

The Democratic Teacher and Culturally Relevant Cosmopolitanism

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Historically marginalized student groups continue to be the fastest growing populations in public schools, and the most discriminated. African American students, Hispanic students, and students who immigrate to the United States, are most likely to be students in poverty, labeled as students with disabilities, and are less likely to be included in general education classrooms, attend schools with sufficient resources, and interact with teachers qualified to meet their needs (Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is this notion of the "qualified" teacher that will be explored in this paper through the examination of cosmopolitanism as presented by Hansen (2011); underscored by the ideas of Freire (2002), hooks (2003), Ladson-Billings (2009), and others, that schools are formal institutions built on ethnocentric monoculturalism (Emdin, 2015). In this discussion of Hansen I posit that teachers embracing cosmopolitan views without acknowledging this reality, subvert chances for equal access to those students who are culturally different - non-White. Emergent themes in this critical analysis acknowledge that this subversion of denying access is undemocratic; showing cause to define the democratic teacher not only as a culturally relevant pedagogue, but more importantly, an active participant in subverting oppression.

Throughout *The Teacher and the World*, Hansen addresses both the challenges and opportunities of a globalized world, presenting cosmopolitanism as a philosophy of education that can provide teachers an anchor to the ideals of educating in uncertain and changing landscapes. Historically, a path is described that illustrates for teachers how to respond to a changing world creatively and with an accountability of ethics rather than in a reactive way:

Rather than becoming dogmatic or close-minded in response to pressure, or abandoning educational work outright, teachers can ready themselves, through a variety of exercises to make the world today a place of learning. This always unfinished process generates what the tradition describes as exercises or practices of the self. Such practices include deliberate ways of speaking, listening, interacting, reading, writing, and more which are at all times, arts in development since their aim is not serving the self but rather improving it. (p. 36)

It is the propensity to engage in these activities that gives rise to democracy (p. 122). Further discussion of schools as institutions where the democratic process can occur brings Dewey's (1916) fundamental emphasis of continued reconstruction of experience to bear.

Hansen connects cosmopolitan interaction to Dewey's democratic view of education in stating it does not require pre-established institutions but it does require a perspective of developing the habit of reflective, responsive, dynamic and expansive interchange between oneself and the world (Ibid).

Democracy Toward What End?

Drawing upon this idea of a democratic perspective for teachers, questions emerge: What purpose does education as 'institution' serve, and within it, what purpose does the teacher serve? The school as 'democratic institution' is necessary for providing a service to students. For Hansen, the services provided must be reviewed and adapted or modified to meet student needs, preferably by the teacher who is positioned best to do so (2015). The 'cosmopolitan' develops "her or his bent as fully as circumstances permit while also interacting richly and responsively with other people" (p. 133).

While one cannot disagree that these qualities should undoubtedly be encouraged in teachers, the challenge is to engage them past a philosophy of democratic teaching (for All people), toward fully embodying and enacting one of cultural relevance -teaching based on acknowledging diversity, and the planning and implementing of teaching, grounded in differences.

bell hooks (2003) describes democratic education as a commitment to "radical openness" (p. 48). She ascribes teachers with this vision as assuming learning is never confined solely to an institutionalized classroom, concurring with Hansen's cosmopolitan teacher embracing the 'concept' of a democratic education in seeing teaching and learning as taking place constantly. hooks, aligned to Freire (2002), expands upon his view to open the discourse to oppression; "We share the knowledge gleaned in classrooms beyond those settings thereby working to challenge the construction of certain forms of knowledge as always and only available to the elite" (p. 41). For hooks, (who openly admonishes the banking concept of education), democracy as institutionalized in schools is culturally relevant action administered through pedagogy, encouraging students to embrace the 'will' to explore different perspectives and change one's mind as new information is presented:

Throughout my career as a democratic educator I have known many brilliant students who seek education, who dream of serving in the cause of freedom, but are fundamentally dismayed because colleges and universities (schools) are structured in ways that dehumanize, that lead them away from the spirit of community in which they long to live their lives (culturally used to). They fail, they give up, drop out. (p. 48)

hook aligns with Hansen in depicting cosmopolitan values of teachers, which are found initially in her belief in the power of learning communities - those that value wholeness over division, where the democratic educator works to create closeness. Her quote from Palmer, depicts moving past Hansen's philosophy, calling for learning communities where creating closeness among students equates to "intimacy that does not annihilate difference" (p. 49).

Institutionalized Purpose

hooks addresses the harder questions of a teacher's purpose in institutionalized education, "As a teacher I forged with the individuals who, like myself, valued learning as an end itself and not as a means to reach another end, class mobility, power status" (p. 47). "We were the folks who knew that whether we were in an academic setting or not we would continue to study, to learn, to educate" (Ibid). Her memory of white male students (becoming) aware of their own privilege in her classroom, expressing their feelings of fear and uncertainty about giving up models of power, not only embodies democracy in freedom of belief, values, speech and teaching and learning; it recalls culturally relevant pedagogy in action. That hooks encouraged

the honest dialogue amongst her diverse students to remain open in the classroom space for white men to explore "the uncomfortable and hurtful realization of their own privilege and fear of what to do with the realization and their newly felt social capital" (p. 49), transitions the spirit of cosmopolitanism toward attending to healing and addressing localized hurts to "imagine and articulate what the positive outcomes of a pluralist (culturally relevant) approach might be" (Ibid).

hooks grounds the history of educational institutions as founded on principles of exclusion. She contends these institutions, founded on the values of white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, evolved from a distorted view of inclusion and diversity (p. 55). As the cosmopolitan teacher would agree, there are tremendous differences in communities ethnically, racially, religiously, sexually and by gender, but hooks argues that diversity only suggests the fact of such differences. Employing a culturally relevant pedagogy is a response to the fact of such differences; a commitment by the democratic teacher to communicate with and relate to the larger world, while not shying away from discourse that suggests students should no longer uphold dominator culture (p. 47).

This depiction by hooks of her classroom's safety and discourse illustrates the need to address national equity prior to or at least, alongside, any discussion of democratic behavior in a globalized world. The "realty politics" of national agendas along race, gender, sexuality, and culture cannot hide under a cosmopolitan framework if that is to succeed (Emdin, p. 25, 2015). In his work, Emdin deals with "cynical cosmopolitanism, interest convergence, and one-on-one dialogue" (p. 18). He cautions:

When enacted by a person deeply allied to a particular faction within a structure, the claim to exhibit cosmopolitan behavior may become jumbled with a condescending and patronizing undercurrent that is focused on tolerance rather than a critical, deconstructive and ultimately transgressive relationship with the other. (p. 19)

Relating to the "Real" World

Emdin recollects how reality politics played out in his childhood classrooms as a black male: teachers of color with white supremacist ideologies, black teachers that bought into the idea that urban youth of color are inherently violent or anti-academic, and a favorite teacher who "understood him, and when she didn't understand me, she made an effort to try and understand me" (p. 20). He goes further in remembering many other teachers who were not so amazing and would take his sense of humor, or other expressions of his cultural identity and perceive that as him not being interested in what was going on in school or being purposefully disruptive (Ibid).

What does this have to do with Hansen? It aligns with the feeling of needing to belong to a larger community - to step out of one's own limited view and search for meanings even in our differences. Emdin likens involvement in gangs to this, "They give members responsibility, make their members feel like they're part of a family - a unit that will protect them. They give members a sense of cosmopolitanism, or make them feel they're valued citizens of a larger community" (p. 19).

Emdin, who spent years as a K-12 science and math teacher in underprivileged areas, pushes teachers to look deeply at where they are and who their students are in that space, as global citizens with local addresses and localized issues. His view of cosmopolitanism has teachers reproducing the energy kids feed off from gangs, in the classroom. In true democratic fashion, he wants not only teachers but kids to feel like they are responsible for each other's learning (p. 21). Ultimately, cosmopolitanism for Emdin is brought down to culturally relevant pedagogy at its most localized, human element, "I want them to have a secret handshake. I want them to feel like they have their own special name. I want them to feel like the classroom wouldn't run or operate without them" (Ibid).

In looking at cosmopolitanism and the ways it affects the work of teachers it is important to realize that functioning with the broad notions of the concept in mind without seeking to explore the possibilities it opens and the complexities inherent to its implementation, oversimplifies everyday life and threatens to devalue the lived experiences of the most marginalized students (Emdin, 2015). Like Hansen, Emdin's philosophy is underscored by the premise that we all belong to a single human community which allows for equitable practice, yet his work is further nuanced to include disclaimers against pronouncing acts or attitudes of friendship, and camaraderie as automatic engagement in a "cosmopolitan ethos" (p. 18). Misreading the ability to engage in a one-on-one, co-generative dialogue as the enactment of cosmopolitanism, is problematic if the goal is to impose a viewpoint, convert, or enlighten the 'other' (Emdin, p. 21). The real work in classrooms, e.g., the honest discourse that included the white males in the classroom of hooks, requires what Emdin refers to as the act of extending a hand to the 'other' even though one is perceived not to "deserve these graces" (Ibid). Both hooks and Emdin conjure up Freire's *conscientizacao*, as teachers who embrace the spirit of making it possible for all students to enter a historical process as responsible 'Subjects' in dealing with injustice (Freire, p. 36).

Beyond Cultural Relevance

How do teachers frame cultural relevance in their pedagogy without the over- simplification of its tenets? Ladson-Billings, in offering context to the question, "Does culture matter?" states that culturally relevant teaching uses student culture to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture; "The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one's history, culture, or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture, or background distorted" (p. 110). For Ladson- billings, the primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to assist in the development of a "relevant black or other personality" that allows African American students or other to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African American culture (Ibid).

Ladson-billings deconstructs the notion of cultural relevance as moving beyond language and ventures into the realm of the multicultural/intercultural debate (Meer, Modood, and Zapata- Barrero, 2016). Ladson-billings, a proponent of interculturalism, reviewed classroom programs and strategies demonstrating a level of effectiveness with African American students: 1) those designed to remediate or accelerate without attending to the students' social or cultural needs (including all issues of language), 2) those designed to re-socialize African American students to mainstream behaviors, values, and attitudes at the same time they teach basic skills, and 3) those designed to facilitate student learning by capitalizing on the students' own social and cultural backgrounds (Ladson-billings, p. 16). She commented on findings suggested by Cummins:

Cummins suggests that students are less likely to fail in school settings where they feel positive about both their own culture and the majority culture and are not alienated from their own cultural values. Teachers need to be transparent with themselves about what the majority culture controls in a given classroom - homework policies, rules of penmanship, how work can be assessed or how tasks can be completed by students (can they offer different ways of organizing or showing their work to receive the same evaluation criterion?) Just integrating students into a class does not equate to culturally relevant teaching. (p. 12)

If not culturally relevant teaching, what does integration equate to in teaching? Hansen defines the lens through which teaching other cultures is viewed, as democratic and political. Rasheed (2015) elaborates, "the social equality framework underlying democratic processes creates space for the universal adaptation of norms of mutual respect and hospitality," (p. 104). Ladson-billings gives examples of school-based programs that were the antithesis of social equity, proudly espousing multiculturalism as foundational components. An example of one such program was, *A Social Skills Curriculum for Inner-City Children*, implemented in northeast urban centers in the 1980s and 1990s (Ladson-billings, p. 10). This program's explicit goal was to "re-socialize youngsters viewed as outside the mainstream and to inculcate in them mainstream perceptions and behaviors" (p. 13).

The philosophy behind such programs resembles that of the compensatory educational models of the 1960s and 1970s in that children's academic problems are seen to be rooted in the "pathology" of their homes, communities and cultures (Ibid). Under the auspices of a multicultural curriculum, programs like this attempted to capitalize on students' individual, group, and cultural differences. The lesson here is that for a cosmopolitan teacher enacting truly democratic teaching, a distinction must be made - an overt focus on differences is not the problem so long as strategies, routines and procedures are designed to value them - not capitalize on them for one's own benefit. Once differences are valued, then true democracy can exist and be built upon by teachers and all students.

Shifting the Paradigm

A cosmopolitan orientation encourages teachers and students alike to move from listening to others to listening *with* others; constituting the road to tolerance (Hansen, p. 115). Hansen illuminates the importance of this - "Cosmopolitanism as education encourages listening *with* others: an imaginative, aesthetic exercise of trying to see the world as they do, to try to grasp the underlying values, beliefs, and aspirations that inform their ways of looking and knowing" (p. 116). Bronfenbrenner pushes this ideology further in offering a bioecological perspective on human development.

From his premise, Bronfenbrenner concludes, "all persons live in the same world and all develop modes of perception" that we (the world) must get past with intentionality; we must understand the historical, emotional, intellectual implications of culture and cognition so that as teachers we make ethically responsible choices about curriculum, and teaching and learning strategies (Bronfenbrenner, p. 109). In probable agreement, Hansen says that persons see the same world differently depending on their upbringing, experience, and concerns.

As stated previously, for Hansen, to listen with others is to try to discern their response to being in the same world. Related to Bronfenbrenner, this orientation pushes beyond tolerance –

a posture in which one can listen to others without being affected by the experience - into the realm of formative learning, in which who and what "I" am comes into play - "I" open myself to being influenced by "my" encounters (p. 118).

From a privileged perspective, these, seen as skills and not merely for observing the world or getting along in it, allow the teacher who is willing to recognize ownership of them and to purposely employ them - to practice vulnerability. If students can learn that in dissecting a sentence, solving an equation, conducting an experiment, training for a sport or composing music, what is gained are not merely technical skills, but an expanding orientation toward the world through the vulnerable interchange with a teacher, their world becomes *the* world - or dominant paradigm - through which they feel valued and validated, and learn to value and validate themselves and others (p. 120).

In examining scientific conceptions of the developing person from Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, one is struck by his observations that the overwhelming majority of these conceptions are context free; the characteristics of a person are defined, both conceptually and operationally, without any reference to the environment and are presumed to have the same meaning irrespective of the culture, class, or setting in which they are observed or in which the person lives (p. 111). Most scientific conceptions and measures of cognitive capacities are characterized by an underlying assumption that the abilities in question operate in a Piagetian sense and are invariant across place and time. They are presumed to have the same psychological significance irrespective of social structure, culture, or historical era. This assumption characterizes a wide range of measures, including objective tests of intelligence, academic achievement, and personality (Ibid).

Bronfenbrenner's view forces teachers to critically examine the implications of cultural relevance, challenging them to shift to a broader identification of culture as scientific in applying it to the study of human development, and to their work with students in classrooms. It is this call to a shift in paradigm that unites Hansen not only to Bronfenbrenner but Freire, hooks, Emdin and Rasheed. Hansen, commenting on the current world order states, "It is a 'fantastic phenomenon,' the way mankind has been reduced to human capital and how globalization emphasizes economic life over the rest of human life with a premium on production" (p. 42). If education can come from a cosmopolitan perspective embedded in the frameworks of social equity (Rasheed, 2015) and political reality (Emdin, 2016), democratic teachers will reach students and enable them to focus their minds, expand their spirits, and discover best how to deploy their individual uniqueness, while in turn, achieving this themselves.

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