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Theory and Research in Education 2011 9: 73

DOI: 10.1177/1477878510394819

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Theory and Research in Education

9(1) 73–86

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DOI: 10.1177/1477878510394819

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Abstract

One central aspect of a healthy democracy is the practice of democratic dissent. For the first time in many years, dissent is being widely practiced in town hall meetings and on street corners across the United States. Despite this presence, dissent is often suppressed or omitted in the prescribed, tested, hidden, and external curriculum of US schools. This article calls for a realignment of these aspects of curriculum with both a guiding vision of ideal democracy and a realistic interpretation of democracy as it is currently invoked in order to maximize this historic moment and work toward more robust democracy as a whole. This article will define dissent, show why it matters for healthy democracy, describe its role in the conscious social reproduction of citizens, reveal implications of the current more consensus-oriented forms of democracy portrayed in US schools, and call for new work on consensus and dissent in schools given changes in the present environment.

Keywords

civics education, critical theory, democratic education, hidden curriculum

While many theorists of democratic education understand good democratic education to be a conscious process of socialization into the knowledge and dispositions of democratic life (Gutmann, 1999; Levinson, 1999), many also recognize that the form or practice of democracy they hope to educate for is considerably different from the one that currently exists (Callan, 1997: 39). There is currently no opportunity to be socialized into an ideal democracy. Some critics claim that focusing on an ideal democracy and failing to prepare student citizens for the actual, flawed democracy they are likely to face when they walk away from graduation is inappropriate and a disservice to students (Vaughn, 2001).

One central aspect of a healthy democracy, the practice of democratic dissent, is emphasized in many of the best theories of idealized democratic education.¹ Yet, dissent is one aspect of democratic education that is especially hindered in American schools,

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often even in schools striving toward some of the best forms of citizenship education. Schools are not only failing to prepare students for a better democracy, they are also failing to prepare students for democracy as it currently exists. For the first time in many years, especially since 9/11 ushered in an era of acquiescence under President Bush's official proclamation 'You are either with us or you are with the terrorists',² leaders and the public are celebrating and invoking dissent. Figures from both ends of the political spectrum, from Hillary Clinton and Jon Stewart to Karl Rove and Sean Hannity, have publicly endorsed dissent.³ The Left used dissent against the Bush administration and launched a movement of change affiliated with it to do grassroots campaigning for Obama in 2008, while the Right has ignited dissent in town hall meetings regarding health care and tea-parties challenging economic reform in 2009 and 2010.

Despite its increasingly strong public presence, dissent is often suppressed or omitted in the prescribed, tested, hidden, and external curriculum of schools.⁴ This article calls for a realignment of these aspects of curriculum with both a guiding vision of ideal democracy and a realistic interpretation of democracy as it currently exists in order to capitalize on this historic moment and work toward more robust democracy. This article will define dissent, show why it matters for healthy democracy, describe its role in the conscious social reproduction of citizens through various forms of curriculum, reveal implications of the current more consensus-oriented forms of democracy portrayed in schools, and call for new work on consensus and dissent in schools given changes in the present environment of American politics.

Dissent and its role in robust democracy

Dissent occurs when a citizen openly disagrees with the consensus of a community or the dictates of those in power. It sometimes entails risking one's well-being by expressing a different opinion. When done under admirable conditions (as opposed to simply dissenting for the sake of dissent), dissent employs critique in the pursuit of truth and is undertaken in the spirit of benefiting the lives of others. Dissent takes many forms, two of which are common and sometimes overlap. The first involves raising awareness of an issue that has been suppressed or ignored by the mainstream. This form of dissent may also entail making it known that some players do not agree with the view of those in power. Dissidents of this form put forward alternative information and form independent organizations, both noteworthy aspects of a healthy democracy (Soder, 2001). They may march, picket, or protest. While they may not necessarily 'fix' a problem, they make it known that there are people who disagree, build solidarity with others who hold an alternative view, or destigmatize a problem by bringing it into public view. The second sort of dissent aims to change minds or practices. It may play out under a picket sign, but it may also occur through more subtle democratic contributions or participation within the system the dissident seeks to change. It tends to be a far less flashy approach, aimed at genuinely changing the opinions of other people or presenting alternative perspectives, rather than just demanding their attention or urging them to do something differently.

Robert Ivie's (2006) eloquent description of admirable and justified dissent within a vigorous democracy is worth quoting at length.

Communicating artfully the fruit of free intellectual inquiry amounts to speaking in the democratic idiom, and dissenting in the idiom of democracy means contesting opinions robustly but respectfully, that is, with respect for the diverse views and plural interests of a strong and inclusive – open and vital – democratic public. It means speaking to the complexities of issues rather than debunking opponents and oversimplifying problems. It means crossing conceptual boundaries – making them permeable, flexible, and adaptive rather than rigid and brittle opposites. This is what helps a diverse people act collectively with a maximum degree of critical consciousness, which is much preferred over an undemocratic condition of sheer polemics. (Ivie, 2006: 82)

Here, dissent is richly portrayed as taking account of multiple perspectives and striving to understand their complexity, while respectfully challenging concepts and viewpoints in order to pursue the best form of life for all parties involved.

Intelligent dissent is central to healthy democracy because it brings about a proliferation of perspectives and sparks conversation. Intelligent dissent entails an informed understanding of social and political situations. Using knowledge of such conditions, good dissidents identify problems and influence public reflection on those problems in reasonable ways. Often revealed problems arise from policies that need to be ameliorated, or at least better understood, in order to ensure citizens' meaningful cooperation with those policies. Dissenting views can promote critical reflection upon and revision of public policy, generating wider discussion, and ideally rendering policy better informed and supported by citizens. Socially, dissent works against stagnation to bring forward new ideas and reveal new or problematic implications of old ones. It gives us a process through which we can reconsider and revise our collective identities and our individual goals.

Consent and dissent

In the United States, in order for the government to have legitimacy according to the Declaration of Independence which borrows from Lockean interpretations of the powers of government, it must have the consent of the governed (Locke, 1952 [1690]). As stated in the Declaration of Independence (1776):

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. – That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, – That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

For Locke, the power and jurisdiction of the government comes from the consent of the governed, who enter into or maintain community commitments that support the government. Jefferson's words assert the right of the governed to alter and abolish the government when it fails to uphold just laws supported by the community members or under other specific conditions, such as failing to peacefully protect the property of the governed, as outlined by Locke (1952 [1690]). Legislative rulers preserve legitimacy

by maintaining the consent of the governed without coercion. I claim that maintaining the consent of the governed and the right to alter government entails allowing a space for dissidents to question the justness and ends of government so that they can determine for themselves whether the laws and systems of government are desired and whether the power of the government is justified. This is especially the case for dissenters who often occupy or champion the position of (often oppressed) minorities. 'For the fairness and democracy of any state should be assessed not alone through a study of whether its majorities examine it and find it good, but through a study of whether its minorities examine it and find it good' (Carter, 1998: 97). Finally, insofar as the government maintains its legitimacy from the consent of the governed, it is the way that the government responds to dissent that determines its continued health.

A government's need for the consent of the governed implies that citizens must have the opportunity to express dissent and not be coerced. If this is the case, then citizens must have the ability, skills, and know-how to invoke dissent. Students, as citizens, need to understand their duty to dissent when necessary and must learn criteria for determining when and how to dissent. Dissent becomes a pivotal requirement in the establishment and maintenance of a legitimate democracy.

Important aspects of intelligent dissent, as I am using it here, are consciousness and intentionality. These aspects also form necessary, though not sufficient, conditions of the consent of the governed. For without conscious allegiance, consensus can be hollow and weak or can be problematically misused to benefit some group members and not others. Aligned with Thomas Jefferson and John Locke's focus on the consent of the governed, Dewey (1916) concludes: 'Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can only be created by education' (87). Consensus, and its corresponding forms of dissent, should be voluntarily and wisely enacted in order to ensure the legitimacy of the state, and schools are important places for teaching young citizens how to do this.

Schools can guide students in learning how to give their consent or express their dissent in meaningful and informed ways. Moreover, schools should help students understand how carefully doing so helps to break hegemonic bonds between the student and society and empowers the student. Arriving at genuine consensus or dissent is an active, intentional, and reflective process. Problematically, however, I will show in the next section that the forms of curriculum currently employed in most US schools tend to develop consent without willful choice or deliberation and, in the most troubling of cases, through outright coercion. Simultaneously, the teaching of dissent is often either omitted or repressed.

The effects of curriculum

The prescribed, tested, hidden, and external curricula of American schools work together to give students the impression that good democracy is orderly and conflict free. As Michael Apple and other curriculum scholars have demonstrated for nearly forty years, schools continue to socialize the dispositions of students toward obedient conformity. Schools also tend to guide their overt curriculum by what Apple (2004) calls a 'consensus ideology' that favors agreement and unity rather than conflict and change, despite the

fact that the latter can be more beneficial for democracy (54). Consensus here is different from, but related to, the willing support of legitimate government described above. Instead, consensus is an image of a happy society where all people interact harmoniously and it is expressed in curriculum as a set of knowledge and skills that all people can agree to support. This sense of consensus directly excludes dissenting views to achieve a seemingly more cohesive whole. The consensus ideology is evident in each of the following aspects of curriculum.

The prescribed curriculum

For nearly the last decade, the curriculum overtly endorsed by American school officials and printed in schools materials (especially in social studies classrooms where the teaching of civic life is most explicit) has encountered significant pressures to ensure safety, avoid political turmoil, and impart measurable facts. Following major school shootings of the late 1990s and acts of violence related to 9/11, many school administrators sought curricular materials that promote a safe classroom – one where conflict does not break out and violence or disruption does not result. For example, one superintendent noted, ‘the first priority of our school is to provide a safe environment’ and went on to explain that ‘confrontation and controversy lead to unsafe conditions’ (Martinson, 2003: 134). These fears lead administrators to discourage curricular materials and classroom practices that spark dissent.

The fears are magnified by concerns that parents or community members may criticize or even sue teachers for teaching contentious topics, let alone skills, that might enable students to provoke controversy themselves (Hess, 2009). In one small example, an assistant principal in the Midwest was disciplined by the school board for risking the safety of the school and inducing political conflict not supported by the community when he reserved one minute of the school day for students to observe the National Day of Silence – a consciousness-raising occasion concerning the struggles of gay and lesbian people.⁵ In a nationwide example, many administrators decided not to show President Obama’s speech about education to school children because they feared or were already overwhelmed by parental backlash, or because of concerns that a speech by a political official did not fit in their school curriculum (Kranz, 2009). Boiling down a prescribed curriculum to materials that do not engage conflicting values or ways of living suggests that school leaders are not willing to support thorough or even small amounts of dissent in classrooms.

Alongside efforts to reduce conflict and political opposition in the prescribed curriculum, thousands of schools have sanctioned the use of a 2004 video called *Patriotism and You* by the Committee for Citizen Awareness. This video paints a portrait of good American living as exhibiting unwavering commitment to the country and working toward unity with all. It sets the stage for a consent of the governed that is not entirely legitimately earned, for it borders on the type of patriotic indoctrination that Harry Brighouse (2006) rightly warns distorts students’ views of the state and violates the liberal principle of legitimacy. The portrait of America in this film is not politically neutral, especially when it omits the beneficial role of dissent, and makes loaded claims such as: ‘Patriotism is respecting authority’ and ‘We should manifest a unity of philosophy,

especially in times of war.⁶ On the heels of materials like these, it is no surprise that, of the 2,366 seniors who completed the California Survey of Civic Education in 2005, 22% agreed with the statement 'It is un-American to criticize this country', and 21% found the statement to be neutral (Kahne and Middaugh, 2007: 122).

Examining the treatment of just one major American dissident as portrayed in popular social studies textbooks reveals the prescribed treatment of leaders who dissent, if they are mentioned at all. In most textbooks, Martin Luther King, Jr. is celebrated as a hero who preached love and unity as he tried to unite Americans divided by racism. While there certainly are aspects of this image that are true, these textbooks tend to ignore the complexities of King's life as a dissident. The radical aspects of his work, especially those that became clearer later in his life as he fought poverty and the Vietnam War, are mentioned rarely, if at all (Aldridge, 2006; Kim, 1993). King is not portrayed as someone who practiced dissent as I defined it above, but rather as a gentle uniter – one who is accepted and appreciated by all. Failing to demonstrate for students the ways in which King engaged dissent to reveal problems, break unjust laws, rally the public, and demand alternative ways of living, prevents students from seeing the success and necessity of dissent in democracy.

The tested curriculum

In the midst of the standards and accountability era, where schools are judged by the performance of their students on tests, the material most emphasized in schools is often that which is measurable on tests. Typically this is factual content knowledge, though sometimes it is also skill based. Focus on testing in mathematics and reading leaves less time for extended discussions of civics and social studies. In fact, the weekly amount of time spent on social studies has been reduced by 75 minutes nationally, as reported by the Center on Education Policy in 2008. Moreover, even when these areas are tested or highlighted in the curriculum, civics education material tends to become boiled down to what is easily measurable, rather than more complex aspects of democratic living, such as dispositions (Lopez and Kirby, 2007). Often dissent, as a set of skills, knowledge of the past and vision of the future, proclivity toward action, and collection of traits (such as courage, concern for others, and the like), does not make it into the test and, therefore, does not make it into the curriculum.

One telling instance of officially endorsed curriculum unites the prescribed curriculum with the tested curriculum. The state of Florida passed the Florida Education Omnibus Bill (HB 7087e3) in 2006, which required that 'American history shall be viewed as factual, not constructed, shall be viewed as knowable, teachable, and testable.' Here we see an explicit declaration of a fact-based understanding of American history that is measurable. Yet this statement also suggests something more troubling. Because the complex history of the country is boiled down to 'facts', it is fixed and unquestionable. This depiction of America does not allow for its key beliefs or aspects to be arguments that are publicly debatable – a basic criterion of good democracies put forward by Meira Levinson, Stephen Macedo, and many theorists of democratic education.⁷ There is no space in this educational proclamation for radical revisionist interpretations or even more benign minor points of disagreement. Moreover, because history is 'not

constructed', the perspectives of those who participated in it are inconsequential, as the fact of the matter exists apart from their experiences of it. Here we see no role for a dissenting view. Moreover, those whose experiences of American history do not match up with the factual case presented may find themselves silenced or excluded.

The hidden curriculum

Since first introduced by Philip Jackson (1968) and critiqued by various critical theorists, the hidden curriculum has tended to be automatically castigated. But the hidden curriculum, in itself, is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, it can serve to bolster praiseworthy educational goals. The problem is that the hidden curriculum tends to work through passive learning. It is something that occurs through the practices of the school, the approaches of the teacher, and the expectations of the classroom – each of which are typically experienced without much conscious reflection or are seen as fixed and beyond one's influence. This raises a problem for both the consent of the governed and its corresponding skills of dissent insofar as they should be actively learned, practiced, and attributed.

One of the biggest concerns with schooling expressed in Gallop polls by teachers, administrators, and parents is lack of discipline (Efrat and Schimmel, 2003). Teachers tend to praise and reward students who are quiet and cooperative (Apple, 2004: 51). Tied to concerns with how children might misuse dissent, many people fear the image of a disobedient teen who bucks authority (Knight Abowitz, 2005). During a new teacher meeting at a high school where I supervise student teachers, I recently discovered that extensive disciplinary systems are in place to identify, deter, and punish 'rebellious' teens. The assistant principal came to this meeting armed with only two pieces of paper to distribute to the teachers: one a description of oppositional defiant disorder and the other a discipline reporting form. While the first describes a legitimately worrisome psychological condition, the presentation of this combination of materials sent the message to teachers that they should be on the lookout for and ready to punish students who question authority or even classroom materials, regardless of whether it is done so reasonably or with educational implications. Moreover, the emphasis on oppositional behavior as a disorder risks casting even appropriately dissident children into a category of illness or misbehavior. It is likely that practices such as these contribute to the disproportionate number of suspensions, punishments, and dropouts amongst students who speak or act out against educational policies or practices (Fine, 1989: 167).

Extensive research shows that, through the hidden curriculum, children are heavily socialized into unquestioning consent (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 2008; McLaren, 1999). Through rules and routines and their related systems of reward and punishment, children learn to conform, to follow the rules, and not to question authority. Children are often rewarded not for the content or the ingenuity of their thought, but rather for their behavior as neat, likable, and obedient pupils (Apple, 2004). In some regards, these approaches in schools are understandable, for good behavior that follows predictable patterns allows schools to function smoothly. But the desire for smooth efficiency should not trump the need for classrooms to produce citizens who are capable of engaging in and appreciating dissent. A hidden curriculum that lulls students into comfort in routine lends itself to

complacency and unwillingness to question the status quo. When further supported by a system of punishment that constrains dissent, the hidden curriculum provides little incentive for fighting against the system or even exploring the kinds of questions that would prepare one to give consent or express dissent as an adult citizen.

I want to be sure to acknowledge here that some students do resist the pressures toward conformity within the hidden curriculum. Students are not just passive recipients of the hidden curriculum's influence. Some students contradict, reinterpret, or resist such influences.⁸ These resistances, however, are different from dissent as I described it at the outset of this article. While resisting pressures toward conformity can put a student at risk (often for punishment), this risk is typically not undertaken in the spirit of seeking truth or benefiting the lives of others. Instead, these resistant acts tend to be geared more toward self-gratification (such as breaking school rules against smoking) or releasing frustration (such as talking back to a disliked teacher). Additionally, student resistance typically does not put forward suggestions for improved policies or practices. Despite these important differences, however, student resistance can be a productive gateway to developing admirable skills of political dissent. Inclinations toward speaking out against experiences that one perceives to be unjust can be harnessed. When skills are nurtured that allow students to direct these courageous reactions toward providing sophisticated accounts of fair treatment and crafting consciousness-raising efforts directed at classmates and school leaders, resistant students may develop into respectable political dissidents. To achieve this end, students must receive overt training in how to make informed arguments supporting their alternative view and must learn how to appropriately and creatively defy problematic school rules.

The external curriculum

The external curriculum 'refers to what students learn outside of the classroom (e.g., from other students in the school, and from other sources such as the family, the media, religious leaders, neighbors, friends, etc.) and the different ways in which they mediate whatever they learn in those environments with what they learn in the classroom' (Schugurensky, 2002: 5). This is the aspect of curriculum that is most interesting in the present US context regarding dissent.

The evening news features scenes of contentious town hall meetings on health care reform, comedians exaggerate the impassioned speeches of protestors, movements supporting underdog political candidates pop up on college campuses, war protestors march on city streets, and parents share their political views over the dinner table. Many students encounter acts of dissent daily, though it is rare that these acts are openly discussed in class, and the merits of these approaches and their effectiveness are seldom analyzed in educative ways.

It is unclear exactly how children make sense of these events, especially when they often conflict with their experiences of witnessing other forms of dissent in their schools, which may include punishment of students and even teachers. Vicki Proctor, Carl Chew, Doug Ward, David Wasserman, and Douglas Avella are just some of the many teachers who have expressed their dissent regarding the widespread implementation of testing following No Child Left Behind (Blanchard, 2008; CBS News, 2007; Chang, 2004; Gonzales, 2008; Wilson, 2009). Many have voiced well-reasoned arguments against

testing that express concern for their students and the future of America – certainly an admirable democratic endeavor. But each of the teachers I named, and many others, have been openly punished for their actions, sometimes through reprimands from school officials and sometimes through termination of their jobs. These instances send the message to students that dissent about educational policy and its effects on children and society, especially within school walls, is not permitted, regardless of one's age or status. Yet students also see dissent outside of the school, leaving them to wonder if, where, and how they can practice dissent themselves.

Students are also hearing mixed assessments of the dissent that is occurring all around them. Not only do some witness punishment of teachers who speak out, many more overhear comments which sometimes celebrate the patriotic efforts of citizens who've taken to the streets or town hall meetings in protest and other times denigrate those citizens as ludicrous. The politically polarized demonstrations witnessed recently are often praised by like-minded observers for being courageous and insightful, but criticized by opponents as being poorly reasoned and misinformed. A thriving society not only needs dissent, but a populace that can understand, assess, and act upon that dissent. When the general population is overwhelmed by multiple perspectives on an issue and lacks the sound judgment necessary to evaluate the reasonableness of those perspectives, it is unable to distinguish beneficial from harmful views. Many make no judgment at all and allow the status quo to persist. Cries of dissent, then, fall on overwhelmed or indiscriminate ears – if they are heard at all. If teachers want to prevent this phenomenon, they might help students develop skills to determine which perspectives are wise and which are not. Likewise, they might help children distinguish justified dissent from simple frustration or angst. Teachers can build a discerning public that can recognize and respond to dissent in the external environment.

Theorizing democratic education and citizenship in the present

Little evidence exists of teachers helping students to mediate their conflicting experiences of dissent in and outside of schools, questioning the role of dissent or consensus in their curriculum, or bringing the learning of these aspects of democracy into explicit discussion. Without these efforts, teachers are failing to prepare students for democracy as it currently exists around them. They are also missing out on an opportunity to make democratic education more thoroughgoing and more true to its mission of maintaining state legitimacy, and pushing toward improved living for all. Theorists of democratic education should seize the opportunity to simultaneously prepare students for both democracy as it exists and democracy as it ideally should be.

The overall effect of the combined aspects of curriculum described above better prepares students for a totalitarian regime than for a healthy democracy. It prepares students to be passive and obedient members of society who neither give their conscious consent to their government, nor express dissent regarding aspects they find problematic. It prepares students for a stable and conforming world guided by distorted notions of unity and harmony as the chief goals of democracy. It leaves students unable to respond to change or to civilly exchange with those with whom they disagree.

To better prepare students to cultivate a healthy democracy, we must educate for dissent within and across each aspect of curriculum described above by educating for autonomy, respectful deliberative communication, careful use of language, differentiation of just and unjust laws, equitable living for all people, and the ability to put forward feasible alternatives. These skills form a comprehensive educational basis capable of overcoming many of the problematic trends described above and, ultimately, producing the kind of citizen who can best engage good democratic living.

This approach begins by linking education for dissent with education for autonomy, a widely accepted liberal principle of education advanced in recent decades (Callan, 1999; Levinson, 1999). Guided by Amy Gutmann's description of the principle of nonrepression (Gutmann, 1999: 44), children should learn to be liberal choosers who form or determine the best life for themselves. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that children not only have the right to self-determination, but also have the right to speak out against social expectations others hold for their lives. To freely choose or create the best lives for themselves, children need to be exposed to a wide range of viable alternatives within school. To aid students in distinguishing good life options, children must be encouraged and be able to hold open discussions that critique popular life choices and propose alternatives to lifestyles that are expected in their communities. As noted in my definition of dissent above, these autonomy-developing lessons are important elements of good dissent.

Lest children begin to perceive dissent too narrowly as the action of a lone citizen selfishly pursuing his or her desired life, autonomy-promoting education should be couched within an introduction to living within a deliberative democracy. An ideal classroom will not only explain how successful deliberative democracy works to balance the needs and interests of citizens through a process of participatory citizenship and exchange of ideas, but also engage students in exercises that embody such a process. By practicing deliberative democracy in the mini-community of the classroom or through activities like debate, students can develop civic virtues including honesty, toleration, and respect, which are enacted through seeking out alternative perspectives, privileging the status of the common good, and achieving fair consensus (Pamental, 1998). Recent deliberative democracy movements draw heavily on the deliberative communication described by Jürgen Habermas and the neo-pragmatists who follow the spirit of associated democracy championed by John Dewey. Within deliberative communication, each participant 'takes a stand by listening, deliberating, seeking arguments, and evaluating, while at the same time there is a collective effort to find values and norms on which everyone can agree' (Englund, 2006: 503). Such communication should be focused on real content and pursued in order to achieve genuine action. Successful communication between students entails learning to evaluate different opinions, reflecting upon and providing justification for one's own opinions, being open to learning new ideas from others, and learning to construct compromises when necessary. This is a social basis for good dissent, one which provides a foundation for learning to differentiate respectful from disrespectful dissent. As one criticism of the current tea party movement has been that they engage in dissent that disrupts conversation and disrespects the personhood of others (Stitzlein and Nolan, 2010), teachers might engage their students in analyzing examples of such practices so that they can further hone their skills of differentiation.

Communication and language skills are central to learning how to dissent. Movements of dissent are often driven by leaders who can capture unjust situations with apt and compelling descriptions, and who can rally others with poignant speeches invoking images of a better way of life. Students should learn the arts of persuasion and discourse so that they can be prepared to use language in the practice of dissent and so that they can detect when they are being manipulated by the rhetoric of others. Interdisciplinary units within language arts, media criticism, and speech can be crafted to meet these goals. Moreover, providing students with opportunities to witness real groups actively engaged in political struggle (by bringing together the prescribed and external curricula) supplies excellent material for classroom analysis, including inspection of the use of language and other techniques employed by skilled dissidents. The active work of protest groups today provides a ripe environment for such educative endeavors, which not only show students how to understand and evaluate these groups, but also prepare students to join their ranks when appropriate.

Of the relatively few students who currently engage in dissenting practices, many are quick to cite the First Amendment as their guarantor of dissent. Teachers should help students more fully understand the First Amendment and the related legal restrictions on certain types of speech and action within schools resulting from key cases such as *Tinker*, *Papish*, *Fraser*, *Hazelwood*, and *Morse v. Frederick*. With knowledge of the parameters of legally justified public outcry, children should learn that admirable dissent is not done to simply rabble-rouse or gain attention, but rather combines reasonableness with passion for a just cause. A prescribed curriculum that closely studies historical examples, as well as fictional accounts, can help students learn to discern the difference. Additionally, students should learn about the responsibilities that are reciprocal to their First Amendment rights, such as allowing for the free speech of others and using speech that is free from slander or libel.

As good dissent often involves collective social action aimed at ensuring justice and equality for all, students should learn skills of consciousness-raising and coalition-building. Teachers should demonstrate how to effectively form organizations and raise awareness about causes through classroom simulations and discussions of historical examples such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the feminist movement. Within these group settings, dissidents-in-training should learn how to express their needs or those of oppressed groups so that they can critique problematic policies and practices which do not meet citizen needs. They need to learn how to articulate demands for the well-being of themselves and others. Teachers should guide students through cultural analyses, persuasive authoring of editorials, and credo writing to achieve these ends. Finally, students should learn how to envision and put forward alternatives to problems in the world today. Teachers should expose them to stories about the successes and failures of other cultures as well as fictional accounts of future worlds so that children can offer informed and imaginative visions of improved living. For good dissidents do not stop at the act of protest, they follow through by offering viable alternatives.

I close, then, with a call for teachers and administrators to rethink the explicit and implicit curriculum endorsing simplistic consensus, to invoke explicit discussion of the democratic role of dissent, and to nurture students in the skills and proclivities they need

to assess and enact it well. Social studies teachers, in particular, might begin with Diana Hess's timely book *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion* (2009). I also call upon educational theorists to direct renewed attention toward the democratic virtue of dissent and the ways in which it might more strongly link society and classrooms. Important beginnings of such work have recently been introduced in the thought-provoking *Journal of Educational Controversy* (especially Volume 3) and in Mordechai Gordon's edited collection *Reclaiming Dissent: Civics Education for the 21st Century* (2009). Let's not miss out on this historic opportunity to teach and employ one of the most fundamental aspects of healthy democracy – one that is alive outside of schools and ripe for student attention.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank editor Randall Curren for his detailed feedback on an earlier draft of this manuscript.

Notes

1. Note here that dissent is an admirable component of most theories of citizenship or democratic education even though they may themselves be quite distinct in other regards. Because of this, I do not locate my discussion of dissent within one particular school of thought on good democratic education, though my use of dissent throughout this article may seem to fall most easily into participatory or deliberative visions of civics education because of their heavy emphasis on the roles of consensus and dissent.
2. Uttered using this phrase or a closely related one at a joint session of Congress on 20 September 2001, at ground zero in October 2001, and at the White House on 6 November 2001.
3. See Barack Obama's Inaugural Address, January 2009; Karl Rove in Reader's Digest, January 2009; and Sean Hannity's broadcast transcript describing both himself and Hillary Clinton, 14 August 2009.
4. These forms of curriculum, arising from critical theory through the work of Michael Apple, Peter McLaren and others, are most succinctly described in Schugurensky (2002).
5. Personal correspondence with a teacher at the school, 25 April 2008. Name withheld for the teacher's protection.
6. Joel Westheimer (2007: 175–9) provides an excellent analysis of this video and other curricular materials.
7. I'm referring here to Levinson's liberal legitimation and Macedo's public justification requirements.
8. Such student resistance is well documented in Apple (1995) and McLaren (1999).

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