
Democracy & Education

Deliberative Democracy: A Contested Interactive Space

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Abstract

This is a response to Liggett's (2014) call to implement "deliberate democracy" in English language education classrooms. While the concept of participating in deliberate democracy is a solid ideal and worthy of pursuit, I present questions and scenarios that illustrate the complicated nature of the tasks. By sharing my *testimonio* along with the research, I propose that in order for teachers to guide their students' participation in deliberate democratic activities, they must step back and understand the context of the sociocultural interactive space created in the classroom and whether ELL students are able to and/or prepared to speak in an empowered way to engage in this contested interactive space.

This article is in response to

Liggett, T. (2014). Deliberative Democracy in English Language Education: Cultural and Linguistic Inclusion in the School Community. *Democracy & Education* 22(2), Article 4. Available at: <http://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol22/iss2/4>

THE IDEAS PRESENTED in Liggett (2014) article "Deliberative Democracy in English Language Education: Cultural and Linguistic Inclusion in the School Community" initiated a reflective process where I examined my experiences as a former English language learner and juxtaposed these with an understanding that my experiences emerged within a sociohistorical context of educational practices in the past. As a bilingual/ESOL/multicultural teacher educator today, I recognize the critical issues that emerging bilingual students and English language development teachers face in their schools. Because of this, I'm grateful for the opportunity to think deeply about the ideas in the article and in particular about the interactive space where English language learners might participate in deliberative democracy (Liggett, 2014).

The core argument proposed are that all English language learners (ELL students) should be given access to a linguistic skill set and social capital in order to present an argument and to defend a position that theoretically would lead to participation in the

democratic process. The idea of focusing on deliberative democracy in English language education as a way to be inclusive of cultural and linguistic diversity of students, while preparing them for participation in a democratic society, is an idealistic position. I believe that the reality for many emerging bilingual students is much more complicated than deliberative democracy can address. At the same time, my internal struggle led me to acknowledge a shared vision for the future, noting that if we, as

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educators working with English language learners, don't move toward a higher calling of scaffolding our instruction for democratic participation, then who will open the way for the next generation of linguistically and culturally diverse students? Too many emerging bilingual students have suffered a subtractive education (Baker & Hornberger, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999), and I believe that with sociocultural considerations, the argument for deliberative democracy can help move conversations and practices in the right direction for change. My approach in this paper is not as opposition of deliberative democracy but rather as a caution about our responsibility as educators to peel back sociocultural, historical, and political layers to reveal institutional racism that silences emerging bilinguals.

In my response to the article, I depart from a traditional academic discourse and weave my experiences and reflections into the text. I draw from the cultural tradition of testimonies to present a personal narrative (*testimonio*); connect with research; and reflect upon the implications for today's culturally and linguistically diverse students and schools and the teachers who interact with them on a daily basis.

Educational Inheritance & Participation Space

I grew up in Los Angeles during the years when the research to support bilingual education was emerging and programs were not quite ready for school settings. At home, my Spanish-speaking mother raised my five sisters and me on her own, in a country and cultural environment that was foreign to her. She struggled and sacrificed all her life so that we could have the opportunity to obtain a good education. She would tell us that she could not leave us money, but that our inheritance would be our education, something that would become a part of us and could not be taken away.

I entered kindergarten speaking only Spanish and remembered that from the first day, the teacher would scold me for speaking my native language. One day, I leaned over and asked a boy, *in Spanish*, about what we were supposed to do, and my teacher raised her voice and angrily told me, "No Spanish!" As a five-year-old, I was terrified, and from that moment onward, I did not speak. In my home, the discourse style was such that when my mother was upset with me, she lowered her voice and quietly said my name. So, it was confusing when this important adult raised her voice in an angry manner. My five-year-old spirit was traumatized.

The research shows that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds bring funds of knowledge (Moll, Gonzalez, & Amanti, 2005) that are often overlooked, misunderstood, or in the worst-case scenario, ignored (Delpit & Kilgour Dowdy, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Phillips's (1983) groundbreaking work on participant structures as well as Heath's (1983, 2012) ethnography on the way we use words at home and in school have given educators an understanding that culturally diverse children are socialized to participate in ways that counter the mainstream school's cultural expectations. Unfortunately, many in education are unaware that they are viewing a child's differences as a deficit instead of an asset. The research shows that this can lead to unintentional negative consequences in the identity development of diverse children (Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999;

Zentella, 2002). As I moved into first grade, I was referred to the special education program and worked with a speech pathologist because I did not speak aloud in English or in Spanish.

The Interpretation of Silence

Liggett (2014) discussed *silence* and made an important point about recognizing and honoring students who are silent in the classroom by choice. Silence is much more complicated than simply a "choice" and can be interpreted in many different ways. For immigrant students or emerging bilingual students, silence could mean that they are not feeling safe, that they may not have the linguistic skills to articulate their ideas, or that they have internalized the oppression and institutional racism that devalues their languages and voices. The approach to the issue of silence troubled me for several reasons. The argument that deliberate silence can be interpreted or equated as communicating intent falls into a dangerous zone of misinterpreting or misunderstanding the role of silence. As teachers of emerging bilingual students, the need to stop and assess a student's silence with a cautious perspective can be easily lost in the busy day-to-day decisions and responsibilities teachers live each day.

To provide an example of how silence can be misunderstood, I reflected on an event I experienced while in graduate school. As a pilot study, I began collecting data in a kindergarten room, attempting to understand how two young children navigated an all-English environment. Both of these children had little or no exposure to English prior to entering the school system. Through observation, field notes, and interactions with the children, I began to note differences in their personalities and risk-taking behavior while acquiring English. As I observed the more silent child, I couldn't help but see myself in this child's quiet engagement in the classroom. This event served as a reminder that silence should not be considered as "agreement" or seen as a lack of intelligence. I know from experience that silence could represent an inability to engage in the discussion because of fear, unfamiliarity with the language or sociolinguistic cues, lack of understanding the task or inquiry, or an unseen socioemotional factor that prevents a student from participating.

Educational researchers in the field of second-language acquisition and education (Collier, 1995; Fishman, 1999; García, 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Wong-Fillmore, 1991) have pointed out that there is a strong interconnectedness among language, culture, and identity. Fishman (1999) stated that "language *is* the culture," and yet he would agree identity and a sense of self or of society isn't expressed through a *particular* language (my emphasis).

While some people may see a sociolinguistic intent in silence, I posit that it is much more complicated and should be approached and understood with caution, especially in academic settings. Providing open-ended opportunities for emerging bilingual students to reveal their thinking, insights, and meaning-making processes are ways for educators to work with individual students who are "silent." As a newcomer teacher, I found a daily 20-minute journal writing time a worthwhile literacy pedagogical approach to engage with students on a one-to-one basis. I was able to take a

peek into their experiences and their linguistic and academic literacy skill sets as well as provide direct instruction to help them continue their growth.

Identity development is another outcome that is connected to how one participates or is silenced among peers. For an emerging bilingual individual, identity is interrelated to how he or she uses and understands words in daily interactions.

Adolescence and Identity Development

One day I came home with a bag hidden behind my back. Even after a graveyard shift at the film factory, my mother tried to be up and awake when we came home from school. That afternoon, she intuitively knew I was hiding something, and as I tried to sneak into the bathroom, she was there, asking me what I had. My tears began to flow as I handed over my bag of hair dye. She quietly asked me, “Why?” and I confessed that I felt ugly, that I wanted to be like my friends who had blond hair and blue eyes. She lovingly caressed my face and said, “*Mi hija* you’re beautiful just like you are.” I shook my head and said, “No, Mom, look at my nose—it’s too big.” She smiled and told me that I had an Aztec nose, and perhaps it was the same nose as an ancestral Aztec princess. I looked up at her loving face and was intrigued. I did not dye my hair that day.

I don’t remember much about my middle school years, except that somehow I passed my classes, with the exception of history, which was quite boring and never really seemed to relate to my life. Research on language acquisition and bilingual education notes that it takes 7–10 years for an emerging bilingual learner to reach comparable academic levels of their peers (Cummins, 2001, 2008). Middle school was that transition point for me. One day in history class, I looked up when I heard the name Queen Alexandria. My mother’s name was *Alejandrina*! My mother was named after a queen? Later, as a bilingual educator, I learned about the power of cognates and how creating relevant connections between the content and the student’s background is a key strategy in culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Delpit & Kilgour 2008; Ladson-Billings 1995a, 1995b; Jordan-Irvine, 2003; Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). In my middle school experience, however, the teaching and curriculum missed the opportunity to make connections to my life as the fifth daughter of an immigrant woman from Mexico. Today, looking back on those years, I’m saddened by the knowledge that I wasn’t the only student impacted by a subtractive education. Examining the completion and dropout rates during the early 1970s, we find that approximately 35% students identified as “Hispanic” dropped out, while only 58% were designated as “completers” (Stark & Noel, 2015). This echoes what Ream and Rumberger (2008) found in the U.S. Census data. According to these researchers, “approximately one-third of all students who enter high school in the ninth grade, fail to graduate four years later” (p. 109).

High school was a nightmare for me. Nobody knew my name; I was lost in the shuffle within the halls; I struggled academically. That first year of high school, I decided to sign up for Spanish, but once I met Señor García, I knew it was the wrong decision. There were a few other Chicana/Chicano students who, like me, wanted to learn how to read and write in Spanish. Sure, we knew how to

speak and carry on a conversation and most of us had been our family’s translator for years. But Señor García shamed us for not being biliterate and belittled us in class until each of us dropped out and changed our schedules.

One day I was surprised to be called into the counselor’s office. I had never seen a counselor before. I thought it was nice that someone was asking me about what I liked and what I wanted to do with my life. I shared that I loved plants and animals. In my mind, I envisioned caring for animal life or dreamed of working in a forest, whose pictures I only saw in books. But instead, the school placed me in vocational education classes that kept me away from traditional high school classes such as English literature and biology. I was tracked into courses where I never read Shakespeare or Dickens or explored the differences between human and plant cells. I didn’t know I was missing fundamental opportunities or exposure to content that could serve me in my future.

Vocational education wasn’t my choice, but I didn’t understand that I had a choice; I attended classes focused on animal care and control instead of the traditional high school classes. As an adult woman today, I can remember the moment that I realized that while the school adults and I were using the same words, there wasn’t agreement on what we meant when discussing my interest in working with animals. While visiting the LA zoo with my class, I was thinking about and imagining what it would be like to become a veterinarian working with a variety of animals. The reality I confronted was that everyone who looked like me with brown skin and who spoke Spanish carried a shovel. This moment of realization and identity shock was hurtful and confusing, because what the school saw when they looked at me was not the image my mother reflected back to me. Was this the inheritance my mother spoke about? I didn’t believe this, and so I dropped out of high school.

The Promise of Culturally Responsive Practice

There is much in the literature that speaks to the identity development of Latino youth and how their educational experiences contribute to that identity (Nieto, 2005; Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Zentella, 2002). The promise of culturally responsive practice points to ways that teachers can create inclusive, empowering educational environments for all students, and in particular environments that are supportive of healthy identity development in culturally and linguistically diverse students (Delpit & Kilgour, 2008; García, 2005; Gay, 2010; Hakuta & August, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Creating a positive climate is an act of culturally responsive practice and mirrors key features of educating for social justice (Gay, 2010; Hackman, 2005; Jordan-Irvine, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Teaching for social justice is often associated with “equitable education” and includes an “approach and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity” (Nieto & Bode, 2012 p. 12). Culturally responsive pedagogy is the action behind social justice teaching and can be seen in teacher candidates’ inclusion of language goals in a lesson plan for ELL students and use of scaffolding or sheltered instruction, while building upon students’ knowledge and skills. Gay (2010) identified culturally responsive

pedagogy to include the knowledge about cultural ways and learning styles, the courage “to stop blaming the victims of school failure,” the will “to confront assumptions of cultural universality,” the skills to act productively in translating knowledge and sensitivity about cultural diversity into pedagogical practices” and the tenacity to pursue equity in education for students who are not being served by our schools (p. 46). Being sensitive is often interpreted as “care.”

The notion of care is something that has surfaced repeatedly in the literature (Noddings, 1998) and in particular when referring to emerging bilingual students (Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Rodriquez, 2012). As Valenzuela (1999) examined field notes and transcribed interviews from her three-year ethnographic study of predominantly Mexican-heritage high school students, a pattern of words related to “care” was revealed. The mixed-methods research approach of Valenzuela’s study allowed her to locate “the problem of achievement squarely in school-based relationships and organizational structures and policies designed to erase students’ culture” (pp. 9–10). She later explained that through her analysis of students’ classroom conversations, interviews, and observations, the salient themes of subtractive assimilation, social capital, and care/caring revealed how students’ fought to hold onto their identities with integrity and pride. The outcome she found over the three years points to how schools weaken Mexican students’ supportive social connections and withhold or remove resources important for their academic success.

I have repeatedly heard and read about Spanish-speaking students who dropped out of high school because they didn’t think anyone “cared” about them at school and/or the content was not relevant or meaningful. This was certainly true in my own personal situation. Valenzuela (1999) also pointed to this idea in her study of Texan youth in high school. During her interviews with the high school students, they shared words that reflected the complicated relationship among language, identity, and schooling. “No one seems to care if I show up. And they talk down to you when you do show up” (p. 88). “You kinda have to seem like you don’t care because if you say something, and it comes out sounding stupid, then everybody will say you’re dumb” (p. 71). “This teacher asked me in front of everybody to stop raising my hand so much in class . . . The kids laughed at me . . . I felt so stupid” (p. 72).

In contrast to these situations, Valenzuela (1999) explained that the students thrived best in nurturing environments where they were accepted, recognized for their assets, and shown respect through authentic caring relationships. The guiding principles for culturally responsive practices include the social-emotional domain of creating positive relationships between teachers and students and between schools and the home community.

Seen as foundational work on academic identity, Steele’s work (1997) on stereotype threats explored how perceived stereotypes that authority figures reflect to students contributed to loss of identity and to self-fulfilling prophesy of low academic achievement. Steele also pointed to optimistic teacher-student relationships as affirming students’ identity development with certain domains. In a school setting, the linguistic domains are prevalent, and for emerging bilingual students in the early stages of their

English proficiency, the linguistic domain will have a direct impact on identity development. Steele also pointed out that caring relationships are central for students’ academic success. Valenzuela’s (1999) ethnographic study described instances of the caring relationships as well as examples where the students felt silenced, disempowered, misunderstood, and disrespected. The impact and consequences of these outcomes are far reaching beyond the schooling years. According to Steele (1997), this focused look at how societal stereotype threats contribute to identity development leads us to consider the following:

This is a threat that in the short run can depress their intellectual performance and, over the long run, undermine the identity itself, a predicament of serious consequence. But it is a predicament—something in the interaction between a group’s social identity and its social psychological context, rather than something essential to the group itself. (p. 627)

Most educators don’t want to believe their classroom is a reflection of greater societal perceptions and stereotypes; this reality would give us pause to ask, “Where is the social justice in our education system?”

The question then turns to how can we change this in our classrooms? When considering the complex, multilayered climates where students’ cognitive skills and identity are developed, I can’t help but feel that the environment is critical for creating a safe place for all students to feel welcomed and valued. I believe that it is more complicated than we think. If this foundational instructional strategy or process of creating a welcoming climate was a simple act, wouldn’t we have been making progress and experiencing more inclusive, safe climates in our schools today? As a teacher educator, I question and wonder what prevents this critical belief in developing positive, caring relationships from being internalized and put into practice within our current teaching force? I agree that identity is an important part of the conversation about deliberative democracy in ELL education. However, there is an internal process involved in identity development, and so this lends itself to a theoretical possibility, which doesn’t always fall into neat, clean parameters. The important thing to remember is that language performance is an outward demonstration of a skill, and at some point in time, it can be a reflection of ones’ thinking. But not always.

Language, Literacy and Cultural Nexus

My story is a long, circular one, and like all humans, it has many twists and turns with unexpected results. I believe I became a bilingual/ESOL multicultural educator because from the beginning I knew that there was something intriguing and confusing about how language, literacy, and culture interacted with the schooling process. I can almost point to the exact moment when the seed of inquiry was planted.

Early in my school years, a woman from the school came to speak with my mother. In our tiny kitchen with only three chairs, this official woman was served coffee while my five sisters and I stood behind my mother in silent respect. The woman spoke about

how the school enjoyed having us girls at the school, but that it was important for us to speak and practice more English. My mother smiled at her and then glanced up as if to ask us, “¿Que me esta diciendo la señora?” (What is the lady saying?) In horror, my sisters and I looked at each other and wondered who was going to translate the school lady’s words to our mother. Afterward, I remember my mother gathering us and stressing that while the woman from the school was well meaning, in our home, we would speak Spanish. Growing up in Mexico, my mother had a formal education that stopped at sixth grade, but in my eyes she was a wise woman. She would be happy to know that we now have a strong educational research base on the importance of maintaining and building upon one’s native language.

During the 1970s, educational researcher and writer Jim Cummins wrote about the status of bilingual education and the disempowerment of bilingual students in the educational process. “Since equality of opportunity is believed to be a given, it is assumed that individuals are responsible for their own failure and are, therefore, made to feel that they have failed because of their own inferiority” (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 180). Cummins went on to provide a theory of language acquisition that still influences bilingual education today. The distinction between having Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and having Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) allowed advocates to argue for instructing students in their native language. The research supported the assertion that students proficient in their native language acquired a second language more efficiently and quickly than students who were experiencing “semilingualism” or a lack of linguistic competence in either language (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 40). Since that time, many researchers and educators have joined Cummings in writing about the cognitive and socioemotional benefits of having one’s native language valued, recognized, and built upon (Cummins 2001, 2008; Collier & Thomas, 2004; Delpit & Kilgour 2008; García, 2005; Hakuta & August, 1997; Nieto & Bode, 2012).

While the concept of deliberative democracy is a solid ideal and worthy of pursuit, I believe there is a missing piece or step prior to being able to participate in an interactive space with deliberative democratic structures. A democracy is built upon the idea that all participants are equal, but we know that in education, this is not the case for emerging bilinguals. Often, they are not offered opportunities or access to critical information that would enable them to navigate a system with many hidden rules. While well meaning, the educational system still holds on to systematic racism and institutional discrimination in their policies and practices.

I recently had a profound experience that took me by surprise. I had the opportunity to travel to Mexico City to attend a conference at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. Prior to my travels, I felt anxiety. As I reflected on this feeling, I realized that I had fears about being accepted by people in Mexico. Would my Spanish be acceptable? While my heritage is from Mexico, I was not born or raised there. Would I be seen as less-than? Then, on the first day of the conference, as I sat and listened to Etelvina Sandoval Flores, a brilliant scholar who spoke about *Retos y nuevos espacios de formación* (Challenges and Opportunities in

Educational Reform) in academic Spanish, I was surprised that I understood about 85% of her talk. The second thing that surprised me was a long-buried thought that floated to the surface: *They lied to me*. As I inspected this thought, it occurred to me that somewhere inside of me, I had held onto a belief from my childhood. The deeply buried lie was that Spanish was not a language of intelligence or that Spanish was not academic. As I sat and listened to Sandoval Flores, I had proof right in front of me that this wasn’t the case. I had read Skutnab-Kangas’s (1999, 2000) groundbreaking idea that language is a right, and I had studied other scholars (Fishman, 1999; Wong-Fillmore, 1991; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Brisk & Harrington, 2000) who emphatically stressed that all languages are functional for communicating ideas and passing on a cultural way for a people. I knew that any one language was not better than another. Yet as I sat hearing about the changes needed in our teacher preparation programs for the benefit of our future K–12 students, I recognized the lie I had internalized as a child. At the end of this keynote lecture (Sandoval Flores, 2014), I metaphorically and symbolically threw away the lie that “Spanish was not an academic language.” My world shifted, and I felt liberated.

Liggett (2014) argued that an education that focuses on deliberative democracy for English language learners “would not only foster an inclusive classroom community, but also prepare ELLs for meaningful democratic participation” (p. 1). To that end, it is proposed that students need to write and speak in ways that promote their positions, argue points, or provide contrasting views or perspectives. This is a position that is becoming more popular now that Common Core State Standards have been adopted in most of the United States. This position has also gained popularity with scholars in the field of bilingual/ESOL education, as noted by the recent emergence of Stanford University’s website and MOOC on understanding language (<http://ell.stanford.edu>). The premise of being able to articulate one’s position and support it with evidence is at the center of academic language. I recognize that language is a tool for thought and for communication (Vygotsky, 1934/2012; Wink, 2011; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000) and is central to the teaching and learning process. However, when I think about the various language skills needed to engage in the discourse functions related to presenting an argument, debating, deliberating, and challenging another’s view or position, I can’t help but wonder where the sociocultural issues of identity, power, and privilege are included in the discussion. If deliberative democracy holds promise for English language learners, my questions ask: Which English language learners? Does the “the ability to engage in dialogue that challenges or questions perspectives of oneself and one’s identity” (Liggett, 2014, p. 2) pertain to young children in elementary settings, or possibly only secondary students who are developmentally more mature in their cognitive skills? Could this skill set be more appropriate for students who have been acquiring English for more than three years than recent immigrant students? In an attempt to answer some of these questions, I delve into the intent of deliberative democracy and

the complexity of language to consider how a teacher could prepare students for the intellectual and emotional and linguistic preconditions for democratic deliberation.

Deliberative democracy emerges out of democratic theory where decisions are made by agreement and offers a “discussion-based” opportunity for all who will be impacted by the decision. The key decision should aim to be based on “what is good” and not dependent on those who have resources or are better prepared (Melton, 2009). This approach contrasts with aggregative democracy, which is based on the idea there is fairness in competition. Young (2000) pointed out that exclusionary practices contribute to problems in implementing deliberative democracy, which she posited privilege argumentation as a discourse style. External exclusions show up in institutional systems that favor the norm and where the non-norm is barred from participating. Internal exclusions are subtle and often show up in educational classrooms where an individual’s communication style doesn’t fit a linear mode. According to Melton (2009), individuals are “ignored or looked down upon . . . ; their presence has no weight because they are not heard or listened to” (p. 176). This internal exclusion practice becomes bolstered with words like *traditional* and *standard* that legitimize the rejection of orientations that are different than the dominant norm.

The first step for a teacher to consider is to explore the central question: Is presenting an argument or providing a rationale or reasons for one’s position a discourse style or a linguistic function? Examining the skill of debate or deliberation requires several preconditions: (a) a contextual understanding of the topic being debated; (b) a cognitive skill set to see multiple sides; (c) the linguistic skills to express oneself and to counter another person’s point; and (d) the confidence to speak up. I would posit that it is a linguistic function—a pragmatic way to approach the use of language. Kress (1976), in his analysis of Halliday’s work, noted that “although this connection between language function and language system is clearest in the case of young children’s language, it is actually, I think, a feature of language as a whole. The system of natural language can best be explained in the light of the social functions which language has evolved to serve. Language is as it is because of what it has to do” (p. 17). He echoed Halliday’s groundbreaking sociolinguistic work that noted that functions provide a frame for understanding how language is used. Understanding explicit and implicit ways of communicating are part of being a multiculturally aware global citizen. If engaging in deliberative democracy is part of an interactive space with two opposing opinions, why is it up to the English language learner to change their ways and accommodate the mainstream way of engaging in debate?

Macedo and Bartolome (2014) raised this issue when they argued that in order for education to be truly liberating, it must be respectfully communicated in the vernacular of students themselves, particularly when these students come from subordinated populations. English is seen as a language of power (Delpit, 1988), and yet we have to question if this perspective in our educational system is contributing to the creation of an ethnocentric perspective in our citizens? If our goal is to become

cosmopolitan and move toward becoming global citizens, doesn’t the term *global* include and allow for skills to be developed in multiple languages and not just in English? In the call for cosmopolitanism, there is a call for opening up the “global public sphere” to issues that bring diverse perspectives together with the goal of civic involvement and for the good of all (Ferguson & Nagel, 2009). But how does this happen in the classroom?

This brings us to the second point to contemplate. Teachers need to consider how language is an amazingly complex tool that includes the concept of *voice*. I’m not only referring to the phonological aspect of sound, but the concept of voice includes the ways that words are conveyed and communicated in the interactive space between individuals. How could our world be a democracy without the inclusion of multiple voices, points of views, and ways of expression? Macedo and Bartolome (2014) captured the essence of this argument:

What is important to understand is that voice requires a struggle and the understanding of both its possibilities and limitations. For most immigrants and other subordinated groups in the United States, coming to voice represents a process through which they come to know what it means to be at the periphery of the intimate and yet fragile relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. It also means that the colonized becomes fully aware that voice is not something to be given by the colonizer. Voice is a human right. Voice is a democratic right. (pp. 24–25).

While Macedo and Bartolome positioned themselves as critical multiculturalists, the argument they put forth brings to question how bilingual/ESOL educators can facilitate the learning of marginalized students and English language learners in culturally responsive ways to present arguments, participate in debates, and at the same time welcome their students’ voices. Storytelling—*testimonios*—has yielded as one of the more common ways to provide a counter narrative to the mainstream way of seeing the world. According to DeNicolò and González (2015), *testimonios* can become a sharing of struggles with others who understand and identify with the speaker. They also shared that “this process can also function as a call to action through bringing awareness of oppression to those who do not share a lived or experiential understanding” (p. 111). The practice and need for *testimonios* in the classroom will not only open the space for empathy, understanding, and action but also provide a challenge to educators to broaden the dialogic style within deliberative democracy instruction. Young (2000) put forth the idea that in order to include people who are marginalized, the rules of interaction and participation need to change—for example, to include other patterns of discourse. Melton (2009) extended this idea with the notion that moral respect is at the core of democracy and that when there is a respectful disposition, it will promote civil and respectful deliberative practices. Melton pointed out, however, that dispositional change can only occur at the internal, individual level, which is not a classroom practice educators can implement. Educators can create environments that foster an inclusive

community climate, but the truth is that transformational internalized awareness needs to originate within the individual.

In a strange way, the writing of this article is my *testimonio*, a nontraditional style to present an argument and alternative view. By framing my *testimonio* within the sociopolitical context of the way we interact with emerging bilinguals in the classroom, I am resisting the adoption of a simplified view of the interactive space where our ELLs find themselves placed. By sharing my *testimonio*, I am calling for action and change in the way teachers working with emerging bilingual students view language, culture, and literacy—through a sociocultural lens instead of accepting institutional forces that sustain marginalization in our schools today.

With the move toward the Common Core Standards (CCS) in the nation and the adoption of the English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards, the educational community has been discussing the overlapping ideas of constructing a claim with support and providing evidence and skills to analyze and critique arguments as key for all English language learners. While there is something powerful in the way that language can be used in similar ways across content, we need to approach the standards with caution and acknowledge that it is more complicated than we think and that it requires us to step back and understand the context of the sociocultural interactive space created in the classroom and whether EL students are able to and/or prepared to speak in an empowered way to engage in this contested interactive space.

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