



# Difference, Dissensus and Democracy: Revitalizing the Political in Education

**October 16-18, 2009**

Program (revised September 1, 2009)

## **Friday, October 16th**

*Case Room, Liu Institute for Global Issues*

9:00am            Welcome

9:30-10:30am    Educating beyond cultural diversity: Redrawing the boundaries of  
democratic pluralism  
*Sharon Todd, Stockholm University*

In this paper, I draw distinctions between “cultural diversity” and “pluralism” and argue that a radical conception of pluralism is needed for fostering democratic education. I begin with an exploration of the usages of these terms in European educational policy documents that promote democratic education as a vehicle for overcoming social conflict between different cultural groups. Here, it can be seen that cultural diversity is frequently synonymous with pluralism, a fact that prevents adequate engagement with the very terms of conflict such educational endeavours seek to surmount. Instead, this paper calls for a more robust conception of pluralism, one that does not simply denote different cultural groupings but is found to be rooted in the very formation of subjectivity itself. Moreover, following Hannah Arendt and Chantal Mouffe, I contend that such a radical view of pluralism leads to a better understanding of conflict and contestation.

10:45-11:45am    The public policy pedagogy of corporate and alternative news media  
*Deirdre Kelly, University of British Columbia*

This paper argues for seeing in-depth news coverage of political, social, and economic issues as “public policy pedagogy.” I draw on Nancy Fraser’s democratic theory, which attends to social differences and does not assume that unity exists as a starting point or a goal of public debate. Alongside the formation of “subaltern counterpublics” (Fraser), independent media outlets sometimes develop. There, members of alternative publics debate their interests and strategize about how to be heard in wider, mass-mediated public arenas. I address the normative implications of this non-unitary, multiple-publics model for news journalism, analyzing how current conventions in mainstream news journalism (e.g., “balance” defined as “airing two extremes”) can restrict public debate and impoverish the public policy pedagogy on offer. I illustrate my arguments with a case study of media coverage of the creation and implementation of a social justice curriculum in British Columbia.

12:00-1:00pm      Semiotics and identity construction  
*Tomasz Szkudlarek, University of Gdansk*

The process of identity construction simultaneously operates in individual, cultural and political registers. From Plato to Rousseau to Herbart to Dewey to “human capital” theory, education and politics have been two sides of the same process, although theories of education typically use separate languages for describing those two sides (e.g., psychology vs. sociology). Contemporary philosophy of politics appears to offer a possibility of linking those traits. Ernesto Laclau bases the notion of political hegemony on Lacanian psychoanalysis. Even though his present interests focus on politics entirely, in his older texts we may read of subjectivity as informed by very similar structural conditions to those pertaining to political hegemony. The paper starts with a brief presentation of Laclau’s theory and suggests a way of using it in the investigation of subjectivity. Laclau understands objectivity, identity and subjectivity by means of rhetoric, which means that his theory may easily be turned into a conceptual matrix of research into educational and political practices alike. Laclau’s theory seems to gain an even stronger potential of pedagogical applications when supplemented with Umberto Eco’s semantics of metaphor. Eco connects the rhetorical tropes of metonymy, metaphor and catechresis in a way that makes them transitive, enabling a coherent theorization of complex processes of individual identification and political hegemony construction. The connection of the theoretical sources provided by Laclau and Eco demands an explication of some controversies regarding the understanding of rhetorical figures applied in the process of identity formation like metaphors and catechreses by both authors. The paper will propose a common ground for those approaches.

## **Lunch**

2:30-3:30pm      Souvenir, identity and the semiosis of “presentification”: National imageries and articulations of political legitimation in school textbooks  
*André E. Mazawi, University of British Columbia*

This paper engages the works of Paul Ricoeur and Michel de Certeau on images of remembrance (Souvenir) and their written representations. It draws on works in this tradition in order to problematise the “economies of writing” which underpin the articulation of national imageries in school textbooks used in deeply divided societies, and how they invoke, or “presentify” (to use Ricoeur’s rendition), exclusive notions of citizenship and political participation. The paper pushes for a critical reflection on the ways through which civic and political exclusion of diverse social groups is discursively legitimized, how it is semiotically choreographed, and how it fabricates a naturalized and objectified consensual order—a souvenir—that shuns political dissent and difference in classroom discussions and in civic education more particularly.

3:45-4:45pm      Subjectification and the (b)order of education: Rancière's political phenomenology  
Gert J. J. Biesta, University of Stirling

I take the question of subjectivity to be a central educational question. This is not because it is the only thing that should matter in education. But when education loses a concern for subjectivity it runs the risk of becoming mere training, socialisation or even indoctrination. Subjectivity plays an important role in discussions about democratic education. In one view the role of democratic education is conceived as the production of democratic citizens. Here, democratic subjectivity is seen as the *outcome* of particular educational interventions. The problem with such a view is that it tends to separate the domain of education from the domain of politics and hence makes it difficult to understand and acknowledge the political dimensions of democratic subjectification. Jacques Rancière's suggestion that the event of democracy coincides with the event of subjectification offers a helpful alternative for understanding the connection between democracy, subjectivity and education. As it highlights the role of dissensus in democratic subjectification, Rancière's approach also has the potential to deal more effectively with the difficult nature of this process. In my paper I want to build on some of Rancière's ideas in order to explore the educational dimensions of democratic subjectification. One point for discussion has to do with Rancière's suggestion that subjectification *only* occurs in the transformation of the 'distribution of the sensible.' I wish to explore the educational and political implications of an approach which sees subjectification both occurring 'within' and 'across' different distributions of the sensible.

**Saturday, October 17th**

*Case Room, Liu Institute for Global Issues*

9:30-10:30am      Is education for patriotism morally required, permitted, or unacceptable?  
Zdenko Kodolja, University of Ljubljana

If patriotism is morally unacceptable, as some philosophers believe, then education for patriotism cannot be tolerated, although some other non-moral reasons might be in favour of such education. However, it seems that not all types of patriotism can be convincingly rejected as morally unacceptable. Even more, if MacIntyre's claim is correct that patriotism is not only a virtue but also the foundation of morality (since we can understand and adopt moral rules only in the particular version in which they are endorsed by our community), then schools ought to cultivate patriotism. For, in this context, patriotism (understood as a moral duty to show special concern for one's country and compatriots) is morally required. But if this claim is mistaken and some sorts of patriotism are at best only morally allowed, as Primoratz argues, then schools are not obliged to cultivate patriotism. Although they are not required to cultivate it, they may promote morally acceptable types of patriotism such as "moderate patriotism" (Nathanson), "constitutional patriotism" (Habermas), "republican patriotism" (Viroli) and "cosmopolitan patriotism" (Appiah). The opposite, extreme patriotism, which leads to hostility towards other countries, international tensions and conflicts, should not be promoted in schools. Therefore, the answer to the question as to whether education for patriotism is morally required, permitted or unacceptable depends on which kind of patriotism is being discussed.

10:45-11:45am      Heterotopias of homelessness: Citizenship on the margins  
*Maria Mendel, University of Gdansk*

The concept of heterotopia challenges political theory, which has often focused on utopic thinking. Foucault (1984) describes a heterotopia as a heterogeneous space that juxtaposes “in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.” Streets, squares and parks form heterotopias when their utopic purity as public space is juxtaposed with the private spaces created by the cardboard boxes and other temporary shelters of homeless people. Since citizenship has traditionally been thought of as participation in a democratic public sphere, how do heterotopias of homelessness challenge ideas about citizenship? Based on narrative research with homeless people in Poland, I show how the homeless conceive of their marginality. Their participation or non-participation in democracy is not hidden but, on the contrary, very visible in public spaces where they are “included as excluded” (Rancière, 1999, p. 119).

12:00-1:00pm      Against pedagogy: Posthegemony and politics  
*Jon Beasley-Murray, University of British Columbia*

The role of intellectuals in politics has often been framed in terms of their purported pedagogic influence. For the Gramscian theory of hegemony, for instance, intellectuals (radical or otherwise) are presented above all as teachers, whose role is to persuade and to convince within the sphere of civil society. In this presentation, however, I outline a theory of posthegemony, and specifically consider the role of intellectuals within a framework in which affect and habit are more important than ideology or belief. In turn, such a reconceptualization of politics might also lead to new ways to think about educational practice. Drawing on a range of educational theorists, from Ivan Illich to Jacques Rancière, I venture some hypotheses about the posthegemonic classroom.

## **Lunch**

2:30-3:30pm      Rethinking emancipation, rethinking education  
*Carl Anders Säfström, Mälardalen University*

In this paper I discuss the possibility of the idea of emancipation within an educational philosophy that does not accept schooling as its first premise. The first part of the paper will broadly sketch some trends in educational policies in Europe, such as life long learning, accountability and evidence-based research, and argue that these words are only meaningful within the myth of schooling and not in a language of education/emancipation. The second part of the paper discusses different but related conceptions of emancipation. In the third part of the paper I specify the role and place of emancipation within a philosophy of education that seeks to articulate its social value.

3:45-4:45pm      Art, emancipation, and political subjectivity  
Claudia W. Ruitenberg, University of British Columbia

Despite skepticism about art's ability to play a critical role in a society that absorbs everything into a capitalist logic, Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière believe that art still has a political role to play in making dissensus visible and shifting the "distribution of the sensible." Many artists and curators believe this role is best served through participatory art. I use the work of Rancière to caution against the assumption that participatory art is more democratic, and to argue that the key criterion to assess the democratic potential of art is the extent to which the spectator or participant has an opportunity to use her or his intelligence. Political art that keeps the spectator at spectator's distance but that does not direct the achievement of its intended political effects is more respectful of the "capacity of anybody" than participatory art that appears more democratic at first glance.

**\*\*Reception\*\***

**Sunday, October 18th**  
*Ponderosa G lounge*

Meeting about publication of workshop papers in a special issue of *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, about further dissemination via the website, about connections with other research groups and scholarly societies, and about possible future meetings of the research group.

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