs office, peers, and colleagues, some of whom were able to attend. The guests were invited to become members of the classroom community and were asked to hold the students’ vulnerability and disclosures with care as they shared their deeply reflective and highly personal work. Their responses were both humbling and gratifying. The president of the student body, a Black woman studying in the sciences, remarked that she did not think such a classroom space could exist on our campus, had not experienced anything like it in her 4 years, and thanked everyone for the care, thoughtfulness, and vulnerability they shared in their pieces. Another professor commended the students on the wide range of their pieces and noted how the medium and content reflected their positionalities and critical reflexivity about them. Students of color shared raw, painful examples of ways they had been marginalized, and White students offered insightful critiques

of their own experiences, noting how specific spaces and activities reinforced a White-dominant norm. As our time together came to an end, I asked the students how they wanted their work to circulate after our class was over. We knew we wanted it to be shared and that it had the potential to impact our campus culture. We decided on a digital zine that could accommodate the multimodal formats of our different projects and that could be linked and shared.³

Living Together Justly

Reflecting on this experience offers several things that might be relevant to a pedagogy of the polarized. Following Parker's (2003) model for teaching citizenship, we attempted to implement his three ideas for teaching democracy: pluralism, path, and participation. First, an emphasis on community and caring for one another within this pluralistic context enabled the students to engage deeply and respectfully around issues about which they did not agree. Foregrounding experience was pivotal to building understanding in this process as the students focused on sharing their experiences with different issues, listening to the experiences of others, and affirming all of the ways that they were experiencing the same events differently. To be part of a community means being invested in the experiences of others, and the students endeavored to showcase that investment through their speaking and listening practices. Second, I encouraged the students to approach citizenship as a way of life and a path traveled together. By incorporating both reflection and action, as the connection between course material, events, and responses, the students were attempting to engage wisely in public affairs. In this class, students were able to connect the theoretical content explaining resistance, struggle, and power to their lived experiences and campus context in order to practice it themselves through class discussions and the creation of their resistance project. Third, I encouraged the students to attempt to take popular sovereignty seriously, albeit minimally, to coconstruct symbolic responses to community events that impacted all of them differently. Although they were not a self-governing system, they worked as a group to decide how to engage in resistance (creatively through art), where and how to organize their response (through a virtual community performance), and what further actions they wanted to take (compiling their work to circulate after the class was over).

I offer this as one example for teaching students some of the principles of democratic citizenship and how to live together justly. Schools are the first public sphere that young people participate in outside of the home. College campuses are public spheres that bring students together from different locations and subjectivities to study and live together for extended periods of time. As such, they already include all of the elements of the larger society and operate as minicommunities that can benefit from concerted efforts to teach citizenship. This class involved students in practicing how to interpret events, share their experiences of them, and craft responses to them, all activities that they engaged in community as citizens of a specific space. The work consciously and carefully connected students' personal and civic lives, linking the curriculum to the "real world" outside of school and helping them practice what kind of citizens they wanted to be. Their unique projects reflected the plurality of ideological approaches they were taking to the work and how those were linked to their sense of identity, as privileged or marginalized, as dominant or nondominant. By locating the areas of agreement in their different perspectives, they were able to work from them toward the political oneness that Parker (2003) argued is necessary to fulfill *e pluribus unum* (from a plurality of approaches, a unity of political action).

While not a panacea for the issues educators face teaching during highly polarized times, this class was unique and powerful, situated as it was during an unprecedented semester. Events that had been polarizing the country for months came to our campus and closed the distance between what

³ As of this publication, that work is ongoing.

was happening “out there” and what was happening “in here,” and we as educators had to decide how to respond. For one class, one microcommunity, this entailed practicing being active, participatory citizens by building relationships, sharing experiences, being vulnerable and supportive, and directing energy toward a common cause. My hope is that, by reflecting on these experiences here, I have offered something that might be useful elsewhere.

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