

Nonviolent Action as a Necessary Component in Educating for Democracy

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Abstract

Educating for democracy, seen within a liberal democratic framework, requires that students develop the requisite knowledge and skills to recognize injustice and work effectively to oppose it. Stitzlein's notion of dissent is examined in conjunction with Kahne and Westheimer's argument for teaching democratic capacities by actively engaging students in addressing real world problem. This paper further suggests that for active dissent to lead to real change, we must extend our notion of dissent to include the knowledge and skills to influence the balance of power. Teaching students for democracy requires teaching them theory, history, and techniques of nonviolent action so they may be aptly empowered to play a vital role in the formulation, maintenance, and alteration of the rules and policies of our society.

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E DUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY in the United States can bring to mind a wide range of understandings about what it means to be a democratic citizen and what role schools ought to take in promoting good citizenship. Some advocate for a more traditional approach to education where teachers follow a prescribed national curriculum that supports existing power structures and mainstream beliefs, values, and practices (e.g., Hirsch, 1988; Ravitch, 2010). Others see an education for democracy as developing in students radical capacities for identifying society's unjust laws, policies, and practices and engaging in action to alter them (e.g., Apple, Au, & Gandon, 2009; Fletcher, 2000; Friere, 1970). Furthermore, there is debate among philosophers about whether educating for democracy ought to take a more deliberative or a more aggregative approach (e.g., Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Hanson & Howe, 2011). Educators have very different views on what constitutes a good democratic citizen; thus, they hold vastly different ideas on what it means to educate for democracy.

While it is true that there is tremendous disagreement among educators about what conception of democratic citizenship our

schools ought to promote, the intent of this article is not to lay out an argument for one conception of democratic education over another. Rather, it seeks to further the analyses of those who claim the necessity of teaching students the requisite capacities for identifying society's problems and helping to successfully rectify them through engaging in active forms of dissent. Specifically, this

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paper examines the role that nonviolent dissent can play in affecting the balance of power and addressing policies and practices of injustice. In this paper the concept of *power* is taken from Sharp (1980), who contends that there is a direct relationship between the power of the rulers and the willingness of the ruled to obey. The notion of *dissent* is taken primarily from Stitzlein (2012), who argues that students need to learn to express dissent if they are to right the wrongs they identify in society. Kahne and Westheimer (2003), who look at 10 different educational programs where students were engaged in solving real-world problems, inspire this analysis of moving students beyond speaking out against injustice to actively participating in efforts to oppose unjust practices. While there are tremendous benefits to having students learn by doing, there also are serious concerns about protecting students' educational welfare. Educators need to be mindful about dealing with negative consequences that may result from students who feel their efforts failed. If one of our main objectives in teaching for democracy is preparing students to play a meaningful role in opposing unjust policies and improving practices in society so the needs of all are met, teaching them effective methods of active dissent helps ensure that their voices are heard. It is vital that educators balance the educational well-being of their students with the importance of developing in them effective deliberative and active democratic participatory capacities.

Understanding Power

According to Sharp (1980), power is too often perceived as something intrinsic in a person, group of persons, or organization. He thus points out that, in democracies, we too often concern ourselves with whether this or that person or group should hold the power. He says that we should focus on "the condition in which people possess the opportunity for active participation in the political society" (p. 53). In a society where protest against one's government is a legal right, and in which there exist many organizations that run independently of governmental control, there are several opportunities for citizens to participate in political decision making by either actively supporting or actively opposing any given governmental policy or law.

For Sharp (1973a), power is the capacity of one person or group of persons to control the actions of others. Political power is, quite obviously, "wielded for political objectives" (p. 7). Its sources, Sharp explains, arise from six different areas: (a) human resources, (b) skills and knowledge, (c) intangible factors (such as ideological and psychological factors), (d) material resources, and (e) sanctions. Power wielders, according to his analysis, must have the following: (a) enough support and cooperation from people doing the necessary work, (b) the requisite skills to meet their own needs and at least appear to meet the needs of others, (c) charisma and strength as well as other psychological and ideological factors that help win the cooperation of followers, (d) sufficient material resources to carry out necessary tasks, and (e) the authority and resources needed to impose sanctions on those who violate the rules and policies.

No matter how skilled, knowledgeable, or materially advantaged a person is, there is no power without the obedience of the

ruled. Put another way, if the ruled decide to stop doing what the ruler commands or requests, the ruler no longer has the ability to control their actions; thus, the ruler no longer has power. Sharp (1973a) claims that "all rulers require an acceptance of their authority, their right to rule and to command" (p. 12). The leg of power, then, is the obedience of the ruled. The degree to which a government controls its citizens is directly proportional to the degree to which the citizens cooperate or comply with the government's edicts and demands. The more obedient the followers, the more power the rulers have. Thus, if students are taught to effectively oppose the power holders, they will be better prepared to have their voices of dissent heard and taken seriously.

Understanding Dissent

In her recent article, Stitzlein (2012) posits that effective democratic citizenship means having an educated populace able and willing to engage in dissent. Stitzlein's views have a distinguished American foundation. Thomas Jefferson, for example, asserted that dissent is needed to maintain a healthy and vital democratic government, one that does not neglect the needs of its people in favor of serving its own interests. In his letter to James Madison regarding Shays' Rebellion, Jefferson (1787/1978) stated that "a little rebellion now and then is a good thing" (p. 124) in helping to ensure that the governors remain responsive to the needs of their citizens. Nearly 250 years later, Stitzlein (2012) reminds us of the importance of resistance. She argues that "it is only with the opportunity and capacity to dissent that the citizenry can establish and maintain that the laws and systems guiding them are desired, good, or just" (p. 50). If a government within a deliberative democratic society, according to Stitzlein, is to garner the true consent of the governed, its citizenry must have the necessary capacities to communicate their needs and voice opposition. Thus, Stitzlein argues, schools must teach students to practice dissent in a responsible and effective manner.

Dewey (1927) claimed, whatever else democracy is, it must be a form of government that takes the interests of the people as its "supreme guide and criterion of governmental activity" (p. 146). An education for democracy, Dewey argued, develops in students the aptitudes necessary for self-governance, for making decisions beneficial to their own pursuits as well as those of their neighbors. Such an education not only requires that students gain knowledge about and motivation to help to meet the needs of others and themselves—it also requires that students develop the necessary capacities to be heard by power wielders, who can implement change.

Teaching students to resist authority, however, comes with risks, even in schools that support a more liberal conception of educating for democracy. Stitzlein (2012) recognizes that children, especially young children, may not have the cognitive or psychological maturity to understand the needs of others or even themselves, nor are they able to always envision appropriate changes that will help meet these needs. Gutmann (1987) claims that there must be limits to students' right to oppose school authorities. She states that "democratic schools should *as a matter of right* respect [students'] conscientious dissent unless it

interferes with the democratic education of others” (p. 122). Gutmann provides the illustrative example of allowing dissension when it means students not participating in the pledge of allegiance but not allowing it when White students object to sitting beside Black students. The former case does not impede other students’ right to a quality education while the latter case interferes with Black students’ right to sit wherever they feel will provide them the best opportunity to learn. Teaching dissent, then, must include guiding students to engage in opposition that is mindful and respectful of the needs of others and not to jeopardize any student’s equal educational opportunities.

Determining what does or does not jeopardize a student’s educational opportunities, though, is far from straightforward. Gutmann’s (1987) example is easy, but what about cases that may be less clear? Consider an example from my personal experience. A parent felt that state-standardized tests were harmful to her child as well as to education in general and kept her child home from school while the tests were being taken. This parent told the school that if it expelled her child for refusing to take the exams, her child would attend but purposely fail the exams. The school, wanting to report good scores, told the parent that, if the child was ill, the school would excuse her absence. Such dissent from this one parent may have little to no effect on other students. However, what if half of the student body was absent during the testing because of their parents’ objections? While this may be an effective means of voicing dissent, it may also jeopardize the ability of the school to provide a quality education to any student because the test scores are tied to school funding.

Gutmann (1987) argues that an education for participatory democracy “has moral primacy over other purposes of public education in a democratic society. . . . Even when students’ participation threatens to produce some degree of disorder within schools, it may be defended on democratic grounds for cultivating political skills and commitments” (p. 287). Similarly, Stitzlein (2012) posits that, although students need to be guided by teachers, it is imperative they learn to engage in responsible defiance because “skilled practice of dissent is essential to the ongoing success of democracy” (p. 43). Even though students (or parents) voicing their objections to a particular school policy runs the risk of causing some level of disruption, both Gutmann and Stitzlein claim that teaching dissent is worth the risk because of the fundamental and predominant role the capacities of engaging in dissent play in people being effective participants of a democracy. Stitzlein argues that not teaching dissent in fact endangers students’ democratic education more than any disorder or confusion that dissension may incur. However, causing disorder is quite different from impeding students’ educational opportunities. In teaching students effective means of dissent, educators must be very aware of the impact such dissension will have on their students. If an act of dissent disrupts the learning environment to the extent that it interferes with any student’s ability to acquire a quality education, teachers should ask themselves whether allowing or even encouraging such an act is too costly. Certainly one very important duty of teachers is to protect the educational rights of all of their students. Thus, if we agree with Gutmann and Stitzlein that teaching dissent

plays a chief role in educating for democracy, we must not lose sight of teachers’ obligations to look out for the educational rights and opportunities of all their students.

By teaching students to engage in opposition, schools help develop in students not only the skills in voicing their views but the attitude that dissent is a vital and important aspect of democratic citizenship. Dewey (1916/2011) wrote that the “social environment forms the mental and emotional disposition of behavior in individuals by engaging them in activities that arouse and strengthen certain impulses” (p. 13). Dewey emphasized the importance of the classroom in shaping students’ learning attitudes and habits. Similarly, Stitzlein (2012) contends that, if students are not taught dissension in schools, it “may not be sufficiently valued for its role in maintaining a healthy democracy and therefore may either be ignored or squelched within daily political life” (p. 43). She further claims that if schools do not educate students to engage in effective defiance as adults, they may practice it in ineffective or even harmful ways. Teaching dissent is an essential part of educating for democracy because it provides students with needed disposition, knowledge, and skills and also engenders habits and dispositions that motivate them to practice dissent effectively and appropriately as adults or support others who do so.

According to Stitzlein (2012), there are four forms that dissent can take: (a) to unveil and expose injustice, (b) to build a coalition of followers so that opposition to an injustice may have a stronger voice (c) to work at persuading the power holders that an injustice exists and to make any appropriate alterations in policy to correct it, and (d) to get citizens to assess and even challenge their beliefs so they may openly consider the merits of the views expressed by the coalition. Some of the capacities required for dissent include “questioning laws and cultural practices . . . expos[ing] the racial and class-based injustices of the penal system . . . [.] the arts of verbal persuasion, consciousness-raising, [and] coalition building” (Stitzlein, 2012, pp. 53–54). Students must therefore learn to recognize inequity and injustice where they exist, help communicate their awareness of injustice to others, and persuade others of the virtues of their views so a coalition of many can voice their objections to the stakeholders of a particular set of policies, practices, or laws.

This notion of dissent seems to focus almost exclusively on articulating one’s concerns, disagreements, and opposition for the dual purpose of building a coalition and persuading the governors to address the articulated concerns. Stitzlein (2012) argues that dissent involves the “effective use of historically informed persuasive speech . . . [and] cognitive and moral reasoning” (p. 44). One expresses disapproval, builds movements, seeks to persuade, and challenges opposing beliefs through various cognitive and verbal endeavors. Dissent, in other words, seems to consist entirely of both cerebral and verbal acts. While her argument leaves room for dissent going beyond verbal opposition to action that confronts power holders—such as vigils, strikes, marches, and boycotts—she does not address any of these. Instead, her emphasis is exclusively on teaching students the capacities of mindful, reflective, informed verbal challenges to perceived unjust practices or policies.

Stitzlein (2012) provides a strong argument for the vital importance of teaching students to take an interest in their government's policies of and their society's structures and practices so they may develop into a citizenry willing and able to formulate and then voice their informed views, even if, and perhaps especially if, those views express disapprobation against a perceived injustice. Being heard as a citizen in a democracy should not be seen as a luxury but, as Stitzlein (2012) contends, as a "pivotal requirement in the establishment and maintenance of a legitimate democracy" (p. 51). Teaching the capacities of dissent is more than a helpful aid in building democratic capacities; it is important if we are to have a thriving and vibrant democracy.

In order for a democratic society to be sufficiently robust to provide all citizens an opportunity to be heard by those in power, we should help ensure that the rules of law and policies set by our government are attendant as much as is reasonably possible to the needs of its people rather than serving some selfish or otherwise narrow purpose. Educating students in the capacities of dissent, as Stitzlein (2012) argues, should not be seen as merely a negative right. She reasons that it is not enough for the law simply not to stand in the way of students learning the capacities of dissent. Rather, if our democracy is to be a true democracy, which means that it is responsive to the needs of its people and has their informed consent, then students must learn to express their disagreement over any policies or laws that violate their perceived needs and rights: "If students, as developing citizens, have a right to dissent, they must have the requisite skills and dispositions for dissent in order to invoke this right" (p. 52). If a government in a deliberative democracy is to represent the needs of its people, it is the people who must articulate those needs in an informed, clear, and effective manner. To have such capacities of communication, people need to learn them, and what better place than in our schools. Educating for democracy, then, within a liberal deliberative framework, requires that citizens learn the required capacities of resistance so their needs and rights are not violated by the government whose job it is to protect those needs and safeguard the rights of all its citizens.

The argument that students in a deliberative and participatory democracy have a right to learn how to effectively dissent is strong and persuasive. Yet dissent, as Stitzlein (2012) argues, does not go far enough in ensuring that the citizenry of a democracy is being sufficiently represented by its government. First, the notion of dissent discussed above teaches students what can be opposed and does not also focus on what can be supported. Having one's voice count in a meaningful sense in our democracy's decision-making processes does not have to involve opposition; it can, for example, involve assent or agreement—it can have as its focus a building up or putting together rather than a fighting against or tearing down. One may want to be heard in support of the president's new national health plan or a governor's new funding policy.

Second, dissent does not sufficiently ensure that the power holders will listen to or address the articulated needs of the people. Stitzlein (2012) uses Gandhi's "movements of nonviolence" (p. 54) as an example of dissent. She does not, however, explicate his notion of nonviolence, nor does she discuss the use of nonviolence

as a means of citizens affecting the balance of power. Raising awareness about injustice is important, but so is actively opposing the injustice through various methods of nonviolent action that can shift power from one group to another. For example, in the early 1950s in Montgomery, Alabama, bus policy required all Blacks, 70% of bus passengers, to give up their seats to White passengers, even if that meant they had to stand in the overcrowded back part of the bus (Williams, 1987). Although this felt blatantly unfair to many Blacks and even many Whites, and some proclaimed the injustice of this practice, the policy remained firm until a large group boycotted the city buses. The boycott shifted the power from the managers of the city transportation division to those who paid the fares, and everyone, regardless of race, was granted legal permission to sit on any available seat. It was not until action was taken that the stakeholders in the racist policy were forced to address and alter this policy.

Recognizing, developing an understanding of, and voicing opposition to discriminatory policies are important components of effective democratic participation. However, voices alone against the Montgomery bus policies could very well have been ignored or brushed aside. The withholding of bus fares made the activists heard and altered the power relationship between the passengers and the policymakers. If students are only taught dissent as a means of expressing opposition, their voices may go unheard. On the other hand, if they are taught to take action such that they significantly affect the balance of power, their voices have a far better chance of having an impact on the target policies, laws, and practices.

Active Student Engagement

Kahne and Westheimer (2003) looked at 10 educational programs whose goals were teaching democratic participatory capacities by engaging students in community projects. This engagement led to students developing an increased sense of civic responsibility and empowerment. The students' positive experiences led them to believe that they could and ought to be involved in their community to help address and improve problems. One group of students did not experience success and, as a result, their desire to participate in local action actually decreased. Kahne and Westheimer's study highlights the importance of students having successful experiences if we wish them to continue their active participation. Perhaps one lesson we can learn from this is that teachers ought to try to select projects in which students are likely to enjoy success. Further, it may be helpful if teachers inform students that not all movements, even those that are thoroughly and intelligently planned and whose goals are admirable, will achieve their desired outcomes. Students need to learn that change often occurs slowly, over time, and as the result of many different efforts. One failure does not mean that their labors were wasted or that they will not bear fruit sometime in the future.

For one of the programs that Kahne and Westheimer (2003) looked at, the Overground Railroad Project, college students listened to and talked with civil rights activists, visited places where civil rights movements occurred, and read literature and watched movies about related themes. "When they returned to their

respective campuses in the fall, they initiated projects that were informed by the ideas and strategies they studied” (p. 40). Just what these projects were, however, is left unsaid. It would be interesting to know if students engaged in any acts of civil disobedience (i.e., nonviolent action that openly violated a legal rule or policy) where they risked fines, expulsion, violent opposition, or even time in jail, as did Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, one of the men with whom they spoke.

It would seem that college professors bear some responsibility in ensuring that their students’ school-related projects do not result in violence, academic failure, or imprisonment. However, how does one teach students to challenge power by engaging them in action without risking some significant negative consequences? Perhaps having students learn about nonviolent disobedience but engage only in legal nonviolent action is the best approach to take.

Teaching students to be active participants in working for change can lead them to developing a sense of empowerment. Anyon (2005) finds that in some cases students from low-income and racial-minority backgrounds gain a sense of pride by actively participating in improving their communities. She states that they may “counter the view that they constitute a social ‘problem’” (p. 189) by helping to make positive changes. Thus, by playing an active role in helping to address issues they identify in their community, these students learn that they can help address concerns in society and also make a positive difference in how others view them as members of their community.

Kahne and Westheimer (2003) claim that students need to learn how change within a democratic society happens by actively engaging in local efforts to solve real problems (see also Anyon, 2005; Camajani & Seyer-Ochi, 2003; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). Stitzlein (2012) argues that students ought to be taught to engage in dissent if they are to right the wrongs they identify in society. The goal of this analysis is to combine these two perspectives and suggest that teaching students about the history, theory, and techniques of nonviolent action and having them employ these techniques in active nonviolent dissent empowers them to work toward altering unjust policies and practices. While it is important to teach students how to be successful in improving their community (e.g., building more green spaces, instituting a recycling program, volunteering to host workshops, providing pet visits to the local retirement home), it is helpful to draw a distinction between these sorts of actions that do not challenge the structures of power with the sorts that seek to oppose certain political attitudes, practices, policies, and power holders. As Kahne and Westheimer (2003) point out, civic mindedness and “a willingness to help out voluntarily are valuable character traits for good neighbors and citizens, but these traits are not inherently about democracy” (p. 39). Instead, democratic action affects the structures of power and, as Sharp (1973b) argues, nonviolent action “is a means of wielding social and political power even though it does not involve its practitioners in the use of violence” (p. 451). Teaching students this notion of power is an essential part of educating for democracy. Yet nonviolent action is often overlooked or too readily dismissed in the literature on democratic education.

Nonviolent Action: Defined and Discussed

I use the term *nonviolent action* instead of *nonviolence* because the latter is too often taken to mean the mere absence of violence when seeking justice. It is important to remember that nonviolent action is far more than the absence of violence just as peace is far more than the absence of war. Peace, at least as defined by many peace activists and peace educators, does not exist where oppression, injustice, and extreme poverty exist (Cortright, 2008). Similarly, the former term, as used by many peace activists and peace educators today, is not one used merely to describe those who avoid using violence to oppose injustice. Nonviolent action is, first and foremost, action, which is nonviolent. It is organized and strategic action that does not employ violence toward others and is used for the purpose of opposing injustice. Determining just what that involves, though, can be a bit tricky.

Some actions that have been termed *nonviolent* raise questions about whether such a term is warranted because they involve harm to one’s own person. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ self-immolation (Herb, 2005) to protest the Vietnam War and the oppression of Buddhists by the Catholic leader of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, certainly involved violent action. Similarly, the hunger strikes of Gandhi (1956) to protest his own followers engaging in violent resistance to the British and of Alice Paul, who opposed what she felt was her unjust imprisonment for engaging in a legal protest for women’s suffrage (Walton, 2010) are all cases of actions that caused harm to one’s own self. Additionally, the Blacks who willingly subjected themselves to the physical harm of others when refusing to leave the lunch counters designated for Whites only may not have harmed themselves, but they definitely put themselves willingly in harm’s way (Anderson, 1995). Unlike the first set of examples of boycotts and peace marches, the examples of self-immolation, hunger strikes, and resistance involve willing receipt of harm by self or others.

If we accept all of the above cases as appropriate examples, our notion of nonviolent action must include action that may incur violence against one’s self, but it cannot include any case that involves the use of violence against others. As Gandhi (1956) warned his followers when opposing the British, they may be jailed, tortured, or even killed, but they may not return violence with violence. In other words, in using nonviolent action, one may be the recipient of violence, but one must never inflict it on others. Thus, when it is used against violent protestors, nonviolent activists may suffer or even die as a result of their struggle against injustice. It is a common misconception among many laypeople that nonviolent action is a calm and gentle exchange among opposing parties. While it can be calm and gentle, it often is not, particularly when used against brutal opposition.

Nonviolent Action and Democratic Education

Teaching nonviolent action, like teaching dissent, can cause some disruption or disorder in the classroom. When students become empowered with the capacities of nonviolent action, they may practice opposition to a teacher’s rules or a school’s policy. It is therefore important that those who teach such capacities are careful and skilled. Students must be warned against resisting rules

for the mere sake of being oppositional. They must be taught the very real possible consequences of their actions. For example, if students refuse to do more than half an hour of work outside of class for their English teacher in protest against what they feel is too much homework, they must understand that their refusal may result in a poor or failing grade. When students disobey the rules established by those in power, students must learn to expect that the power holders will not give up their control easily. A good deal of muscle flexing often occurs by authority figures in an attempt to maintain their ability to elicit the obedience of their charges.

At one of the New Hampshire high schools in which I taught, 10 of my students put together and executed a plan of nonviolent action to make a rule that the recently hired resource officer (a police officer) could not wear his gun while on duty at the school. A few of them wrote a letter to the school board, and one of them attended a board meeting to explain the argument that any guns in school carries too much risk of violence. The students also put up *No Guns in School* posters. After the board meeting, several of the students engaged in a sit-in directly in front of the principal's office for two hours each of three consecutive days. Some of these students received unexcused absences from classes and zeroes on work. At the end of the first week's sit-in, the students told the principal they planned to repeat their action the following week. By the end of that school day, the principal issued a new policy that the resource officer would wear his gun hidden on his ankle underneath his trousers instead of openly on his belt. The protestors agreed to this compromise, and the nonviolent action ceased.

Not all the students who objected to the officer wearing his gun were willing to receive detentions or poor academic marks. Only those who could tolerate such consequences with calmness and respect participated in the opposition movement. The students had learned to make a distinction between rules and rulers. In nonviolent action, one opposes people's rules, policies, and actions rather than the people themselves.

The concern remains, however: Does such a movement unduly risk the educational welfare of the students? Receiving a few zeroes may be an acceptable cost to some, but what if students' grades were impacted enough to jeopardize their position as a member of a team or club, or their acceptance into college, or perhaps even graduation? Although I did not suggest or help create this movement, I did sanction it by offering some guidance (i.e., informing parents and having students ask teachers and administrators what consequences they may suffer). At the time I was excited to see how empowered the students felt and how seriously they took their role as activists. I was also impressed with their calm, almost professional demeanor. In retrospect, however, I would have discouraged them from skipping classes. I would have strongly advised them to participate only during their free periods so they did not incur any negative academic consequences and so they did not violate school policies that may have caused even more costly reprisals.

Conclusion

The theory of nonviolent action plays an important role in educating for democracy by teaching students to critically examine

existing rules and policies, formulate a plan of either support or resistance, and carry out the plan. Students learn that action, which targets the balance of power, allows the activists' voices and views to be taken seriously. As Camajani and Seyer-Ochi (2003) claim, "Students will only be truly empowered by their understandings of democracy when they can move beyond the diagrams and apply their knowledge in the real world of political action and social change" (p. 39). Students ought to be made aware that those who merely express opposition are often ignored or merely placated. Nonviolent action plays an imperative role in having one's voice heard and one's needs addressed. If we are to take seriously the importance of developing an engaged citizenry within our pluralistic democracy, we may want to look closely at how the notion of nonviolent action provides students with the necessary tools to participate meaningfully and significantly in the decision-making processes of our society. Yet we must do so with caution.

When having students practice what they have learned about nonviolent action, it may be prudent to engage students only in legal acts of nonviolence because teachers are responsible for the educational welfare of their students. Learning about nonviolent noncooperation through readings, films, guest speakers, and field trips to historical sites of civil disobedience (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003) is an important way for students to learn about the impact such action can have on the distribution of power. Having students violate rules or policies, even if the goals are admirable and the students gain a great deal of understanding about nonviolent action, risks too much, particularly when dealing with minors. Even with college students, jeopardizing their educational well-being seems too great a cost. Further research needs to be done on the effectiveness of teaching students the requisite capacities for active nonviolent dissent in a manner that protects their educational interests.

If we envision education for democracy as a means of developing in students a facility for actively participating in identifying and then opposing injustices in society, then we must move beyond teaching them to voice their objections. Students must also learn to engage in action, but action of a certain kind. Working with others to clean up city parks or raise money to install air conditioning in the local nursing home is admirable. It also benefits students by teaching them that their efforts can make a difference in improving their community. In learning to effectively oppose unjust policies and practices, however, it is important to teach them how to alter the distribution of power. Nonviolent action, which can also be thought of as active dissent, threatens the rulers' power so that it benefits the rulers to address the activists' expressed needs. Teaching students the history, theory, and techniques of nonviolent action can help them become effective agents of change.

As educators, though, we must always bear in mind our responsibility to protect the educational welfare of our students. Determining how teachers can balance the goal of developing in students the required capacities for nonviolent action with the responsibility of protecting students' educational well-being needs further discussion. One fruitful line of inquiry may be looking at the effectiveness of teaching students a composite of skills and

knowledge: teaching them to express dissent, teaching them to actively oppose unjust practices in a way that does not risk their overall educational interests (i.e., action that does not violate school rules or societal laws that could lead to negative academic or legal consequences), and helping them understand nonviolent disobedience by studying its theory, history, and techniques. This approach may be useful in developing empowered students who become active members of our democracy, willing and able to effect positive changes and successfully address unjust practices in society.

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