The Cambridge Handbook of Democratic Education

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

14

Democratic Deliberation in the Absence of Integration

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14.1 Introduction

Democratic deliberation minimally describes the capacity to engage with others on matters of social and political import in a respectful manner, exhibiting a give-and-take that recognizes both the significance and seriousness of other points of view, and where the aim is to achieve greater mutual understanding. Democratic education is the seedbed for the cultivation of this noble ideal. Though it has many aims, at its core lies the commitment to deliberation between differently positioned, thinking, and contributing individuals of equal moral and political standing. Yet for deliberative interactions in educational settings to fruitfully occur, certain favorable conditions must also obtain.

In this chapter, I chiefly concern myself with one of these putative conditions, namely that of *school integration,* strongly implied by liberal models of democratic deliberation and debatably necessary for consensus-building and legitimate decision-making. It is in integrated educational settings, the argument runs, that liberal democratic societies are best able to ensure equal status, recognition, and opportunity among participants, but also where substantive interactions across difference can occur. In and through these interactions we might reasonably hope to challenge prejudices and stereotypes that so often cause misunderstanding, distrust, and intolerance. Seen in this way, school integration ought to work in tandem with democratic education insofar as it entails bringing together young people from different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives in order to learn with, and from, one another. And in learning with and from one another, the expectation is also that students might collectively foster a number of civic virtues.

Inconveniently, however, around the globe high segregation and stratification indices within and between countries, regions, provinces, cities, and even neighborhoods present a number of challenges to this attractive ideal. Nowhere is this more evident than in the educational domain. Indeed, if we take school integration – minimally understood to imply spatial mixing – to be the most favorable facilitative educational condition for democratic deliberation, then this condition is often, if not typically, absent. What, then, do these realities portend for

democratic deliberation, or for the cultivation of civic virtue? What indeed do such realities portend for democracy itself?

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In Section 14.2, I describe, in broad strokes, what I understand the aims of democratic deliberation to be. I then delineate a number of civic virtues educators hope to cultivate through deliberation, but I restrict much of my attention to the baseline virtue of toleration. Whatever else deliberation is supposed to do, it is reasonable to expect that it minimally ought to assist in fostering *this* virtue. Accordingly, I adopt a substantive definition that entails an ability and willingness to listen and learn from differences, and further to use this information to reflect upon one's own present beliefs and understandings. Following this, I recapitulate the argument that integration is the ideal educational condition necessary for the kinds of substantive interactions democratic deliberation ought to facilitate. In Section 14.3, I provide an assessment by considering a number of difficulties with this idealistic account. I will demonstrate that liberal versions of democratic deliberation predicated on integration as a facilitative educational condition are puzzlingly inattentive both to the inevitability of segregation, as well as the inequities occasioned by integration, thus rendering their account untenable. In Section 14.4, I probe the possibilities for democratic education in the absence of integration. I argue that neither the possibilities for deliberation nor the cultivation of civic virtue turn on an environment being "integrated." Indeed, some kinds of segregation may be more conducive to fostering both deliberation and civic virtue.

14.2 Democratic Deliberation

The notion of deliberative democracy is meant to capture a robust exchange of ideas involving multiple perspectives from which everyone involved can learn, and through which legitimate decision-making can occur. It welcomes debate on matters of substantive disagreement. Where principled differences frustrate consensus, a deliberative approach stresses the importance of finding a common ground necessary for consensus-building. Indeed, it is the common ground of shared belief and practice in the public sphere that establishes both the rule of law and the legitimate exercise thereof. Integration that can facilitate deliberation therefore seems imperative precisely because many beliefs and practices are so disparate.

Notwithstanding the importance of local attachments, citizenship articulated as "shared fate" (Williams, 2003) requires that persons engage one another from time to time in order to address and find acceptable solutions to the challenges facing fellow citizens. It further entails a capacity for enlarged thought, the ability to see oneself bound up in relations of interdependence with others, and the capacity to reshape the practices and institutions of one's environment. In short, citizenship-as-deliberation requires the capacity for communicating with others, under conditions of social equality, and forging paths of social cooperation.

These deliberative habits require educational development. Democratic deliberative theorists (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Macedo, 2000; Satz, 2007) insist that it is in the state school where young people are most likely to acquire the relevant knowledge, skills, dispositions, and virtues necessary for this important work. Paula McAvoy and Diana Hess even go so far as to say that "schools are the institution that can transform the political climate" (2013, p. 43). Echoing that sentiment, Amy Gutmann and Sigal Ben-Porath (2015) opine that "recommitting primary and secondary education to the value of democratic citizenship could reduce [the] democratic deficit." They write:

> Citizenship education at its best addresses those differences by educational practices that cultivate tolerance and open-mindedness, address controversial issues in a mutually respectful way, and develop an understanding of different cultures that is compatible with toleration and mutual respect. These educational practices not only support the core values of a liberal democracy, they also enable students to practice them in a way that will position them as civic equals in their democratic society . . . schools that cultivate the capacity of citizens to respect each other and engage with each other beyond differences and to view each other as civic equals may be a democratic citizenry's best hope for the future of democracy. (p. 5)

Here we discern a number of necessary conditions for deliberation to do its work. One condition is its public character. By "public" we are meant to understand both the space in which deliberations occur, and to which all participants have access; but "public" is also taken to mean the kinds of allowable reasons in these interactions. In other words, participants ought not to have recourse to arguments or evidence deemed unreasonable or inaccessible to other participants. Another condition is the importance of epistemic diversity in these deliberations, where differences among participants in terms of sex and gender, ethnicity/race, culture/religion, social class, and political commitment are taken as salient proxies for different points of view worthy of discussion. In other words, the integration ideal is strongly implied, for a more homogenous school or classroom would presumably yield fewer divergent perspectives, without which deliberation cannot meaningfully occur. These different backgrounds, identities, and experiences are understood to inform different ways of knowing and understanding. Moreover, it is through deliberative exchanges with different others that young people are to be socialized into the kinds of dispositions and habits they later will need as adult citizens operating in a pluralistic society.

14.2.1 Deliberative Virtues

The educative route to deliberation requires that certain virtues be cultivated. Among the virtues, we hope to see patience, honesty, a sense of fairness, and the moral courage needed to be challenged by ideas we find unpleasant or unfamiliar. We also hope to find a willingness to listen, intellectual humility, self-reflection, and a capacity for discernment, truth, and understanding of complex social and political matters, many of them controversial. Finally, we hope to

develop the communication skills and etiquette required for conducting a respectful discussion in which core beliefs may be challenged, principled disagreement can be expected, and thus also during which emotional reactions are likely to be charged.

Whether or not this grocery list of educational aims is remotely feasible in most classrooms is a question I will bracket for the time being. For now, I merely focus on one of the items the authors mention more than once: *toleration.* I do so for two reasons: first, toleration will strike many readers as the bare minimum that we ought to expect from deliberation; I therefore will treat it as a baseline civic virtue. Second, given both the currency that toleration continues to have in civic discourse, as well as the conviction many espouse that our world is increasingly becoming *less* tolerant, toleration may nevertheless signal an achievement of sorts if its substantive cultivation augurs greater possibilities for peace, cooperation, and more democratic decision-making.

Substantive toleration necessitates meaningful interaction with others espousing opposing views. Meaningful interaction denotes an openness to others, where the aim is to listen and learn from differences, but also to prioritize truth, which entails that we (i) acknowledge that the relevant evidence will likely support some views more than others; and (ii) that a moral vocabulary in any case will be needed in order to adjudicate between competing normative claims. In other words, not every view (e.g., "women are inferior to men") is worthy of serious consideration. Notice, too, that toleration implies respect, at least insofar as genuine listening and learning also signals a willingness to change one's mind.

And so, in an educational setting, tolerance will minimally require that young people come into meaningful contact with others of different background and persuasion on terms of equal status and recognition. But meaningful interaction, like a meaningful relationship, signals neither a shared point-of-view nor mutual understanding. It may entail difficulty, misinterpretation, unease and even distress, even if it sometimes also yields positive emotions and outcomes. These presumably difficult substantive encounters with others will assist in cultivating the capacity not only for toleration, but also critical reflection upon one's own beliefs and assumptions, an openness to challenge, and the intellectual humility required to change one's mind on the strength of the best reasons and evidence. We might also hope that these encounters will produce the cultivation of attitudes and dispositions necessary for constructing, maintaining, and participating in democratic decision-making.

14.2.2 Integration as Facilitative Condition

If a healthy liberal democracy describes a system of mutual social cooperation, then segregation would seem to pose a threat to the extent that citizens fail to identify with, let alone empathize with, different others, thus rendering cooperation impossible. Moreover, given that demographic concentrations often inversely correspond to opportunity structures, officeholders (who typically hail from the more privileged strata) often know too little about their less

advantaged constituents. This lack of knowledge impedes both the cultivation of competence and the understanding needed to write policy that is more responsive to their needs and concerns. Accordingly, if elected officials of democratic political institutions are supposed to be both responsive and accountable to their citizens, then the fact that some citizens are able to leverage their concentrated resources and political influence in ways that wittingly or unwittingly disadvantage those with minority views results in both widespread distrust and an absence of legitimacy.

Now, if it is true that segregation causally inhibits both equal participation and opportunity, then integration does indeed seem to be the most sensible tonic. Particularly in integrated schools many hope to find opportunities for intermingling that will grant the disadvantaged access to the cultural and social capital of the better off, while simultaneously providing the privileged exposure to the less fortunate that will yield greater empathy and understanding. Such an integrated environment, first in the school and later in the workplace, will presumably lead to persons relaxing around each other, having fewer stereotypical views of others different from themselves, and sharing information and networking strategies that make power-sharing possible. In short, school integration not only will assist in removing barriers to social mobility; it also will provide the foundation for a common project of "living together democratically" so that citizens move away from tribalism and identity politics and instead embrace mutual identification.

Though incomplete, this short sketch describing integration-for-democratic deliberation will suffice. In Section 14.3, I move to assess these claims by addressing several unarticulated assumptions before turning my attention to some empirical difficulties with both integration and deliberation.

14.3 Assessment

Many of the ideas in democratic theory mentioned in Section 14.2 are so widely shared among political scientists and philosophers that a number of unspoken assumptions escape closer scrutiny. Perhaps the most important of these is that *the state is uniquely responsible* for preparing children for democratic citizenship, and relatedly, that state-funded and managed schools are *ideally suited* to this important work. A corollary assumption is that the precepts of democracy – for which constitutional principles are a proxy – are themselves self-evidently true, and hence can be coercively inculcated without objection onto a captive audience of young people. And because these beliefs are too often taken for granted, democratic theorists concern themselves much too little with questions concerning the legitimacy of this coercive endeavor (Merry, 2020).

But liberal democratic theorists also rarely concern themselves with a bevy of practical difficulties. Here are but two. The first concerns what it is reasonable to expect from teachers charged with facilitating these deliberations. It is not unreasonable to conjecture that in most countries both direct instruction and rote learning remain the standard pedagogy. Moreover, even when there is the

will to do things otherwise – for example to foster dialogue in the classroom – relatively few teachers possess adequate time, patience, or knowledge and skills to facilitate discussions of the kind deliberation theorists have in mind, particularly those involving contentious subject matter, and perhaps most especially in divided societies (Johnson & Johnson, 1988; Nystrand et al., 1997; Pace, 2019; Quaynor, 2012; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). And even when teachers *do* make the time or broach controversial topics for discussion, it is not a foregone conclusion that things will go according to plan. For example, contrary to the expectation that minoritized others in the classroom are eager to deliberate with their majority peers on contentious subject matter, many will prefer to remain silent – if they are not first actively silenced – and disengage from the conversation altogether, rather than risk the frustration and fatigue of trying to educate the others in the classroom who routinely ignore or express skepticism about ideas and experiences with which they are unfamiliar (Berenstain, 2016; Fine, 2018).

Yet even if some students are fortunate enough to have highly skilled teachers capable of facilitating classroom deliberations, the next difficulty is even more daunting. This concerns likely tension with parents and the local community. A vivid, but by no means unique, illustration is the decision taken by hundreds of school districts throughout the United States during the 2020–2021 academic year to introduce critical race theory (CRT) into primary and secondary school curricula. School board meetings, once mind-numbingly dull affairs attended by almost no one, quickly became public spectacles, with livid parents demanding that school officials retract their decision. Nor is the irony lost on parents, who are repeatedly told to be "involved in their child's education," until of course that involvement impugns the professional authority of the school staff (Bæck, 2010). Importantly, too: the pushback from parents – whether concerning racial injustice or any other sensitive issue – is just as likely to come from minority parents over concerns about the ignorance or insensitivity of the teacher or other students in the classroom (Hailey, 2022; Merry & Schinkel, 2021). Indeed, many minority parents justifiably object to their children being portrayed as pitiable victims.

None of these difficulties is trivial, but in this chapter, I will set these aside in order to assess how well the argument for democratic deliberation manages on its own terms, in particular with respect to the conviction that integration is a key facilitative condition for deliberation, out of which we can expect certain civic virtues to emerge.

14.3.1 Integration Revisited

The belief that integration is a facilitative condition for democratic deliberation must confront numerous difficulties. First, it is dubious to suggest that segregation per se threatens democracy. Arguably, any or all of the following impediments pose a far more serious threat: (i) xenophobic nationalism endemic to most societies, including liberal democracies; (ii) massive wealth disparities; (iii) rigidly tracked education systems; (iv) a dearth of proportional voting; (v) quid

pro quo campaign contributions and corporate lobbying; (vi) the plethora of political candidates beholden to party interests; (vii) judicial appointments by political fiat; (viii) a deplorable corporate media in many countries that fails to inform the public about matters of substance; and, last but certainly not least, (ix) the algorithmic design of social media platforms that rapidly disseminates misinformation and exacerbates the polarization of voter sentiments.

Second, there is plenty of evidence that segregation obtains even in the absence of pernicious efforts to impose it. The habit of clustering with others sharing the same history, culture and language, dialect and religion, or myriad other habits and customs governing daily life, is as old as human civilization. Liberal democratic values also aid in facilitating segregation to the extent that citizens are free to associate with those whose company they prefer; indeed, in free societies voluntary association is both a moral and constitutional right. Further, constitutional guarantees in many countries give parents ultimate decision-making power concerning the education their child receives, even if the wealthy inevitably have more – and often better – options available to them. In any case, the idea that liberal democratic governments ought to dictate to citizens where they should live, or which school one's child is required to attend, is anathema precisely because this would necessitate a draconian curtailment of inviolable constitutional liberties.

To merely delineate these facts is not to endorse the status quo; nor is it to suggest that the playing field is level; nor, finally, does it mean that one ought to take a casual attitude vis-à-vis historical injustice, some of which undoubtedly has produced invidious forms of segregation. In other words, one can agree that all forms of involuntary segregation are wrong, and even endorse the notion that integration under favorable conditions and with the relevant kind of resources in play is ideally better suited to facilitating deliberative interactions. Be that as it may, in the absence of social and political arrangements capable of providing these resources and facilitating these conditions, mere *spatial* integration does not typically bring about more deliberation, let alone voluntary social interaction, greater toleration, and equitable treatment. And the difficulties with the integrationist defense do not merely concern improbable efforts to socially engineer neighborhood, school, and even classroom composition. Indeed, the greater difficulties concern reconciling such a rosy view with more than half a century of empirical scholarship on school segregation.

To be sure, some of that evidence suggests that school integration *has* provided some disadvantaged students access to certain objective goods, for example, a safer learning environment; greater teacher retention and staffing stability; a more demanding curriculum; access to higher tracks; and a bevy of extracurricular activities. Much of the time, however, the benefits of integration are hypothesized rather than demonstrated. Fundamentally, the problem is that successful integration depends on more than physical access to spaces with certain kinds of material resources. It also will depend very much on the design of the school system, not to mention how one is perceived and treated once in the building. Countless studies – ironically including many studies produced by

integration advocates – document time and again that young people from stigmatized minority backgrounds face innumerable institutional and psychological hurdles in "integrated" settings (e.g., Conger, 2005; Diamond, 2006; Lewis et al., 2015; Santiago-Rosario et al., 2021; Tyson, 2011). These integration failures are so common that they also routinely appear in fiction. "What is the school for?" asks a character in J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron.* "It is to make us fit into the apartheid system" (1990, p. 67). "John was a trailblazer," Sherman Alexie notes with cruel irony, "a nice trophy for St. Francis, a successfully integrated Indian boy" (1996, p. 19). And in Richard Wright's *The Outsider*, we find this poignant description:

> She had attended a racially mixed school in her adolescence and the snubs and ostracism had branded her with a deep sense of not belonging and a yearning to have her status as an outsider cleared of shame. (1953, p. 66).

Examples like these can be effortlessly multiplied. And because these phenomena are so ubiquitous, abundant, and consistent across many societies where similar empirical research has been done, it will suffice to illustrate these observations by alluding to one recent example of qualitative empirical work.

Sociologist Simone Ispa-Landa notes many ways in which an integrated school works well, including for many minorities. But things go less well for those often believed to be the primary beneficiaries of school integration. Basing her conclusions on wide-ranging observations and interviews in a spatially integrated high school, she found the following:

> All the suburban students I interviewed liked the *idea* of offering urban minorities spots in "their" schools ... However, they felt that suburban schools should try to recruit (in their words) "better," more "hardworking," or "more intelligent" black students ... Thus nested within the discourse about the black students' supposed under-achievement was another discourse, one that questioned the black students' presence and/or "deservingness" to a suburban education. (2013), pp. 224–25[1]

Ispa-Landa's research elsewhere (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015) concerning transfers of stigmatized minority students into white majority neighborhoods and schools further captures the racially charged schooling experiences that many can expect to have. Among her findings we see the usual litany of involuntary features, familiar to readers of sociology of education research. These include: (i) a faith in the credibility of high stakes standardized tests to measure or predict intellectual aptitude; (ii) teacher mismatch and bias, in particular as it concerns low expectations concerning the intellectual ability of stigmatized minority students; (iii) these expectations correlate strongly with disproportionate referrals for special education, discipline, and suspension; (iv) these patterns also simultaneously reinforce a belief in meritocracy *and* social ostracism, othering,

[1] While her research concerns black urban students in a predominantly white suburban high school in the United States, similar findings involving different stigmatized minority groups are also well documented in other countries.

and containment, but also more generally regarding what teachers believe is a suitable academic level for stigmatized minority students. Paradoxically, too, these patterns operate in tandem with good intentions.

The last item merits further comment. In countless situations Ispa-Landa observed that many school staff were "eager to help" and went out of their way to lavish condescending praise ("good job!") on black students. Curiously, however, similar academic success was rarely advertised or openly celebrated as it concerned white majority students, let alone other, minority students (e.g., of Asian or Jewish background), from whom academic success was simply expected.[2]

Significantly, however, even in the absence of overt discriminatory treatment, the following are consistently observed: low expectations; disparities with respect to standardized test scores; patterns of clustering, centered around shared background, experience and interest. Indeed a great deal of empirical evidence suggests that also in highly mixed school settings the influence of peer groups tends to foster segregation (McPherson et al., 2001; Moody, 2001), only sometimes in order to navigate hostile spaces as visible minorities (Anderson, 2021; Hussain, 2021). In other words, *neither historical nor structural explanations of segregation suffice to explain its common occurrence*. That cohorts of diverse background and opinion exist – whether in school or anywhere else – is not the issue; instead, the question is whether it is common.

The reader will recall that "shared fate" theorists would have us communicate with others, under conditions of social equality, and together forge paths of mutual cooperation. Yet the shared fate variant operates on the presumption that students will attend the same schools or the same classes, pursue the same extracurricular activities, or enjoy a social life together outside of school, an arrangement far removed from the segregated reality in most countries. And even when classrooms *are* mixed in all the ways that matter, other problems inescapably arise.

14.3.2 Deliberation Revisited

The various difficulties discussed in Section 14.3.1 matter not only in terms of educational opportunity or academic achievement. They also clearly gesture at a number of problems where democratic deliberation in the school is concerned. The story goes that deliberation will position participants as civic equals, thereby assisting to repair deep misunderstandings and mistrust, and further aid in bringing young people together to engender harmony and understanding. Remember, too, that the integration ideal is assumed to be a facilitative educational condition, where the aim is not only to mitigate stereotyping and

[2] When gender is factored into the equation, elsewhere Ispa-Landa (2013) also found that certain features of black (male) identity and behavior were fetishized owing to positive stereotypes related to athletics and hip hop culture; black boys in white majority schools, *even when tracked low*, were often viewed as "popular" and even high status in terms of social standing. The same did not hold true, however, for black girls, whose attitudes or behaviors (described as "loud" or "difficult") were often constructed as problematic, even deviant.

prejudice but also one of working to leverage salient differences for joint decision-making and a more legitimate pursuit of the public good. Yet as appealing as all of this sounds, several difficulties come into view.

One almost certainly concerns the rules of engagement. Liberal proponents of democratic deliberation typically insist on publicly available reasons and reliable methods of inquiry as prerequisites. The difficulty is that many varieties of human experience are categorically *not shared*, creating hermeneutical gaps, the likes of which impose additional burdens on those whose experiences are difficult to convey using publicly available reasons. Moreover, if deliberation requires a reserved, nonconfrontational communication style, where the reliable methods of inquiry stipulate that emotional responses (such as anger) are discouraged, then the game of deliberation is already rigged in favor of those with mild temperaments, or else who have been socialized into a middle-class etiquette of "acceptable" school behaviors – something that deliberative theorist John Dryzek (2000, p. 63) has described as "oppressive self-control" – in addition to ideas and beliefs that more closely correspond to conventional norms. Thus, intended or not, the net result is the exclusion of perspectives from consideration that do not meet these criteria. Stanley Fish describes what is almost certain to happen to those deemed to have "incorrect" views in such deliberations:

> [If] he has reasons they are unaccompanied by evidence; if he has evidence it is the wrong kind; if he has the right kind, it is not as good as the evidence we have. You know that [proponents of democratic deliberation] could go on forever in this vein because all they are doing is negotiating a very small circle that begins and ends with their own prior conviction and a vocabulary made in its image. The key word in that vocabulary is "reasonable", but all that is meant by the word is what my friends and I take to be so. (1999, p. 91)

Many liberal philosophers and political theorists narrowly interpret "unreasonable" views to refer to religious fundamentalists who appeal to conscience or the authority of a sacred text. No doubt this worry applies to some individuals. But plenty of other nonshared personal experiences and perspectives viewed as unreasonable from the standpoint of the (idealized) deliberation are unlikely to be permitted as well. Most of these do not lean on supernatural claims but rather a multitude of unpleasant experiences – condescension, harassment, discrimination, microaggression, etc. – that typically (i) are not experienced by many of one's (more popular or advantaged) peers, and (ii) whose effects are aggravated by the institutional norms of the school itself. The not infrequent result is to have one's experience denied or dismissed as hyperbole by those unable to comprehend what many individuals contend with as a matter of routine.

The difficulties of facilitating these conversations are made even more improbable in light of the fact that the official school narratives informing these discussions typically omit minority perspectives that could inform the matter at hand. The upshot, as philosopher Ian Shapiro (1999, p. 32) discerningly observes, is that deliberation is just as likely to "unearth new irreconcilable

differences, with the effect that the relationship [among participants with different experiences and beliefs] worsens and perhaps even falls apart in acrimony." Such an outcome is even *likely* to happen if and when teachers themselves lack the relevant knowledge and skill, but also virtues (inter alia, patience, empathy, moral discernment) necessary to facilitate heated discussions.

14.3.3 Toleration

But surely, one anticipates a critic saying, even with these difficulties in mind, we can at least expect more, rather than less, toleration? Perhaps. But much will depend on whether or not participants share the same understanding of what toleration means or requires. It almost certainly is the case that many persons understand toleration to mean something more closely approximating resigned acceptance of difference for the sake of peace, or a kind of reluctant moral stoicism concerning the fact that others have rights to believe and behave in ways one finds disagreeable (Walzer, 1997). Indeed, it is a routine feature of staged debate – both in media and in schools – to have opposing sides to a controversial issue, where the ostensible aim of such exercises (if not simply to entertain) is that listeners tolerate all views expressed during the allotted time. Even civic educators who exhort teachers to "teach the controversy" also insist that they should refrain from partisan proselytizing and instead facilitate the airing of different points of view.

It is also questionable whether promoting toleration is a commendable educational aim. Indeed, surely there are many things (e.g., bullying, dishonesty, racism, cruelty) that we should *not* tolerate, whether in school or anywhere else. Left to itself, "tolerating differences" – sometimes couched in terms of "multiperspectivity"' or "learning to disagree" – lends itself to a moral relativism that consists in little more than an exchange of opinions. And this is precisely how "toleration" in the classroom works much of the time, where opinions concerning matters of substance are effectively treated as matters of taste, not unlike a preference for arthouse cinema or football. *This* kind of toleration stops well short of substantive civic virtue, effectively rendering it as nothing more than a hollow performance.

14.4 Segregation and Democratic Deliberation

To recap an important point: segregation that either is imposed or that correlates strongly with structural disadvantage is prima facie morally problematic. But three caveats follow. First, whether or not segregation per se is problematic will depend on the background conditions – opportunity structures, choice sets and social networks – attending the segregation. Even when historical injustice correlates strongly with some instances of segregation, it is far from obvious whether compulsory "integration" is a remedy. Provided the right enabling conditions are in place, integration may facilitate certain benefits. Yet when integration either implies enforced assimilation, or merely reduces to spatial

mixing within unaltered institutional structures, we are just as likely to see patterns of inequality unabatedly continue.

Second, while the structural factors of segregation cannot be overlooked, there are also voluntary cultural and individual processes at work. Even members of stigmatized minority groups do not cluster simply as a defensive reflex against racism or social exclusion. Persons also gravitate to areas where they are able to be in close proximity to similar others, where communication and cultural norms are understood, and where they may profit from living with others who share similar lifestyles, social networks, and cultural needs. In other words, spatial concentrations can supply resources of solidarity often unavailable in more mixed settings, particularly when that mix is tilted in favor of the dominant group. Third, and more pragmatically articulated: so long as entrenched patterns of segregation – in particular among society's most privileged members – seem unlikely to change, then it is not contrary to reason for minority groups to turn existing segregation to advantage. Not unlike how stigmatized identities can be reappropriated, segregated spaces, too, can also be redefined, reclaimed, and redirected to better serve the interests of their members (Merry, 2013, 2021).

In sum, while much harm undoubtedly coincides with some forms of segregation, these facts alone do not remove voluntary reasons for preferring to live, work, or recreate with others like oneself, however one wishes to define "like oneself." And notice that "like oneself" for those who live with stigma also provides additional reasons to prefer the company of similar others if this ensures greater protection from exclusionary harm. Put another way, some spatial concentrations may indeed be sites of deprivation and stigma; but many spatial concentrations also serve as sites of *reprieve* from deprivation and stigma; indeed, they may supply opportunities to relax, to be nourished by the company of similar and congenial others, and even to convalesce from the unremitting stress of "integration." bell hooks (1995, p. 109) has further argued that segregation can help "to maintain oppositional worldviews and standpoints to counter the effects of racism and to nurture resistance."

On this reading, many (though not all) segregated spaces, including neighborhoods and schools, do not merely describe spatial concentrations of a particular group; rather, they may serve as spaces in which persons are able to rejuvenate identities, celebrate the importance of marginalized lives, and even experience greater freedom of expression without fear or concern about misunderstanding, rejection, or being silenced. However, it is not my contention that segregation only serves to buffer stigmatized persons from harm, or accommodate a desire to be with similar others. Indeed, some kinds of segregation may actually aid in fostering important civic virtues.

14.4.1 Segregation and Civic Virtue

When fair channels of deliberation under integrated conditions are either hostile, or, more likely, simply not available, we should not be surprised if some communities reject deliberation that is exclusively defined, delineated, and

imposed by others. As Dryzek has it, "Reasoned agreement as an operating principle may be easiest to achieve in locality-specific disputes and problems with a relatively small number of identifiable participants who can meet in face-to-face interaction" (2000, p. 50). Indeed, when spatial concentrations can assist in mobilizing around shared interests and aims, then we begin to approximate what Nancy Fraser (1997, 2021) has called "counter-publics."

Counter-publics often provide a more efficacious means of securing parity of participation in deliberation, as well as in facilitating the bonds of solidarity against structural barriers of discrimination (Brown & Davis, 2001; Stull et al., 2015; Wane, 2009), than policies adopted through formal channels, and for which integrated settings are believed to be an imperative condition. To be sure, gay/feminist/disability/tribal minority rights campaigns may, at times, opt to work in alliance with members of majority groups. Indeed there inevitably will be times when *all* minorities must build bridges if fundamental change to mainstream institutional structures and attitudes is ever to materialize (Merry et al., 2016). But those causes do not mean that there is no value in maintaining nonintegrated spaces and institutions for the benefit of those who prefer the company of similar others.

The same logic of turning segregation to advantage extends to the cultivation of civic virtue. Counter-publics allow for group solidarity that reinforces a position of strength from which to engage with the wider public. As the need arises, members of a counter-public can formulate their own interpretations of their interests and needs and advance these for public hearing, where neither public nor civic virtue depends on integration. Certain political obligations – basic rights and responsibilities – may compel our attention, and our identities may incorporate political characteristics. But civic virtue does not reduce to political behaviors, such as political organizing or voting. Nor should it be conflated with republican notions of citizenship that accentuate national over communal attachments and their attendant expressions of common good.

Counter-publics can even more effectively galvanize our efforts in responding to others in need. Indeed, attachments to specific communities often supply persons with the substance of belonging that makes more expansive notions of cooperation both possible and meaningful (Bernal, 2006; Gandin, 2006; Martinez, 2006). As such, some kinds of segregation can have a direct and positive impact both on community solidarity and on local politics; associational membership often is an antecedent, if not the impetus, to other forms of civic virtue. Cities and neighborhoods with spatial concentrations also have better facilitated political inroads for aspiring politicians, who in turn can be more responsive to the concerns of the local citizenry. The denser the associational network is, the more civic virtue and political trust one often can expect. This trend cuts across demographic lines and exists in neighborhoods across many societies (Merry, 2013; Baldassarri & Diani, 2007; Jacobs et al., 2004).

Further, many spatial concentrations open up opportunities for entrepreneurship and other forms of service provision, such as clothing and cultural accessories, skin and hair products, markets and grocery stores, books and newspapers, community centers, and job networks. These lead to an

institutionalization of networks and services that not only increases the attractiveness of the neighborhood in question (whatever its drawbacks and liabilities) but also contributes to the maintenance of a subculture many find attractive and hence are keen to cultivate and sustain. The upshot is that while it is certainly true that some types of segregation are irredeemably harmful, this is often not the case. As the foregoing paragraphs illustrate, segregation may coincide with many tangible benefits.

14.4.2 Segregated Schooling?

Now, even if proponents of democratic deliberation reluctantly acknowledge these things to be true, they still are likely to resist the suggestion that the same should be said about education. And indeed, empirical researchers have marshaled powerful evidence showing that many segregated majority-minority schools often lack the monetary resources necessary to provide more challenging academic tracks, smaller class sizes, and greater staff retention. Or they may point to the concerning parallel between certain minority concentrations and poverty. Integrationists are right to be worried about these injustices when and where they occur. But two points must be underscored.

First, we have already seen that the empirical evidence often points away from the integrationist thesis as it concerns equitable treatment of those who ostensibly stand to benefit from it. Most integrationist "success stories" concern relatively small numbers of individuals whose physical presence poses little threat to the usual state of affairs, and may even provide false reassurance to school staff and parents that their school is more inclusive than it actually is. Second, it is doubtful whether most majority-minority schools always have fewer monetary resources at their disposal. Weighted pupil funding to compensate for poverty and disadvantage is the norm in many countries. However, monetary resources alone are rarely sufficient to close achievement gaps. This is because nonmonetary resources arguably matter more.

Indeed, an abundance of empirical research (e.g., Carter & Merry, 2021; Frost, 2007; Hattie, 2002; Veenman, 1996) suggests that class composition matters far less – both as it concerns educational achievement and expectations to graduate from a four-year university course – than the following resources, any one of which is difficult to finance and scale up: (i) rigor of the curriculum; (ii) quality of instruction; (iii) high teacher expectations; (iv) strong school leadership; (v) shared academic goals; (vi) a cohesive, value-centered learning environment; (vii) empathic care; (viii) positive role-modeling and mentoring, and (ix) a sense of shared community among peers. Ideally, we want to see schools have *both* kinds of resources; unfortunately, however, policymakers typically find it easier to increase investment without addressing the ways in which the institutional norms of state school systems perpetuate inequality. As a result, the status quo is rarely altered.

Again, many readers will grudgingly concede these points – including the importance of counter-publics – but still worry about the implications of homogenous classrooms for democratic deliberation. Surely, they will insist, more homogenous educational spaces simply fail to provide the necessary tension for

such fruitful interactions to occur? Yet even some rather outspoken champions of democratic deliberation take a more nuanced view vis-à-vis classroom composition. For instance, political philosopher Debra Satz wisely acknowledges that "not all forms of de facto segregation threaten the ideal of relations among equal citizens. The social context of that segregation matters" (2007, p. 636). Moreover, and despite their commitment to "teaching the controversy," McAvoy and Hess, too, are reluctant to view homogeneity in the classroom as inherently problematic. They write:

> Even in classes that appear to be extremely homogenous, students consistently reported that they are able to recognize and appreciate the ideological diversity in their midst if their teachers included discussions of controversial issues in the curriculum. Many students stated that the range of opinions expressed in their classes was far wider than in their homes, in part because there were simply more participants, and therefore a greater diversity of viewpoints. (2013, p. 40)

As these observations make clear, the challenges faced in a more homogenous (read: segregated) classroom are just as real in terms of divergent viewpoints present, the importance of equitable treatment, or the need to establish rules of communication, listening, and respect. In other words, there is no reason to presume that segregation per se produces a famine of perspective, that is, less epistemic diversity.

Liberal democratic educators may lament that the gaps separating individuals in terms of experience and opinion may not be as wide as that which an integrated classroom might provide. On the other hand, if the gap between perspectives is less extreme, this may bode well for the deliberative process. Indeed a more "segregated" classroom in terms of culture, gender or ethnic/racial differences may in fact serve as a pedagogical convenience to both teachers and students, perhaps attempting to grapple with controversial topics for the first time. In other words, circumscribed diversity in a classroom may help to ease inevitable frictions that surface during deliberative interaction.

Nor, finally, does a more segregated classroom necessarily mean that a substantive understanding of toleration is out of reach. Remember that a substantive definition denotes an openness to others, an ability and willingness to listen and learn from differences, and to reflect upon one's own present beliefs. On this understanding of toleration, even students in a more segregated setting can develop a moral vocabulary necessary to adjudicate between competing normative claims. They also can learn the importance of using evidence to assess the reliability of some views over others. Finally, students also can develop a capacity to critically reflect upon one's beliefs and assumptions, and cultivate the intellectual humility necessary to alter one's point-of-view.

14.4.3 Final Worries

No doubt some liberal democratic theorists may still worry that these virtues will be self-contained, that is, that what may work well for members within

one's community will not facilitate the civic virtues necessary to engage with those outside of one's community. They bid us to reconsider integration as an imperative for achieving these aims. Integration, the reasoning goes, is the ideal, and hence to 'settle' for democratic deliberation in segregated settings is defeatist. But rejoinders are available.

First, as we have seen, even in societies where legal mandates have been wielded to coercively foster integrated schooling, the outcomes in most cases have done little to address the structural inequalities endemic to school systems, ones that correlate strongly with race and social class (Carter & Merry, 2021). Though we may find this lamentable, most societies remain highly segregated, even if patterns of mixing in many domains continues to occur (Merry, 2021). Second, it is not defeatist to insist that we take seriously what the empirical evidence says, and to be open to pragmatic alternatives when that evidence consistently points *away* from integrationist dogma. Moreover, if and when de facto conditions of segregation can be turned to advantage, such that one's circumstances are pragmatically redefined, reclaimed, and redirected to serve the collective interests of self-determination, then this should be read as *resisting* defeat, not accommodating it.

Third, community-centered civic virtues facilitated by local attachments need not eclipse more remote concerns. Indeed, our links to strangers are rarely as remote as we may think. Local communities also function within broader polities, and even nations operate within international alliances. There is no reason to suppose that civic virtues – if they are in fact virtues rather than contentious political rhetoric concerning "shared values" – will be restricted to specific locations; indeed, they often have what economists call powerful externalities. To paraphrase Robert Putnam (2000), inward-looking (*bonding*) virtues do not exclude outward-looking (*bridging*) virtues. Indeed, the concentrical effects of civic virtue will be cultivated first with those one already knows before ever reaching beyond to less familiar contexts. That is more or less how the homophily principle works. Any civic virtues sewn in Guyanese or Columbian classrooms would presumably suffice until a mass exodus of refugees escaping political repression and famine in Venezuela would test the mettle of those virtues; the same presumably would be true of Indonesian Muslims in Aceh prior to the arrival of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, or Jordanian hospitality shown toward Syrian and Palestinian refugees, or Liberians doing the same for those fleeing the Ivory Coast.

Without romanticizing these encounters, notice that each of these illustrations share a number of things in common, quite apart from suffering on a massive scale: each concerns neighboring countries where cultural, religious, and even linguistic similarities more readily facilitate the bridging. Where proximity is absent, as in the Rohingya case, religious brotherhood (*ummah*) aids in compensating. Either way, if circumstances that permit such bridging are missing, that in itself is no tragedy. Similarly, the benefits of a deliberation within a segregated classroom or school can later serve one well in very different environments, even if new skills and understandings inevitably will be required with those whose differences we may find less familiar. In any case, all

classroom deliberations are but rehearsals, not unlike how attorneys "play" at prosecuting a case in law school before ever entering an actual courtroom, or how army platoons "play war" with one another before – if ever – encountering enemy forces.

In short, neither the integrity nor the possibility for deliberation and cultivation of civic virtue turn on an environment being integrated. Indeed, the cultivation of civic virtue within an appropriately structured homogenous environment, one also capable of facilitating a sense of belonging associated with attachments to a particular group, is a powerful precursor for the more expansive expression of social trust. Moreover, as we have seen, it is often under segregated conditions that students feel themselves freer to discuss, imagine, and pursue what civic virtue means when there are possibilities for parity of participation. If and when segregation is reconceived and reclaimed as a counter-public, it may be likely that participants have recourse to arguments that others cannot dismiss so quickly as unreasonable.

In any case, students do not need to be thrown into the deep end as it were, grappling with every conceivable difference before the relevant civic virtues begin to emerge. Indeed, the *absence* of certain kinds of diverse experiences in the classroom (e.g., incomprehension, silence, denial, antagonism) is almost certain to mitigate unnecessary unpleasantness that so often inhibits students from cultivating both the relevant civic virtues, as well as the skills necessary for deliberation. And if that is right, then in many cases the convenience of a homogenous classroom may be even more significant for those not likely to fare as well in a school in which their minoritized identities prove to be a liability.

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