



I Am Not Trying to Be Defiant, I Am Trying to Be Your Partner: How to Help Students Navigate Educational Institutions That Do Not Value Democratic Practice

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Based on our experiences together, we advocate for a model of education through Democratic Practices. Using Iris Marion Young’s discussion of the limitation of the distributive paradigm, we argue that justice requires taking into account decision making procedures, specifically, in the form of a less hierarchized division of labor in the defining and executing of tasks. We argue that a model of education that is more just to the students must make use of, and work to develop, their abilities to do task-defining work. After articulating some ways this can happen in classrooms and the democratic thinking that makes this possible—and emerges from this work—we show how, having taken on an identity as one who can and should be included in task-defining work, students may become frustrated and angry in educational settings where this desire is forestalled and they are taken as defiant. Finally, we argue that, if students return to their faculty partner in this situation, together they can work to help the student through democratic thinking to understand the context in which this problem occurs, the student’s own values and how those matter, and, finally, to move towards task-defining and towards action.

People obliged to follow rules or abide by decisions when they have had no opportunity to participate in their formulation frequently claim that they have been done an injustice. Democratic practices rectify such injustice. (Young, 2006, p. 97)

The only way to learn the norms and develop the values of democracy is to practice democracy as part of one's education. (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009, p. 6)

Two Lodestars

As a prelude to the paper proper and as the lodestars for this article, we ask you to consider two examples. The first is a thought-experiment, and the other is taken from the student-authors' experiences on campus, working with other students, to address concerns about how the campus restricted certain forms of political engagement.

First example: Thought experiment.

Imagine that you pass a classroom in which you overhear a pre-class conversation between a student and a faculty member. You hear the student say something like this:

Excuse me, Professor. I was hoping to talk to you about an important issue that has emerged. I was disappointed that there are no texts written by women on the syllabus you handed out on Tuesday. I know that the field has historically few women (and has devalued those women),¹ so I understand how the syllabus ended up with 14 authors all of whom are men. But this is a class where the majority of students identify as women. After speaking with some of the other students, we discussed that we would like women's voices represented. Please reconsider the assigned readings to take this oversight into account. If this means extra effort from me — finding texts that would be appropriate — I would be happy to do that to make this work for the course you have put together.

How would you expect this conversation to go?

But before answering, consider this: in philosophy (our field), women are woefully underrepresented, making up roughly 17% of tenured faculty (Jender, 2011, para. 2-3). A quick look at the past two semesters of texts reveals that in our own department (at a small-to-medium sized private coeducational, selective Master's level university located in the Southern United States, where the majority of students are white, straight, cis, traditional aged, and from the "affluent professional class"²), of the roughly 40 required books assigned as texts, only

¹ See magicalersatz (2013) and Healy (2013) for evidence supporting this claim.

² We take this term from Anyon (1983), whose "affluent professional" school is made up of a student population that looks quite like a 5th grade version of our university student body, with parents whose "[t]ypical jobs are: cardiologist, interior designer, corporate lawyer or engineer, executive in advertising or television. There are some families who are not as affluent as the majority... In addition, a few of the families are more affluent than the majority and can be classified in the capitalist class (a partner in a prestigious Wall Street stock brokerage firm)" (p. 148).

three have women authors, one of which was co-authored by a man.³ It is possible to graduate as an undergraduate major in our department without reading any books assigned that were written by women, and we suspect, it is possible to graduate without having ever read *any* required work written by a woman. The student in the above example might be a graduating senior who never had an assigned text written by a woman. This might seem, therefore, a reasonable request. Beyond reasonable, it might seem a just request. But think, if you will, about how it is likely to be received. What would you expect from a faculty member to whom this request was made (this is, of course, a different question than what you would hope the response would be)?

Second example: Student-Author's experiences.

Over the course of several years, speaking as a student among for the experiences of a cohort of students who thrived in pockets of more democratic environments and attempted to engage the wider campus in more democratic conversations, we—as students—repeatedly found that our ability to communicate was restricted. Our ability to partake in communicative action such as post flyers, reserve meeting space, or hold events was dependent on whether our activities were established within recognized, university-approved and regulated student organizations (which require a long time to be officially approved and require at least ten members). We found that student organizations were privileged with access to resources (e.g., money and space) and capacities (e.g., communication) that we did not possess, and we experienced this as a significant form of censorship on campus. While we found the student organization model to be useful in some instances, we often found it restrictive when addressing issues that were unpopular, controversial, time-sensitive, or when addressing issues involving intersectionality; examples included engaging pressing and current political concerns such as the Occupy movements or the Arab Spring movements.

We resisted our experience of censorship by engaging in activities such as posting unapproved flyers, meeting in common spaces without permission, and educating students on what kinds of rights they did or did not have on private campuses. Additionally, we turned to the relationships we had built with faculty, staff, and deans who, differently positioned within the university context, were able to take different kinds of actions. We engaged in extended conversation with people holding different roles and perspectives on our campus, who all

³ A caveat: we are discussing here the books that were assigned, this does not (of course) account for all material that was assigned. But is it the case that it is quite possible within our department that one could—depending on some factors that one could choose or would randomly affect the situation (e.g., who was teaching the Senior Seminar the year one is a senior)—graduate having never read even one assigned text (book, journal article, etc.) written by a woman. Even more likely—in fact, quite likely—would be that a student would graduate from our major having never read an assigned text by an author of color, who is gender queer, or who is openly disabled. A further caveat: we recognize that, given the historical exclusion of women from the field, that some classes might be ones in which this request would be difficult to honor (e.g., Ancient Philosophy). But if the class is focused on contemporary issues, there are women who likely write and write well about whatever the topic is.

shared an interest in and motivation to foster a more inclusive and engaging campus. These conversations required open discussion and negotiation of differences in our understanding of our shared goals. For example, our experience of censorship in being unable to post flyers around campus was in direct tension with the aesthetic concerns for a campus whose students were raised in the affluent, professional families.

Much of the motivation for the student-author's engagement was a desire to partake in local dialogue and action situated within global populist political movements, as well as to better integrate and make present feminist and queer voices on campus. While the conversations they⁴ were involved with were gaining some traction, a series of racial slurs and hate-motivated incidents on campus raised additional and significant resource and communicative concerns from various communities of students based on the institution's attempt to shape the ensuing conversation; this led to an increase in student action and protest.

As a result, it became more apparent the structure of access to campus resources enabled certain action and conversation while hindering or concealing those that served to be more critical of the institution's values and actions within its immediate and broader political contexts. The marginalizing structures resulted in multiple interstitial communities of resistance that were seen as harming the image of the institution and its inclusive and engaging intentions. Thus, while different communities within the campus had diverse and potentially irreconcilable visions for the concrete implications for improving campus, sustained and intersecting conversations led to a collective wrestling with the shared goals and what they meant in practice.

Out of these more democratic engagements, bureaucratic processes were eventually changed on campus so that students who were not a part of recognized student organizations could engage in university communication networks and could request access to material resources. This negotiation served to maintain university oversight of student action by requiring the submission and approval of paperwork to access resources and communication. Yet, it did loosen the degree to which student activity was monitored, and it expanded the type of content and action that could occur by eliminating one important requirement. Notably, the result did not necessarily satisfy any party: the students involved recognized that established student organizations maintain easier and more abundant access to resources while all communication remains filtered through an approval process, and university officials felt unsure of what types of change this would produce for the campus climate. Yet, the process engaged all parties over a point of tension, having multiple positions working together towards a shared desire for an engaging and inclusive campus, and campus practices were concretely shifted through a negotiated effort to meet those desires.

⁴ maggie, the student-author, is allergic to gender and uses singular they pronouns as a way to mediate the discomforts of being gendered.

Introduction

With these two examples in mind, we would like to turn to our motivation for writing this paper: it emerged out of the authors' struggle together to make sense of the experiences of students who have become comfortable and used to having an important role in collaboratively defining appropriate education tasks—in engaging in democratic practices—when this opportunity is denied to them in other settings. The student-author and their peers encountered this problem acutely, experiencing de-authorization and belittling when trying to engage decision-making processes regarding their campus and their education. Stymied to figure out how to respond, the student-author and their peers returned to the faculty-author as a partner in their education; they wanted him⁵ to assist them in navigating the educational institutions that were denying them the ability to participate fully. Working together, the two authors, collaborating with other students, have found some ways that faculty can help students in these circumstances. Further, the call for democratic education requires leaving behind traditional boundaries (i.e., what happens in “my class”) and includes mentoring and teaching beyond the boundaries and relations of the typical classroom.

Contemporaneous with the emergence of these challenges, the two authors were working on a project spanning several years that focused on the political work of Iris Marion Young. Her work “arises from hearing a cry of suffering or distress, or feeling distress oneself” (Young, 1990, p. 5) and develops out of and through movements for social justice. Young is particularly attuned to group difference and identity and to the problems of group oppression and domination (1990, p. 3). We thus turned to her work to help us make meaning of the experiences we were having and to help find the solutions (tentative though they are) that ultimately emerged.

It is important to note that these problems emerged in the context of our collaborative work at a university where the typical guiding (and often unarticulated) views are either that 1) education is unrelated to democracy or 2) one of the goals of education is for students to be prepared for a democratic life after college, often this is cashed out through the teaching of the information faculty think students will need to be democratically engaged after they have graduated (both about the democratic process and about the issues that are likely to be discussed in public debates). Implied in each view are ways of teaching and learning that make up different models of education. We take these two models to be typical (though by no means universal) within higher educational institutions within the United States. We will call these, respectively, the Fish model, after Stanley Fish's (2008) *Save the World on Your Own Time*, in which he argues that the only legitimate goal of education is to teach disciplinary knowledge (pp. 12-13),⁶ and the Democratic-Preparatory model (abbreviated here: DPrep). We

⁵ Having been raised and habituated to using traditionally masculine pronouns for himself, Stephen, the faculty-author will continue to use these for himself here.

⁶ Fish (2008) writes: “So, what is it that institutions of higher learning are supposed to do? My answer is simple. College and university teachers can (legitimately) do two things: (1) introduce students to bodies

will contrast both of these typical models with a form of education, as Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton (2009) suggest above, that takes education through democratic practice as essential to the learning of democratic values and—we would add—skills and ways of thinking, which we refer to as the Democratic Practice model of education. Put differently, educational models used within our institution are often not about democracy, and where the goal is learning what is relevant to democratic life, it is often an education *about* democracy rather than an education *through* democracy.

Our goal in this paper is to focus on the transition that occurs when students who have become comfortable with and habituated to the value of a Democratic Practice classroom leave it and return to Fish and DPrep academic settings, where democratic practices are lacking, subordinated, or seen as mere supplements to the real work of education. In these contexts, students who have become accustomed to Democratic Practice educational experiences are often perceived as defiant and oppositional rather than earnest and committed to taking responsibility for their own education. Our goal, specifically, is to articulate the nature and challenges of this transition from a student's perspective in order to demonstrate how it is made possible and easier through—and leads to a further development of—democratic thinking. We also articulate how faculty who are committed to the Democratic Practice model of education and to helping students transfer this vision to other settings can assist in making these transitions more successful, with less alienation and domination. The recommendations we put forth, thus, reframe the roles and responsibilities for both students and faculty members based on the implications of the Democratic Practice model of education.

Just as Young is not offering a grand, context-independent theory of Justice (capital J) but is offering a way of thinking about and acting to address the specific concrete injustices found within our part of the world today, we are not suggesting that this is the only way of conceiving of democratic practice and democratic thinking. Rather, we are starting, as Young (1990) does, with a "cry of... distress," making sense of it through Young's work, and showing how this sense-making and the actions that emerge from it can lead to less distress (p. 5). We

of knowledge and traditions of inquiry that had not previously been part of their experience; and (2) equip those same students with the analytical skills—of argument, statistical modeling, laboratory procedure—that will enable them to move more confidently within those traditions and to engage in independent research after a course is over" (pp. 12-13). Further, it is clear that these bodies of knowledge are, for Fish, defined by the disciplines; he explains: "What can be designed are courses that introduce students to a demarcated field, reading lists that reflect the current state of disciplinary knowledge, exams or experiments that test the ability of students to extend what they have studied to novel fact situations, and in-class exercises that provoke students to construct and solve problems on their own" (Fish, 2008, p. 13). In his review of the book, Lynch writes that Fish's main point "that academic work is about the disinterested pursuit of truth is a familiar one" (2009, n. p.). Because this view is often taken as the norm, it is even more popular than even its explicit articulation. We also add that this same view, from Fish, is a bit strange given his own understanding, articulated elsewhere, of the way the standards within a discipline change (see Fish, 1980).

believe this article will be particularly useful for those who teach and learn within and advocate for Democratic Practice educational models in contexts where this is counter-normative. We hope our recommendations will help faculty and students think about and prepare students for contexts in which democratic practices are denied, downplayed, or seen as merely supplemental to the real work going on (e.g., in many aspects of life both inside and outside of the academy, including most workplaces).

Democratic Practices are not, of course, the only counter-normative values a student might hold. These reflections will, we hope, be useful as well for those who teach in advocacy of multiple counter-normative values, including those who work for feminist, queer, anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-classist, and anti-ableist ideals within institutions of higher education. In addition, many of the attributes listed here are connected; thus, valuing some of these often means valuing others (as is the case with the thought-experiment at the beginning of this paper). Furthermore, while we do take it as not at all atypical that educational communities within the United States do not value—or only marginally value—the Democratic Practice model of education (or these other counter-normative ideals), we are not assuming that all such communities lack these values. Rather, we are focused on those that do and on how to help students and faculty members understand their experiences in those communities that lack Democratic Practice models as well as how they can respond.

We begin by defining our terms, arguing that democratic practices are built on *just* uses of power and authority. Based on Young's (1990) understanding of justice and her troubling of what she refers to as "the distributive paradigm," we highlight the need for a relative and appropriate sharing of task-defining and task-executing roles both in and out of the classroom. We also name some practices that engage students in this sharing of task-defining work along with some initial implications of this pedagogical approach for democratic thinking. In our second section, we explore the costs to the student who has become comfortable in, habituated to, and come to value the Democratic Practices model of education when they return to Fish and DPrep educational spaces. We highlight the strategies that students have tried to use to change these and how they deal with the discomfort and disorientation they experience in such efforts. Even if in a specific case things go well and change is embraced, the risk for students is often quite high; yet, as seen above, there are times and places where movement is possible. In our final section, we ask: how can students—with the assistance of faculty partners—become better prepared for the unfitness they are likely to experience when they return to spaces that abide more typical educational practices? We offer three suggestions for students and faculty members committed to advocating for Democratic Practice models of education. We can help students: 1) address the challenge explicitly and place the challenge in the larger context of higher education, society, culture, and business; 2) articulate the values and weaknesses of the Democratic Practice model of education they have experienced and articulate why these values should be present elsewhere; and 3) find pragmatic strategies for changing the Fish or DPrep space, including, but not limited to, finding allies with whom to act collectively.

Education through Democratic Practice

The norms of democratic culture are determined by the values of inclusiveness, participation, task sharing, lay participation, reciprocity in public problem solving, and an equality of respect for the knowledge and experience that everyone contributes to education and community building. (Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton, 2009, p. 6)

In this section, we turn to Young's work to articulate the nature of an educational model committed to education through democratic practice. We start by discussing Young's (1990) critique of standard models of justice, which focus on—and take as paradigmatic—understanding “social justice and distribution as coextensive concepts” (p. 16). This critique leads Young (1990) to highlight the importance for social justice of “decision-making procedures, the social division of labor, and culture” (p. 9). We highlight the implications of this shift away from distribution: we argue that democratic practices — and thus a model of education built to engage in these — are characterized by appropriate sharing of both task-defining and task-executing roles (Young, 1990, pp. 214-225).⁷

Young begins *Justice and the Politics of Difference* by noting the logic underlying most conceptions of justice, namely, the assumption that social justice is to be found in the just distribution of what is seen as beneficial and harmful. She does this by revealing how quite different theorists rely on this concept of distribution to make sense of what the end-goal of social justice looks like (Young, 1990, pp. 16-17). She summarizes this view as such: “The [distributive] paradigm assumes a single model for all analyses of justice: all situations in which justice is at issue are analogous to the situations of persons dividing a stock of goods and comparing the size of the portions individuals have” (Young, 1990, p. 18). Young's concern here is not with distribution itself as an element of justice. In fact, she is quite clear that the just distribution of goods is necessary for social justice; rather, her concern is with the reduction of all matters of justice to issues of just distribution on the model of stock apportionment (Young, 1990, p. 16). Young (1990), thus, wants to expand and refocus our discussion of justice beyond mere distribution and to recognize that this focus tends to base its logic on the vision of humans as atomistic beings within a fixed field of relations (p. 18). It also reduces matters of justice to the material, leaving aside essential non-material matters, such as decision-making procedures, self-respect, culture, and power (Young, 1990, p.16). Here, she offers powerful examples of ways that distribution issues fail to speak to the concerns of political actors who have been done an injustice: when a decision for where a hazardous waste site is made without input from those within the affected community; when a company relocates a factory overseas without offering the workers a voice in the decision or a chance to buy the factory; or when people who are Black are either poorly or under-represented in the media (Young, 1990, pp. 19-20). In each of these cases, Young argues, the claims to justice are not claims about just distribution; rather, they are claims about decision-making, representation, and culture.

⁷ This division between “task definition and task execution” is, according to Young (1990), “the most important division of labor in advanced industrial societies” (p. 23), hence our focus on it.

In turning to educational injustice, she highlights the need to move beyond considerations of distribution. She argues that when it comes to educational opportunity, the just distribution of resources is necessary but not sufficient to achieve justice (Young, 1990, p. 26). She is not arguing that “distribution is irrelevant to educational opportunity, only that opportunity has a wider scope than distribution” (Young, 1990, p. 26). Instead, we should work towards the end of the particular injustices that plague our communities, namely, to end oppression, “the institutional constraint on self-development,” and domination, “the institutional constraint on self-determination” (Young, 1990, p. 37).⁸

To envision an education for self-development and self-determination, we turn to her analysis of the division of labor within the workforce. In that context, she highlights how the separation and hierarchizing of task-defining and task-executing work between the professional and nonprofessional classes reproduces systems of oppression and domination by preventing large groups of people from sharing in decision-making processes that would foster self-determination and lead to the development and use of skills beneficial for both individuals and their communities at large (Young, 1990, pp. 216-225). She describes the distinction in the following way:

The division with which I am concerned is that between, in Philip Green’s words, ‘those who plan their own or other’s work routines, however carried out; and those who follow routines that have been planned for them’ (Green, 1985, p. 81). Roberto Unger calls this a distinction between task definition and task execution, ‘between the jobs that allow for the open exercise of reconstructive practical intelligence and the jobs that are supposed to involve the routinized exercise of a well designed task playing a limited role in a plan that practical intelligence has devised’ (Unger, 1987b, p. 76). (Young, 1990, pp. 216-217)

It is the use and, particularly, the development of practical intelligence that is so important here: the setting of goals and the determination of ways to achieve those goals. Young (1990) additionally notes: “One aspect of the division between task definition and task execution is the organizational tendency to separate major decision making power over the operations of an entire enterprise from all the persons and positions that carry out its ends” (p. 218). Unlike those focused on the distribution of goods and privileges, she is attentive to the way these distributions are often unjust because they are made through exclusive processes and how this restricts some from utilizing and developing task-defining skills. We argue that academic institutions gravitate towards these same organizational tendencies, effectively barring students from significant decision-making processes pertaining to their own education.

⁸ She is careful to limit her claims, arguing against offering a theory of justice that is timeless and universal, one that claims to speak from “a point of view outside the social context where issues of justice arise” (Young, 1990, pp. 3-4). Rather, she engages in critical theory, which begins “from historically specific circumstances because there is nothing but what is, the given, the situated interest in justice, from which to start” (Young, 1990, p. 5).

With this in mind, we can see how she would critique a Fish or DPrep classroom where a faculty member typically makes all of the significant decisions regarding the work students are doing including methods, subject matter, content, text selection, scheduling, classroom physical management, class management, and body comportment. Faculty members act this way often in the belief that they can take into account the student's own best interest (or an enlightened version thereof). The sharing of task-defining work is necessary because, as Young argues, even if faculty try to take into account the student perspective, they are likely to do so poorly. As she notes, people in relations of privilege may actually be using a projection of themselves when they consider the viewpoints of others; she explains that when

privileged people obey the injunction to put themselves in the position of others, they too often put themselves... in the positions they see the others. When privileged people put themselves in the position of those who are less privileged, the assumptions derived from their privilege often allow them unknowingly to misrepresent the other's situation. (Young, 1997, p. 48, italics in original).

In a commentary on Young's discussion of education, Simone Galea (2006) notes: "With all good intentions we do see our students becoming like us, a mirror image of ourselves. I imagine them in my place and project my own fantasies on to them" (p. 86). In addition, as educators, we try to reproduce ourselves through them (Galea, 2006, p. 86).

To not dominate, to not limit students' self-determination, it is necessary that they collaborate in task-defining and to not assume, as faculty members, that we know completely what is best for them. Even if faculty were better able to decide accurately what is in students' best interests, entirely alienating students from every aspect of the decision-making process serves as a form of domination. Moreover, it is a lost opportunity for students to build the capacities and skills necessary to set goals, develop responsibility in regards to their education, and learn through engagement in democratic practices. Even if one disagrees with Young and holds that self-development is not an appropriate consideration in the work-place, it seems hard to argue that it is not in institutions of higher education.

When we have suggested in presentations and informal gatherings that some sharing of task-defining is necessary for education, we often have heard faculty object that they are *the* experts, implying that to share some task-defining is to ignore differences in expertise and experience and to make the classroom entirely equal.⁹ While we—and we think Young—would agree that some faculty task-defining is necessary in some circumstances, because faculty members have experiences and expertise that students do not, students bring their own task-

⁹ This same view is intimated in an exchange Maryellen Weimer described on *The Teaching Professor Blog*, where she asks: "What's an Empowered Student?" She explains: "That was the question, followed by, 'Are they students who want to take over the classroom?' 'No,' I replied, 'it's about how students approach learning—motivated, confident, and ready to tackle the task'" (Weimer, 2014, para. 1).

defining skills and expertise with them. At the very least, they know their own schedules and when they are likely to have tests and quizzes in other classes. But often, they can offer much more than that, including an understanding of what each class might offer their own development, what can help them meet their own goals, and the ability to integrate intersecting knowledge and skills with each other.

It is true, however, that many (though by no means all) students come to college lacking some or part of the skills needed to independently define appropriate goals, structures, and methods for their learning. But these are skills that can be, and we argue, should be taught. Students should be taught through practice in defining tasks and through reflection on that work so they can come to define tasks more and better (see Kelly, 2011, p. 4; Meacham, castor, & Felten, 2013). Sharing task-defining work within the classroom is also a profound strategy for increasing students' metacognitive skills, skills which lead to better learning and better transfer of what was learned (Pintrich, 2002, p. 222).

One such way to accomplish these goals is by faculty inviting students into partnerships that lead, through exploration and decision-making, to co-creating syllabi (or parts thereof), rubrics, and other elements of students' educational experiences (including co-researching and co-publishing on teaching and learning) (see, for example, Kelly, 2011). This takes into account the strengths of both faculty and students:

Faculty... can draw on disciplinary and pedagogical expertise. Those assets, however, obscure what students bring (and faculty lack)... Students know from direct and ongoing personal experience how power and partnership are expressed and practiced in the classroom in a way that often remains invisible to faculty, even as faculty set the ground rules for this relationship. (Manor, Bloch-Schulman, Flannery, & Felten, 2010, p. 3).

Engaging students in these processes transforms the university context into a place where students participate in democratic thinking and practices, where the abilities to recognize, advocate, and become responsible for their education prepares them to engage more democratically in their school communities as well as other communities they are currently and will be a part of. Collaborating in task-defining in educational settings fosters a shift towards collective consideration. When engaging in a task-defining process, those sharing in this work have incentives to seek out insights provided by others who have different histories, knowledge bases, and experiences because they know that other students and the faculty member(s) are affected by the decisions made. Those who are engaged in democratic thinking practices are cultivating skills to navigate amongst and with themselves and others that recognizes and embraces the way those present are interdependent and co-constituted. This includes a comprehension of how the collective histories, knowledge bases, and skills present enhance and make meaning possible, rather than compete with or exist dependently of each other. This form of democratic thinking encourages us, as Elizabeth Minnich (2003) describes it, to "listen to many sides" (p. 20). It also encourages those who practice it to be "desirous of

persuading others rather than reducing them to silence by refuting them” or by overpowering them; it allows us to teach thinking that is, as she so eloquently puts it, “neither coerced nor coercive” (Minnich, 2003, p. 20).

Returning to Less Democratic Space

Even as entering classrooms that utilize a Democratic Practice model can be difficult for students in several contexts because it can counteract many of the values, expectations, habits, and modes of thinking they have engaged with and have come to hold for themselves, we have seen many students embrace and come to love this (for them) new educational environment. For students who embrace the challenges that are presented to them in Democratic Practice classrooms, for those willing to question what it is they desire to learn and take the necessary steps to do so thoughtfully, and for those who put effort into building the skills and capacities to become better able to define appropriate educational goals—that is, those who adopt habits and skills of democratic thinking—these classrooms can prove to be a more rewarding and meaningful education than those built on Fish and DPrep models of education. Further, they are, as Young (1990) points out, more just.

The difficulties these students encounter, however, when returning to Fish and DPrep spaces can prove deeply frustrating. Returning to Fish and DPrep classrooms means students find themselves asked to execute tasks determined for them, without their having a role in how these decisions are made. Students who are alienated from decision-making can find difficulty in identifying as worthwhile the particular types of task-executing asked of them. Thus, the student finds themselves in tension with the underlying model and practices these classrooms are built upon. Students may respond in many ways to this frustration. Certainly some feel silenced and respond by keeping their head down and becoming disengaged. Others—the ones we are focused on here—work to transform these other classrooms to allow for the freedom they feel when learning in the Democratic Practice classroom. These students, however, are often (though not always) challenged in identifying ways to transform spaces into ones with more democratic characteristics. We now turn to the alienation and feeling of frustration of these students and to how they can learn to navigate this challenge.

Sitting in a classroom that insists on maintaining its participants as, it can feel, nameless and indistinct who could be replaced on a whim with no impact to the situation can seem a meaningless and absurd construction of education requiring mere complicity and passivity. Particularly after undergoing a process of coming to respect and value themselves in a more democratic setting through an awareness of the constructive impact their skills and knowledge bring, possibly for the first time, feeling as if this is being taken away or threatened can frustrate or anger the student because they are effectively alienated from their own education. From a student perspective, because the class’ main tasks are defined without them and would occur with or without them, the student can feel that what they bring to the classroom (such as

their history, context, and experiences) are not appreciated or recognized and feel they are asked (and able) to contribute nothing.

This is unlike the education Young (1997) advocates for which would, quite contrarily, be a “creative enterprise that presupposes an irreplaceability of each person’s perspective, so that each learns something new, beyond herself or himself, from interaction with the others” (p. 51). In a class with shared task-defining, some of a student’s particular skill sets (ranging from time management, facilitation, banana bread making, nay saying, etc.) and interests (for example, in structural violence, Cold War relations, scale insects, linguistics, hip hop, *The Simpsons*, etc.) are known, valued, and utilized in co-creating the learning environment. The difference between those in the room would matter to the structure and content of the class, while negotiating across and integrating these different perspectives would rely on and further teach the practices of democratic thinking. These very particulars that serve to enrich more democratic classrooms are often lost to de-contextualized task-defining in Fish and DPrep classrooms that fail to underscore the potential relevance to the lived experiences of students.

This then can cause students to put up resistance—a demand to be more fully recognized—and can lead to them, in return, to be perceived as defiant. The perception of defiance may arise, for instance, if students express experiences and expectations that are in friction with those presented by faculty.¹⁰ Defiance, in these instances, may be an expression of and desire to account for differences in the context of Fish and DPrep classrooms. Being framed or perceived as difficult, problematic, or rude presents an additional challenge for the student in addition to feeling alienated, policed, and demeaned in the context of their education: the student is seen as conflicting with the faculty. Students unable to define appropriate educational tasks may begin to withdraw from the particular learning context they are within, or put forth so much effort in identifying ways to merely get through the experience, that the intent of the particular course or learning opportunity is undermined or lost, creating further tension with the faculty. That is, they either opt out, or become “strategic learners,” viewing that part of their education as a mere means to an entirely different (and unrelated) end (Bain & Zimmerman, 2009).

This perception of defiance becomes exacerbated if students express dissatisfaction with the type of task-execution assigned, for example, if they show that they experience it as “busy work” or as insufficiently challenging in ways the student has come to desire or expect. Further, if students attempt to alter the learning environment or begin more explicitly trying to engage

¹⁰ Charles Mills (1998) writes poignantly about experiences of Black students who are forced to either pretend that the moral universe described by white theorists were intended to include them—when they were not—or to explain to their white professors “things that they do not know and do not want to know” (pp. 4-5). As he puts it, Black students know “that what is in the books is largely mythical as a *general* statement of principles, that it was never intended to be applicable to them in the first place, but that within the structure of power relations, as part of the routine, one has to pretend that it does” (Mills, 1998, p. 4).

with task-defining processes, the situation can escalate as the faculty perceives their power and authority as being challenged while the student feels increasingly demeaned by feeling alienated from their own education. For example, a student who feels restricted in adjusting their environment in ways that will better enable them and their classmates to learn (or at least, enables them without bothering their classmates), such as changing the temperature, eating, or walking around to think, begins to feel as they are being policed in ways they know prevent their own deep engagement in the educational process. I (the faculty-author) often feel warm and thus prefer a quite cool room. Yet, I have come to realize that my body and my desires do not stand in for or accurately represent what is best for others or what they find comfortable, and my choices are, for some, detrimental to their comfort and to their ability to concentrate. It is these challenges that students face in transitioning from more to less democratic environments that leads us to make several constructive recommendations for student-faculty partners to extend the parameters of their work—that is, to further engage in a Democratic Practice model of education.

How Democratic Thinking Helps Students Negotiate These Challenges and Can Help Faculty Help Students

As we mentioned above, this article came out of our experiences together and with a group of other students who were frustrated at how they were being treated and how their actions were understood (or misunderstood) by faculty and students in other contexts on campus. This group started to talk with each other and to the faculty-author about what could be done to continue their education in Democratic Practices and to feel like they could be in other settings within the institution without being alienated from their own skills, newfound habits, and values. Over the course of several years, we found that certain ways of understanding the problem and of addressing it were particularly useful. We now turn to these, keeping in mind that some students never came to prefer the Democratic Practice model. And, of those who do come to prefer this model of education, some can, without frustration, slip back into their typical roles in classes and others will deal with their frustration without returning to the faculty member whose class they learned these practices in. It is also the case that some faculty do not see their role in this kind of mentoring, and some might also feel reluctant to be addressing what goes on in other settings, including in the classrooms of their colleagues. We offer this reflection on how the faculty member can approach the problem with students in productive ways, for the benefit of those students who do come to prefer the Democratic Practice model, who do feel frustrated, who do return to the faculty member for guidance and advice, and for the benefit of faculty who do believe that their role does not end when students leave their classroom. That is, we articulate ways that further the educational goals the faculty member had in teaching through the Democratic Practice model in the first place.

We suggest here three recommendations for faculty who value and teach using the Democratic Practice model to help students: 1) address explicitly the challenge and place that challenge in the larger context of higher education, society, culture, and business; 2) articulate

the values and weaknesses of the Democratic Practice model of education they have experienced and articulate why these values should be present elsewhere; and 3) find pragmatic strategies for changing the Fish or DPrep educational spaces, including, but not limited to, finding allies with whom to collectively act.

Our first recommendation—explicitly addressing the challenge the student faces and helping the student see it in the larger context of higher education (and beyond)—assists the student in translating their personal experience into a larger framework; it serves to contextualize their challenge. Instead of dismissing the concerns, addressing them in this way respects and recognizes the values of the student. This approach begins by respecting the frustration and sense of alienation that the student feels.

Assisting students to be explicit about the challenges they encounter in less democratic spaces serves to do more than validate the student's experience. This process will require the student to bring clarity to their challenge. It creates space for students to investigate the unstated and unarticulated views of the various educational models, what values they each take as central, and how each model impacts their relationship to their educational context. Recognizing the way their environment impacts them can help them further see how their environment is shaped not just by the individuals they encounter. Rather, the individuals are influenced by systematic structures; even if they may deal with the structures differently, these structures make up the milieu in which the individual acts and those actions affect the milieu. By understanding the various models of education and their "yearning," they can recognize that "it does not have to be this way, it could be otherwise" (Young, 1990, p. 6). While we have seen students able to articulate their frustrations and (sometimes) anger at the situation, the recommendation here asks the faculty to help the student see the underlying structures that lead to this frustration and anger.

This process recognizes the way both students and faculty are affected by the systematic structures shaping education; it also can help the student confront the way Democratic Practice models are counter-normative and the ways that educational institutions have structured the educational experience around the hierarchizing and limiting of task-defining and task-executing. That is, when the student works to examine the larger framework their challenge exists within, it leads the student to focus more on the relations and roles operating within their specific context as opposed to merely the particular individuals involved; they can see, for example, the costs for many faculty (who often are judged by traditional disciplinary standards and by student evaluations) to teach through Democracy Practices. The student is, as a result, less likely to approach the faculty member, who is viewed as an Other and whose own values can be easily dismissed. Through the recognition that particular environments and practices have certain values built into them that impact various positions differently, students can move towards articulating their own values and recognizing how enacting those values would shape their own environments and practices, thus, providing an opportunity to exercise democratic thinking.

This leads to our second recommendation, namely, that a more democratic faculty can and should assist students in articulating the values present in more democratic spaces and relationships and why they should be valued. Faculty can work to enable students to move from being positioned as passive or defensive to advocates for their wants or needs. In being clear that a particular practice in Fish and DPrep educational settings infringes on a well-articulated value that the student holds, the student is assisted in building a stronger argument when placed in those spaces. Another way to describe this recommendation is that when students are able to identify the values they are attempting to embody and how these values will potentially impact the roles and relations within a context, it positions them to act for, instead of react to, particular circumstances. To be clear, this will not necessarily make changing the situation easier or less hostile. Nonetheless, building upon the newly developed democratic thinking and skills that students gained in practicing democracy better equips them for new and more challenging contexts.

The first two recommendations enable the student to develop clarity about their personal experiences while simultaneously placing these within a broader framework that structures their environments; democratic thinking is developed through the emphasis on the interplay between individuals and structural forces. Such distinction makes more apparent the type of action called for to improve the student's environment while simultaneously positioning them to provide a strong argument for their stance and how it may impact the other roles and relations operating within the context.

At this point, the student and faculty—as well as others, including additional students, faculty, staff and administrators—can collaborate to define the tasks they want to undertake in an attempt to change a classroom or campus by identifying concrete actions the student or faculty can take together. We have found that, when thinking about reforming or changing environments they feel are stifling, students are likely to come up with grand ideas of what could be done, which can quickly lead to disillusionment and anger. Rather than discouraging such ideas, faculty can help students place all of their ideas in context, assisting in the recognition of the various relations involved in actions, who would be able to take such actions, and who would be impacted and how. By introducing time and other limits (including energy and possible costs or unintended effects) as restricting frameworks, the student(s) and faculty can work to identify appropriate goals, to identify actions most likely to lead to those goals, and to develop plans as to how to mitigate unintended consequences. From there, they can consider next possible steps.

Depending on the wider context of the student and the student-faculty partnership, the third recommendation can be scaffolded in a way that builds on the student's capacities and engagement with democratic thinking and action. For example, if the student is particularly restricted by the context or timeframe, the student may be able to negotiate a particular assignment or reorganize the physical space for one lesson in a lecture-driven class. This fruitfully enables the student to feel empowered through engaging with Fish and DPrep classrooms with the capacities, skills, and values they have developed in Democratic Practice

classrooms without too great of a risk, particularly with the support provided by the faculty mentor.

The recommendations and process we have articulated, however, have also emphasized the networks and communities the student is a part of or intersects with. Thus, if the student has the opportunity to develop solidarity with those similarly affected by the structural relations and roles that they are challenged by, they may have even further opportunities to engage with democratic thinking and action. For example, the student-author began partnering with the faculty-author early on in their time as an undergraduate. This enabled a multi-year engagement with the process we have described above, which provided time to identify and build relationships and solidarity with others facing similar challenges. In part, this was enabled by the particular setting of our institution, which fosters an intimate environment with an emphasis on engaged learning. As a result, a community of people across various roles—students, faculty, staff, deans—were drawn together with the goal of instilling more democratic practices in multiple levels of the institution. These actions would not have been possible in a less-committed partnership of shorter duration, or in a partnership made up of one student and one faculty member.

While this process undoubtedly promotes a piecemeal approach to change, it does so in a way that enables students to take more responsibility for their education by defining the tasks they can undertake to change the campus and can (as we have seen) effect real change, including learning environments that better promote democratic thinking and skill building. Even small changes, such as altering some expectations on a particular assignment or reorganizing the physical space for even one lesson, can make an impact on the campus overall while still reaching the goal of becoming more democratic, and this simultaneously opens up the possibility for a more encompassing, longer-term conversation and action which might directly lead to creating a more just education through democratic practices. These large and small actions also profoundly transform the students, from people who have education done to them, to actors who profoundly shape their own education.

Conclusion

Based on our experiences together, we have advocated for a model of education through Democratic Practices. Using Iris Marion Young's discussion of the limitation of the distributive paradigm, we have argued that justice requires taking into account decision-making procedures, specifically, in the form of a less hierarchized division of labor in the defining and executing of tasks. We have argued that a model of education that does more justice to the students must make use of, and work to develop, their abilities to do task-defining work. After articulating some ways this can happen in classrooms and the democratic thinking that makes this possible—and emerges from this work—we have also shown how, having taken on an identity as one who can and should be included in task-defining work, students may become frustrated and angry in educational settings where this desire is forestalled and they are taken

as defiant. Finally, we argue that, if students return to their faculty partner in this situation, together they can work to help the student through democratic thinking to understand the context in which this problem occurs, the student's own values and how those matter, and, finally, to move towards task defining and towards action.

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