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**Emotion, Reflection, and Activism:
Educating for Peace in and for Democracy**

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Introduction

We, the authors, are emotionally and physically disturbed. The disturbance we are experiencing is most particularly sourced in our nation's collective resistance to speaking out against our various and ongoing military actions worldwide. This specific emotional and physical disturbance has given rise to a more general educational concern: when we do not meet our democratic educational obligation to nurture the embodied emotional seed that is essential to critical reflection, peaceful civic activism can and will wither on the vine.

As evidence of this civic withering, we point to our current “standing” or “position” in the world and ask why more of our citizens have not engaged in debate and activism to stop our morally questionable collective actions. For example, in Iraq there have been more than 4,000 American military fatalities and over 31,000 of our soldiers wounded in action (excluding “emotional” injury); as many as 20% of those are serious spinal and/or brain injuries. Psychologically speaking, it is estimated that 30% of our soldiers returning from combat develop serious emotional problems within 3 to 4 months after returning and upon their return find very little medical or emotional support.¹ Aside from American losses, a fall 2007 British study suggested that at the time, somewhere between 600,000 and 1.2 million Iraqis had been killed since the invasion; and, as one of our students recently suggested, most of those have probably been the youngest, most vulnerable of its citizens.²

In addition, we have spent well over 700 billion dollars directly on the Iraqi war, and more comprehensive figures estimate three to five trillion dollars when factoring in veteran benefits and lost wages of those killed—or \$12,000-\$20,000 per American citizen—not including long-term costs or benefits such as changes to the price of oil or political stability.³ These statistics are emotionally troubling enough, and do not include what will certainly be growing casualty and cost numbers from Afghanistan as we begin the new “push” (30,000 additional soldiers) requested by President Obama. Given these numbers, we wonder why the American public isn’t completely irate and marching, albeit peacefully, in the streets demanding a change of course—yet precious little of this kind of activism has occurred since the civil rights/Vietnam War era, nearly 40 years ago.

Unfortunately, relatively few of our citizens understand the important role emotions play in this regard, tending instead toward a conception of education (and thinking) that is cold and emotion-less, and therefore, often action-less. As Medina explains, in disregarding the embodied emotions of both teacher and student, a dis-embodied form of education typically emerges—one that displaces emotions from their rightful place as mediator of past experiences.⁴ Such disembodied, emotionless educational experiences might be recalled intellectually, but sans the embodied feelings that accompany a truly “educative” experience, the experience itself becomes one that is more often than not, “miseducative.”

¹ Deborah White, “Iraq war facts, results & statistics at January 6, 2010: 4,374 US soldiers killed, 31,616 seriously wounded,” About.com: Liberal Politics, <http://usliberals.about.com/od/homelandsecurit1/a/IraqNumbers.htm>

² Opinion Research Business, “September 2007 – more than 1,000,000 Iraqis murdered,” http://www.opinion.co.uk/Newsroom_details.aspx?NewsId=78

³ Stiglitz, Steven Mufson & Mark Medish, *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The Real Cost of the Iraq Conflict*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/0408_transcript_stiglitziraq.pdf

⁴ Yolanda Medina, *Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy: Toward a Theory of Self and Social Understanding* (Dissertation Abstract International, 2006: UMI No. 3242396).

In answer, we posit that one cause for our collective reluctance to speak out regarding our various ongoing engagements around the world can be found in a system of public education which assigns embodied emotion a less-than-meaningful secondary status—a status that denies the role of emotion its rightful place in reflective thinking thereby limiting the critical reflection and subsequent action that a vibrant democracy requires. This disembodied type of education creates in teachers and students what Stanley Milgram calls an “agentic state,” one “in which he [or she] defines himself [or herself] in a manner that renders him [her] open to regulations by a person of higher status.”⁵ We urge in response that educational policy should reflect, and that teachers should incorporate into their practice, the emotional element essential to thought and action and therefore to a vibrant democracy.

As the means to re-engage students at the catalytic, embodied emotional level essential to learning of all kinds and to the survival of democracy, in what follows we make several general educational suggestions: first, the overriding essential educational goal of our time is to convince our students that thoughtful, peaceful, yet vehement, activism, in its various forms, and for various causes, is a democratic obligation. Secondly, understanding what we can about what Nel Noddings calls the “psychology of war,” both when we are in a time of war, and maybe more importantly, when we are not in a time of war, must become and then remain an essential educational aim in our schools.⁶ Thirdly, we need to offer educators specific educational frameworks wherein students feel empowered to discuss the justice and/or injustice of war (and other contentious issues) and which encourage civic action in regard to these issues. Only then can students (our future/present citizens) be released from the agentic state that is the cause for our collective reticence to action.

More specifically, we first take up a discussion of the role of embodied emotion in educational practice. Next, we provide an outline of the characteristics necessary for any pedagogical framework or practice to be “democratic,” including two important restrictions on democratic education suggested by Amy Gutmann—non-discrimination and non-repression.⁷ Subsequent to sketching out the structure of viable forms of democratic education, we take up a brief conceptual discussion of what possibilities are entailed in a just-war curriculum (or a peace curriculum). Finally, we present three specific frameworks that we believe can be vehicles for incorporating such an embodied/emotionally-sourced curriculum: Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy as understood by Medina,⁸ the Project Method as explained by William H. Kilpatrick and commonly practiced in community service learning;⁹ and, the Constructive Controversy model put forth by Johnson and Johnson.¹⁰

⁵ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: an Experimental View* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1974), 54.

⁶ Nel Noddings, *Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36.

⁷ Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁸ Medina, *Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy*.

The Centrality of “Felt-Difficulty” in Democratic Education

John Dewey argued that emotionally embodied disequilibrium and/or discomfort indicate a “felt difficulty” and as such are the catalysts for critical reflection.¹¹ In his analysis, Dewey explained that suggestions for resolving the felt difficulty emerge organically from within the troubling situation.¹² The degree to which these suggestions-for-acting succeed in reconstructing the emotionally embodied discomfort depends greatly on one’s past experience, natural abilities, and education, both formal and informal; and as such, this reconstructive process is the locus for learning. Robert R. Sherman describes, with great familiarity, how human beings react when we “feel” something is amiss. He writes,

The fact of the matter is that we do have such feelings. We are surprised or intrigued or revolted or elated by experiences. We like the recommendations that one essayist has, or dislike the proposals put forward by some legislator. Our “guts” are tense, our heads ache, we pace the floor, and our voices rise. These all are indications that we have an “interest” in the matters at hand. Alas, instead of using these as a motive to thought, to elicit the interests, we suppress the feelings; we believe they are in competition with thought and always should be judged the loser.¹³

We think both Dewey and Sherman have it right: emotion, as an indication of a deep and abiding interest, is an essential aspect of critical reflection and by implication a complete act of educating; in fact, genuine emotional/bodily discomfort is the catalyst without which critical reflection, sound action, and learning simply will not (or even cannot) occur. Truly important learning comes from the developed interests derived from lived experience; and though one has to be on guard that the emotion-as-catalyst does not become the sole basis-for-action, it is essential to understand that embodied emotion is the source for thought, rather than relegate it, as Sherman suggests is often the case, to “loser” status.

This disembodied, emotionless type of educational practice is particularly troublesome in a democracy where, in theory, individual citizens, acting communally, are the ultimate decision makers. Certainly the agentic state described above is dangerous to democratic decision making; additionally, such an education can lead to citizen paralysis as we become convinced that learning has little to do with lived experience and reasonably acting in a democracy, and everything to do with transmitting already established modes of official knowing to young

⁹ William H. Kilpatrick, “The project method,” *Teachers College Record*, XIX:4 (1918): 319-323; Eric C. Sheffield, *Strong Community Service Learning: Philosophical Perspectives* (New York, NY: Peter Lange, 2011).

¹⁰ D.W. Johnson & Roger T. Johnson, “Energizing learning: the instructional power of conflict,” *Educational Researcher* 38:1 (2009): 37-51.

¹¹ John Dewey, *How We Think* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997/1910), 72.

¹² *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³ Robert R. Sherman, Robert R., “Philosophy with guts,” *Journal of Thought* 20:2 (1985): 7.

people with little regard to its construction via experience. Emotionally sourced and developed interests become subsumed under practices that encourage rote memorization over understanding and static knowledge over civic activism. To see this danger to democracy more clearly, we now turn to the structure demanded of any educational practice understood as democratic.

The General Characteristics of a Democratic Education

On the question of what necessary constituents are entailed in a democratic form of education, and the degree to which current educational policy encourages or discourages democratic activism, one does well to remember that teaching and learning does not occur in a social vacuum. In fact, education in this country remains essentially and historically a social and moral endeavor that aims to achieve valuable social and moral public ends.¹⁴ The educational arena is where important ideas should be considered, put to the test, and in so doing, their worth evaluated: bad ideas jettisoned, replaced with better ones to be tested for their own worth, and testing them by actually using them. To paraphrase George Counts, it is not enough in a democracy to simply contemplate civilization in schools; we should be building civilization via our schools.¹⁵

The core mechanism for building our society is, historically, politically, and philosophically, a democratic one which relies not on the artificially constructed discourse found in oppressive historic birthright hierarchies, but, as Dewey said it, one based on “varied points of shared common interest” and the “continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse.”¹⁶ As to the necessarily democratic nature of schooling in a democracy, Dewey writes:

A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder.¹⁷

That is, for educational practice to foster democracy, it should at the very least provide students the opportunity to develop and utilize the democratic habits of reflective-deliberation, peaceful social activism, and informed (rather than ignorant) decision-making.

Ignoring or relegating personal and national feelings to secondary status and avoiding uncomfortable disagreement, stops (as Dewey and Sherman suggest) this democratic reflective-

¹⁴ Carl Kaestle, “Moral education and common schools in America: a historian’s view” *Journal of Moral Education* 13:2 (1984): 101-111.

¹⁵ George S. Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978/1932).

¹⁶ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1916), 86-87.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

deliberation in its tracks: there is no catalyst to thought, nor, therefore, to action, because there is no problem or developed personal and/or national interest. To be sure, there is danger at both ends of the reflective spectrum: relegating emotions to a secondary status thereby paralyzing thought and appropriate action or allowing emotions to overwhelm thought thereby leading to foolish, dangerous, or even deadly action are equally tenuous means of solving felt difficulties. The important point is to eliminate the separation that relegates one or the others (emotion, reason, or action) to a less important status. This, we believe, is a goal that must be pursued in public schools. Reconstructing experience to regain personal and national emotional comfort is a democratic obligation that can only be accomplished via morally and practically sound action—action most successfully seen (politically speaking) in the form of peaceful citizen activism.

We suppose it should be no surprise that particularly young Americans have gotten very adept at ignoring painful national problems given the nearly non-existent portion of their public school experiences spent discussing emotional discomfort openly with teachers, other adults, and classmates. As examples, there is little time devoted to discussing real problems and real solutions that might come out of our initial emotional discomfort, much effort put into avoiding rather than engaging in disagreement, and large amounts of time spent prepping for and taking standardized tests rather than evaluating the practical value of our ideas by putting them into action.

Nor is it surprising in light of the pressure that current educational policy puts on teachers relative to increasing student test scores that there exists a credible fear on the part of teachers (our graduate students) and pre-service teachers (our undergraduate students) to allow value- and emotion-laden problems such as war into their classrooms, much less to encourage their inclusion, because it might very well mean the loss of their jobs (even, it seems, at universities and colleges). On the other hand, sans emotionally developed interests, there is no catalyst for reflection much less public deliberation. As such, it is no real surprise to find many Americans feeling marginalized, powerless, and increasingly ignoring and/or sedating our personal and national emotional discomfort.

As to the current epistemology underlying this testing regimen (the epistemology of regurgitation as we at times think of it), we caution our students that the tests themselves are not inherently evil; the evil exists in the way standardized tests are used and the degree to which they are an example of the tail wagging the educational dog. We cannot expect the reflective-deliberative process of democracy as outlined here to proceed well with an ignorant public. And though we do not believe the current regurgitative epistemology is developing an informed public as it sorely lacks any connection to life itself, the aim of eliminating ignorance remains a democratically crucial one and cannot be overlooked or discounted. On this point, we agree with Alfred North Whitehead who famously proclaimed, “A merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God’s earth;”¹⁸ on the other hand, we also know that an ignorant reflective-

¹⁸ Alfred N. Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and other Essays* (NY: The Free Press, 1929), 1.

deliberative, active, democratic citizen or worse, national/world leader, is clearly one of the most dangerous individuals on God's earth.

We would be remiss in not mentioning two specific and necessary democratic limitations that must be explicitly imbedded in the informed, reflective-deliberative, socially active democratic education we advocate: non-discrimination and non-repression as explained by Amy Gutmann.¹⁹ Taken together, non-discrimination and non-repression prevent our system of public education from becoming an institutional tyranny that stifles student voice and action; these two essential restrictions protect reflective-deliberative interaction, or as Gutmann calls it, our "conscious social reproduction."²⁰ Gutmann argues that non-discrimination "prevents the state, and all groups within it, from denying anyone an educational good on grounds irrelevant to the legitimate social purpose of that good."²¹ That is, no educable child can be denied an education on democratic grounds.

As important as non-discrimination is to a democratic form of education, it is Gutmann's second principle, nonrepression, which strikes at the heart of our concerns stated above:

nonrepression prevents the state, and any group within it, from using education to restrict rational deliberation of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society. Nonrepression is therefore compatible with the use of education to inculcate those character traits, such as honesty, religious toleration, and mutual respect for persons that serve as foundations for rational deliberation of differing ways of life.

Because conscious social reproduction is the primary ideal of democratic education, communities must be prevented from using education to stifle rational deliberation of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society.²²

That is, the principle of nonrepression requires that no rational discussion of what constitutes the good life and the good society is off limits in a democratic form of education and those are the very deliberations, born out of emotion, which lead to sound action; and they are the self-same issues that prevent an "agentic" state or paralysis from developing as a result of "miseducative" experiences in public schools.

War as a Curricular Matter

In her widely-read book, *Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach*, Nel Nodding argues that though we spend quite a bit of time asking students to memorize the dates of wars, learn the names of our famous warriors and the battles they fought, and use the current

¹⁹ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

²² *Ibid.*, 44-45.

epistemology of regurgitation to support patriotism education, we do little or nothing to engage our students in discussions of what war really entails for those who are directly involved in it, nor for those of us who sit at home and read about it.²³ As Noddings points out, many social studies and history texts we use in schools are actually organized around war and she suggests, “If we claim to educate, we must encourage young people to reflect on what war does and might do to the human beings engaged in it.”²⁴ And, we would add, to those of us who are not directly engaged in war.

Noddings goes on to argue, and we think rightly so, that instead of ignoring the emotionally challenging aspects of war in lieu of glorifying it via an emotion-less and supposedly “objective” presentation of our war history, we and our students should question all aspects of war, including the all-too-commonly heard phrase from American politicians, “no one wants war.” Someone wants war or why would we be at war and clearly there is great potential for creating careers, consolidating personal power and gathering wealth via war—our current wars being perfect examples.²⁵ These kinds of questions, on Noddings’ count (and we certainly agree), must be addressed as the means to encourage critical thought and reasonable action as, again, the means to recover our personal and national comfort.

Toward the goal of psychologizing war, or as we would prefer to say, emotionalizing war, Noddings lists the following topics that are rarely, if ever, incorporated into our classroom curriculums, but certainly should be: the psychology of warriors particularly military leaders; the male orientation war has; the public change in attitude about military people during times of war (from mere tolerance to hero worship); the question of what force and aggression are and why they are so often relied upon; pacifism and how its study might impact patriotism; conscientious objection to war; non-violent solutions to political problems; the numbing effect war has on imagination; war-grown passions against immigrants and political outliers (Japanese internment, socialists, pacifists, just-war activists, quakers); propaganda; nationalism; mob mentalities; the use of torture; individual resistance to group atrocities; and, maybe the most emotionally powerful on her list, the loss of self that can occur from being in combat situations—one so often found and then ignored in our soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq.²⁶

Though we have some concern with Noddings’ use of “psychology” (as well as her stance on neutrality suggested in *Critical Lessons* and elsewhere) in this context, the crucial point is to remember the Dewey/Sherman notion that it is only through an emotionally embodied engagement that reflective consideration, and ultimately, reasonable action to solve personal and national problems will ever happen. Certainly the above list includes some very emotionally difficult topics bound to lead to emotionally-charged discussions—discussions that might result in

²³ Nel Noddings, *Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ We would suggest the following as possible examples: Haliburton, Exxon, Bush family, Dick Cheney.

²⁶ Noddings, *Critical Lessons*, 36-63.

reasonable student-developed alternatives to war—if we will only muster up the courage to have the discussions, provide our students with reasonable and constructive ways to direct the emotion, and encourage them to act on their ideas or, as Maxine Greene says, on the “imagined possibilities.”²⁷ Again, we ask our readers to remain mindful of Noddings’ earlier assertion: “If we claim to educate, we must encourage young people to reflect on what war does and might do to the human beings engaged in it” and again we would add, what it does to those of us not directly engaged in it, for as pacifist Henry David Thoreau maintained long ago, it is all of us who bear ultimate moral responsibility for the actions of our government.²⁸

As a pedagogic issue, there certainly is no shortage of curricular material for a study of pacifism—though this type of material is rarely incorporated into emotionally engaging classroom practice—particularly as it is so closely tied to civil disobedience as suggested by Henry David Thoreau and practiced by Gandhi, the British labor movement, early suffragists, feminists, prohibitionists, and civil rights activists, among numerous others. In fact, pacifism, as enacted in instances of civil disobedience, epitomizes the peaceful, yet vehement activism we suggest must be encouraged within a truly democratic form of education; and, as history tells us, peaceful demonstration has been the single most effective means to recovering individual and national emotional comfort—it successfully encourages policy changes.

Likewise, the just war tradition has a long history and is reflected more recently in the work of such scholars as Richard J. Regan and Michael Walzer, which is regularly taken to task by pacifists such as John Howard Yoder as well as feminist thinkers including Sara Ruddick, Nel Noddings, and Maxine Greene.²⁹ When you add the various non-western scholars who write about just war theory, including Hilmi Zawati who takes up Islamic notions of just war, David R. Loy who discusses war from a Buddhist perspective, and, of course, the work of Gandhi, you can begin, we think, to get a sense of how such a curriculum might be very valuable in developing well-informed, emotionally sensitive, reflectively wise, and peacefully, yet vehemently active, democratic citizens—but only if couched in a pedagogy grounded in emotion that lends itself to action, and such pedagogies are seen rarely, if ever in our contemporary classrooms.³⁰

²⁷ Maxine Greene, “Education and disarmament,” *Teachers College Record* 84:1 (1982): 130.

²⁸ Noddings, *Critical Lessons*, 36; Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays* (NY: Dover Publications, 1993/1849).

²⁹ Richard J. Regan, *Just War: Principles and Cases* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996); Michael Walzer, *Arguing about War* (Harrisonburg, VA: R.R. Donnelley, 2004); Howard Yoder, *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001); Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1990); Nel Noddings, *Critical Lessons*; Greene, *Disarmament*.

³⁰ Hilmi Zawati, *Is Jihad a Just War?: War, Peace, and Human Rights Under Islamic and Public International Law* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 2001); David R. Loy, *Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2008); Mahatma Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. <http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/cwmg.html>

Nevertheless, pacifism represents a dogma; to say that violence can never be justified is strangely closed-minded. And though this dogmatic position, by its very nature, is not directly dangerous, it is dogma and just like any other dogma, must be analyzed for its value rather than simply accepted for it to fit into a democratic form of education—it must be reflected and deliberated upon. Finally, we want to point out that pacifistic “dogma” is the only basis upon which a conscientious objector can be relieved of combat duty in this country: we find it interesting that individuals who take a critical, reflective stance as to whether or not each particular war, with its particular causes and characteristics, is justifiable cannot be released from combat duty, but a committed pacifist can. While we believe that all of the above curricular topics can make for a rich and emotionally engaging democratic education these traditions do not provide specific enough examples of *how* teaching for emotional engagement might be accomplished. We now turn our attention to three pedagogical “vehicles” that might utilize the above curriculum in an emotionally sourced pedagogy of democratic action.

Teaching From and For Democratic Emotional Engagement

Engaging students is as much about the “way of being” of the teacher as is the methods she employs.³¹ Teacher dispositions like curiosity, respect for students, admiration, and trust in students’ ability to meaningfully learn provide a foundation for teachers to make most subjects engaging by their personable investment. These dispositions must be conveyed in ways that students perceive. It’s not enough to have teachers believe in the learner or the learning process, neither is it sufficient to be genuinely present unless the students perceive these qualities.³² Hence, teachers need to engage in a developmental process about how they interact and are perceived so that their intentions and others’ perceptions have some congruence.

While the development of the teacher-as-person and how she interacts with her students is important for establishing valuable student-student and student-teacher relationships, there *are*, as well, specific teaching methods and interesting developmentally relevant topics that can engage students at an emotional level, and in so doing, develop both the teacher’s *and* her students’ democratic dispositions and ways of interacting. Before getting specific methods, we would be remiss in not reminding us all that there are clear implications for classroom (and out of classroom) structure entailed in the above democratic educational framework.

Democratic Classroom Framework

A democratic classroom practice contains several elements that we consider crucial. The first critical element is the establishment of a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences. This requires pedagogical guidelines designed to as-

³¹ Jeffrey H. Cornelius-White & Adam P. Harbaugh, *Learner-Centered Instruction: Building Relationships for Student Success* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009).

³² Jeffrey H. Cornelius-White, “Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: a meta-analysis,” *Review of Educational Research* 77: 113-143.

sure that the dignity of every person present will be preserved, no matter how unusual their opinions might be, or how uncomfortable they may make the other students feel.³³ A democratic classroom must be a place of interaction and engagement, where students' worldviews and opinions are considered the most valuable resource for learning. This requires that the educator's pedagogical method remain fluid and open to continuous transformation. There must be room for flexibility and change because each day and each topic discussed will reveal a new set of experiences and interests that may or may not allow us to move on to the next topic. Each encounter will present a new approach to the subject, depending on the students' experiences and how they interpret them. A democratic classroom assures all students of the fundamental right to participate and to be heard—a framework grounded in non-discrimination and non-repression as explained above. The students must also be free to make decisions about their own learning process by determining when it is time to move on, and when to explore a topic of particular interest in greater depth. A democratic classroom is one that encourages emotionally sourced, non-repressive, development of deliberative-reflection.

A sound teaching method that will engage these student interests is not so easily constructed and so we present below three “methods” of varying structural rigidity that we suggest provide the means to achieve the emotional engagement vital to democratic education with particular reference to war. These three specific methodological approaches are oriented around three emotionally engaging notions: art (broadly construed); purposeful activity; and, conflict.

Art: Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy

Relying on critical pedagogy (as represented by such scholars as Peter McLaren, bell hooks, and Michael Apple) as her starting point, Medina has suggested a Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy (CAP) that utilizes art to engage students at a “catalytic” emotional and physical level supplying the impetus for reasoned reflection and, ultimately, the confidence to act in reasonable ways to solve difficult, personal and national felt difficulties such as war.³⁴ In enriching the critical educational tradition with the specific act of engaging with art, CAP brings the emotional/bodily aspect of human experience into play and bridges the chasm between emotion, thought and action decried by Sherman above.

As Medina suggests,

Critical educational theory, as a liberating pedagogy, stresses the importance of using students' experience as an important curricular tool to help create meaning and to understand the world. However, this pedagogical practice perpetuates the cultural imperative of

³³ Medina, *Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy*.

³⁴ Peter McLaren, *Life in Schools: an Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education* (New York, NY: Longman, 1989); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994); Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (New York, NY: Routledge Falmer, 2004).

body/mind separation by failing to recognize our bodies as the site where these experiences are shaped, manipulated, and marked by culture and how our bodies serve as vehicles to interpret these experiences. Thus it ignores the body as a primary site for shaping knowledge.

Accustomed to learning what is just and unjust from outside sources, we tend to assume that change is beyond our realm of capability, and our capacity to see ourselves as agents of change thus becomes limited or incomplete. What is worse, this sense of disconnection atrophies our ability to imagine change. If one cannot even imagine what a different world would look like, one cannot believe in one's own capacity to create it. No matter how much we as critical educators may intend to empower our students to create social change, if they cannot imagine the possibility of change, then as educators we are not doing enough to help them engage emotionally in this critical process.³⁵

Art, then, is the source for the initial physical/emotional engagement that in turn leads to critical discussions and ultimately, sound action.

As we stated earlier, we believe the emotional engagement necessary for strong teaching and valuable learning can be accomplished with all students at all ages and developmental levels. To illustrate this we suggest two pieces of art—in this case one documentary film and one fictional book—appropriate to the two extremes of school age and intellectual/emotional development: *Iraq in Fragments* for older high school students and/or college students; and, *The Butter Battle Book*, by the venerable Dr. Seuss, for the very young.

The 2006 film, *Iraq In Fragments* by American director James Longley, is a study of Iraq in three parts: the film documents the daily life of a fatherless 11 year-old who is apprenticed to the domineering owner of a Baghdad garage; Moktada al-Sadr followers in two Shiite cities who rally for regional elections while enforcing Islamic law at the point of a gun; and a family of Kurdish farmers who welcome the U.S. presence that has allowed them a measure of freedom previously denied.³⁶

Dr. Seuss' classic (which was subsequently made into a movie), *The Butter Battle Book*, is the story of the Yooks and the Zooks, two peoples separated by a large wall who are bitter enemies because the Yooks butter their bread butter-side up and the Zooks butter theirs butter-side down.³⁷ The story follows the ideological hostility between the two and the arms race they pursue until they are ready to destroy the whole planet to protect their sacred way of buttering bread. We leave it to the reader to imagine the possibilities that each provides for engaging students emotionally as the catalyst to reasonable consideration of war and sound action or even activism.

³⁵ Medina, *Critical Aesthetic pedagogy*, 7-8.

³⁶ James Longley, *Iraq in Fragments* (Seattle, WA: Typecast Pictures, 2006).

³⁷ Theodor S. Geisel (Dr. Seuss), *The Butter Battle Book* (New York, NY: Random House, 1984).

Before moving onto a discussion of the Project Method, we want to emphasize that within the theoretical structure of CAP, art is construed broadly and might include film, literature, painting, graphic art, performing art, etc—just so long as students and teachers engage with the art in such a way as to engender an emotional/embodied experience; and, the stronger the engagement the stronger the potential for envisioning new possibilities and ways of creating those possibilities.³⁸ To that end, Medina and Sheffield have a “working list” of art they suggest can accomplish just such an engagement with the problem of war that includes suggestions appropriate for a variety of ages and developmental levels.³⁹

Purposeful Activity: the Project Method

A second, though much older, pedagogical approach we believe can engage students in such a way as to engender democratic dispositions of emotion, thought, and action is generally known as the project method and is often seen within the larger conception/practice known as community service learning. However, as sometimes conceived and practiced, “projects” of this kind are no better with engaging students than, say, a lecture, “book work,” or other activities that are not genuinely student-centered because the projects often do not take into account and rely on student “interest” at the catalytic, emotional level. This common shortcoming of student projects is explained in the work of several progressive educators, particularly William H. Kilpatrick.

In Kilpatrick’s essay, “The Project Method,” he warns teachers that if a project is not grounded in what he calls a “purposeful act,” it is no improvement over more traditional, teacher-centered, methods of teaching.⁴⁰ However, when a project is initiated by student interest (an authentic “emotional” need) rather than by teacher coercion, the project becomes “life itself” and takes on a distinctly democratic character:

With this general introduction, we may, in the first place, say that the purposeful act is the typical unit of the worthy life. Not that all purposes are good, but that the worthy life consists of purposive activity and not mere drifting. As the purposeful act is thus the typical unit of the worthy life in a democratic society, so also should it be made the typical unit of school procedure. If the purposeful act be in reality the typical unit of the worthy life, then it follows that to base education on purposeful acts is exactly to identify the process of education with worthy living itself. The two become then the same.⁴¹

³⁸ For an interesting example in teacher education, see Barbara A. Clark, “Aesthetic Education and Masked Emotions: A Model for Emancipatory Teacher Preparation,” *Critical Questions in Education* Vol. 1, Issue 1 (2010): 40-50.

³⁹ This working list is available by email request: ericssheffield@missouristate.edu or ymedina@bmcc.cuny.edu

⁴⁰ William H. Kilpatrick, “The project method,” *Teachers College Record*, XIX:4 (1918): 319-323.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 320.

When, according to Kilpatrick, educational activity is based on purposeful activity, it relies on student interest (the emotional), leads to purposeful plans of action (thought), and results in reasonably acting in the world (activity or activism). Additionally, projects derived from student interest/emotion can have both an individual and social character.

As an example of a project based on the historic problem of war (and a project suggestion that might work for students of all ages), one could imagine a group of students developing an interest not only in war itself, but the actual experiences of real, live, veterans. The students might also find, as is the case with most communities in this country, that their neighbors, friends, and families are, in fact, veterans of various wars and might set out to interview them as to their experiences and opinions of the particular wars in which they served. Learning what they can through these “interviews,” might, in turn, lead the students to create articles, films, books, art, etc. (either as individual or group creations) based on the experiences and opinions the students collect and chronicle from their community’s veteran population. And this is just one among an endless number of possible student-centered, student-suggested, student-implemented projects that can meet both the curricular and the conceptual requirements for a democratic form of education.

Conflict: Constructive Controversy

A third, more rigidly construed approach to engaging students emotionally by inviting, rather than resisting, controversies in teaching, is known as Constructive Controversy. Johnson & Johnson have discussed, repeatedly tested, and researched (in a meta-analysis), the Constructive Controversy approach to instruction.⁴² They have found their approach is superior (with medium to large effect sizes) to other structured methods of approaching (e.g., debate, concurrence seeking) or avoiding (individualistic processes) conflict for a variety of outcomes including traditional academic achievement, quality of cognitive reasoning, perspective taking, motivation, interpersonal outcomes, and self-esteem.

Johnson and Johnson view conflict as both inevitable and beneficial arguing that if a constructive and structured approach is taken, “Conflict is to student learning what the internal combustion engine is to the automobile.”⁴³ Constructive Controversy is defined as existing “when one person’s ideas, information, conclusions, theories, and opinions are incompatible with those of another and the two seek to reach an agreement.”⁴⁴ The steps of constructive controversy can be paraphrased as preparing the best case for a position, persuasive presentation, open discussion, reversing perspectives, and creating an integrated joint position.

⁴² D.W. Johnson & Roger T. Johnson, “Energizing learning: the instructional power of conflict,” *Educational Researcher* 38:1 (2009): 37-51.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

Such a structured approach to conflict is born of those “gut” feelings described by Sherman above and can result in a reconstruction of one’s own conceptual understanding through integrating the ideas of others. It might, as well, be appropriate for students of all ages, given developmentally appropriate topics, and reflects the democratic process and the democratic education described above. One might imagine the constructive controversy model being employed at a school with a variety of student-centered problems. As an example related to the topic of war, issues of school violence might be addressed via a discussion of such conceptual notions as conflict resolution, peaceful activism, and even larger notions entailed in just war theory. Inviting that conflict rather than avoiding it might, if structured well, lead to an activism wherein school violence (fights, bullying, harassment, etc.) might be eliminated because the students themselves learn better means of solving problems than by resorting to violence. This then might become an opportunity to move to the conceptually larger problem of war.

Before concluding our discussion of possible teaching “methods” to engage with our students on the problem of war, we make two “disclaimers” on the three approaches presented here: firstly, these approaches certainly do not exhaust the pedagogical possibilities—there must exist a broad spectrum of creative student-centered approaches to teaching and learning that might re-engage students emotionally and lead us out of the paralysis inherent in current educational policy. Secondly, these approaches are not mutually exclusive and, we believe, lend themselves well to combining approaches, wherein art, purpose, and controversy might come together in some incredibly robust ways to reinvigorate both educational practice and democratic activism—particularly in reference to when, if ever, war is justified.

Conclusion

And so we come full circle: we believe American democracy has become weaker over time and we believe educational policy and practice shoulders much blame in this weakening. We have suggested that one of the keys to reinvigorating this political experiment of ours is to emotionally engage students of all ages, encourage them to reflect seriously, and provide opportunities for them to act reasonably thereby fomenting democratic activism. Additionally, we believe one of the most important educational issues of our time is our current and ongoing military actions as well as the problem of war more generally. We have suggested that there exist valuable conceptual frameworks (i.e., just war theory and pacifism) that, when put to use in pedagogically valuable teaching practices (Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy, Purposeful Projects, and Constructive Controversy), can emotionally engage our students with the “psychology of war” and lead them to sound and peaceful forms of war-related activism—activism which can indeed “re-construct” our democracy back to emotional health. Finally, we strongly encourage those of us who teach in colleges of education to get to the important work of convincing future and current teachers that though there is risk in engaging their students at an emotional, catalytic level, in not doing so we risk losing something much larger, Democracy itself.

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