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Teacher-led codeswitching: Adorno, race, contradiction, and the nature of autonomy

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on respective ideas from within both liberal political philosophy and Frankfurt School critical theory, this paper seeks to examine claims about autonomy and empowerment made on behalf of educational policies such as teacher-led codeswitching; a policy that seeks to empower students from racially marginalised groups by facilitating their proficiency in the language and cultural expressions of societally dominant groups. I set out to evaluate such claims by first sketching two competing formulations of autonomy; namely, (a) liberal autonomy concomitant to political power, and (b) autonomy that arises out of the practice of critical self-reflection. I proceed by testing codeswitching within each formulation to reveal how – in this case – these two conceptualisations of autonomy are educationally incompatible with each other. I conclude by suggesting that educational interventions such as codeswitching may ultimately be complicit in the longer term processes of racialisation and marginalisation that they seek to diminish, not only because they carry the potential to damage minority students' self-integrity, but also because they limit possibilities for both majority and minority students to engage in dialectical encounters that may open avenues to new principles of social and political organisation.

KEYWORDS

Autonomy; race and racialization; liberal education; liberalism; critical theory; urban education

If civic empowerment is our goal, then educators need to teach minority students to 'codeswitch': to represent and express themselves in ways that members of the majority group – those with political privilege and power – will naturally understand and respect. Students should learn that in every community there is a language and culture of power. If one wants to be effective through political dialogue ... one must master and use that language and those cultural expressions. (Levinson 2012, 87)

Introduction

This paper takes the above pedagogical prescription as its starting point, seeking to trace and test the veracity of the claim to civic empowerment made within it.

Educational prescriptions such as those above explicitly aim to redress structural disadvantages faced by students from marginalised, racialised minority-groups, by facilitating such students' performative competency within the 'language and cultural expressions' of dominant communities. The rationale underpinning such prescriptions is that minority students who have been taught to successfully perform dominant-group cultural signifiers, gain some form of recognition or respect from that dominant group. As a result of such recognition, minority students are then granted access by the dominant group to public forums in which claims to the equal distribution of political and economic power are negotiated, so that minority students are then afforded greater levels of civic empowerment. Concomitantly, minority groups are then in a better position to advocate on behalf of political efforts to amend and rebalance previous structural disadvantages that would have once impacted their community.

However, I demonstrate that a closer analysis of such prescriptions reveals a strong potential for such interventions to instead – ultimately – exacerbate the mechanisms of social and political exclusion, misrecognition, and silencing, that they seek to allay. This is not only because the internalisation of norms which – by varying degrees – are heteronomous to minority students has the potential to damage such students' sense of self-esteem and self-integrity, but also because such educational interventions limit possibilities for genuine dialectical encounters in education for both minority and dominant-group students alike. That is, dialectical encounters that – epistemologically – are likely to provide dominant-group students with the necessary conceptual material to see beyond the confines of the tacit, racially hierarchised, Eurocentric narratives through which they may initiate and/or perpetuate processes of racialisation and marginalisation.

In the first part of this paper, I briefly work to sketch two different formulations of autonomy; that is (a) liberal autonomy concomitant to political power, and (b) critical autonomy that arises out of the practice of critical self-reflection. This is so as to prefigure this paper's second section in which I evaluate teacher-led code switching against the criteria for autonomy set out in theories supporting formulations (a) and (b). Through the comparison that I draw as a result, I demonstrate that the two formulations of autonomy outlined are not educationally compatible with each other; indeed, policies such as teacher-led code switching – which draw on liberal formulation (a) – are themselves complicit in the ongoing processes of racialised hierarchisation that they seek to dismantle.

Sketching two conceptions of autonomy

In this first section of the paper, I intend to trace and compare two alternative formulations of autonomy. This is so as to prefigure this paper's second section, in which I seek to evaluate a specific example of an educational policy and/or intervention that has as its main aim the cultivation of *empowering* qualities necessary for students originating from groups traditionally considered as societally

marginalised; that is, qualities required for such students to gain access to mainstream public and political forums so as to advocate on behalf of, and justify, political and (concomitant) social justice.

Such ideas about education, and by extension wider societal diversity, argue that part of education's proper function is an initiation into, and/or a distribution of the necessary cultural and educational capital that will ultimately allow learners to develop into citizens capable of economic and political functionality and independence. According to one strand of this line of thought (see Levinson 2012), both an access to, and an ambition towards students' functionality within mainstream aesthetic and political modes of *thinking* and *being* are essential components of educational efforts to justly transform students originating from groups unfairly disadvantaged in the distribution/accumulation of economic and political power. While not denying wider structural barriers and societal prejudices, such an access to 'appropriate' modes of thinking and being – so the argument goes – provides students with the necessary human capital to be deemed worthy of admittance to both the professional jobs market and political forums.

As a result, education for autonomy – on this dominant account – might (roughly) be formulated as a preparation to exercise a freedom and ability to accumulate, negotiate, and then exercise economic and political power so as to be afforded the opportunity – as far as is democratically possible – to determine the course of one's own life, as well as that of one's family and local community. Or, as Rawls puts it; 'to rationally pursue ... a conception of what we regard for us as a worthwhile human life' (Rawls 1993, 302). I argue that such assumptions lie behind many theories regarding liberal education and education for participation in liberal democracies.

Alternatively, in his 2004 paper 'What Might Education Mean After Abu Ghraib', Henry Giroux sketches a different form of autonomy, as part of his work to explore the kind of *human reasoning* functional in the collective minds of the American soldiers responsible for the human rights violations that occurred at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2003. Taking a lead from Frankfurt School critical theory, he instead suggests that the cultivation or facilitation of conceptual reflexivity is the central concern for the facilitation of autonomy within education. Giroux writes of the Abu Ghraib abuses and, moreover, the public discussions that followed in the US and other Western countries, suggesting that,

What is often ignored in the debates about Abu Ghraib, both in terms of its causes and what can be done about it, are questions that foreground the relevance of critical education to the debate. Such questions would clearly focus, at the very least, on what pedagogical conditions need to be in place to enable people to view the images of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison not as a voyeuristic, even pornographic, reception, but through a variety of discourses that enable them to ask critical and probing questions that get at the heart of how people learn to participate in sadistic acts of abuse and torture, internalise racist assumptions that make it easier to dehumanise people different from themselves, accept commands that violate basic human rights, become indifferent to the suffering and hardships of others, and view dissent as fundamentally unpatriotic. (Giroux 2004, 11)

Autonomy, in this sense, can be formulated as a kind of freedom through which the individual thinker is afforded the opportunity to work their way to seeing through the combined conceptual totalities that are presented to them, so as to (1) question established norms and received narratives, and therefore (2) develop something of a conscious and critical agency when both formulating a conception of the good and then acting within the principles established and then re-established within such a conception.

To this ultimate end, Giroux is advocating for an education that would have originally provided the US soldiers with a critical facility with which to insulate themselves from specific, fierce and almost *total*, ethnic, national and religious narratives emanating from mainstream American and Western media, as well as general, tacit, Eurocentric narratives regarding white supremacy. That is, an insulation from narratives which – when left unchallenged – functioned to prevent the soldiers (1) from acknowledging the *humanness* of their victims, and (2) from having the critical awareness and/or reason(s) to recognise the *untruth* of the narratives with which they were being supplied, and which therefore led them to such a disconnection from those men and women to whom they wilfully did harm.

Adorno similarly writes, in regard to the mass persecution of the European Jewish population perpetrated by the German state in the 1930s and 1940s:

When men are forbidden to think, thinking sanctions what simply exists. The genuinely critical need of thought to awaken from the cultural phantasmagoria is trapped, channelled, steered into the wrong consciousness. The culture of the habit has broken thought of the habit to ask what all this may be, and to what end. (Adorno [1966] 1973, 5)

Adorno suggests that the forbiddance of thinking and the acceptance of *what simply exists* (reified consciousness), leads to the kind of conceptual and cognitive complacency that Giroux suggests prevents us from asking 'critical and probing questions', and which, by extension, prevented the American soldiers at Abu Ghraib from recognising the untruth of the narratives supplied to them. Adorno – recasting a much altered version of Hegelian dialectics – suggests that in order for the *untruth* of a conceptual system to become apparent to a thinker (an 'awakening from the cultural phantasmagoria'), a thinker must – as an initial step – have the opportunity to encounter *difference*; namely, examples of alternative conceptualisations and systems of thought that provide a contradiction when held up against the received or dominant narrative. Under the right conditions, such an encounter with difference places the thinker within a disorientating, conscious space of conceptual tension that initiates a process of questioning; namely, dialectically thinking through this tension, as opposed to falling into the habit of not asking 'what all this might be and to what end'. (*ibid*, 6).

However, Adorno suggests that dominant social and political forms of (liberal) organisation are inimical to such a process as they require conformity in citizens through the establishment of dominant cultural norms; these norms create a general ultimatum via which the individual must either conform or be excluded, and

they therefore function as a mechanism that erodes away at wider societal variance and, as a result, at the opportunity for each thinker to encounter a contradictory conceptual system that opposes their own. The individual is therefore discouraged – or even *forbidden* – from thinking, and is instead encouraged to *identify*.

If we are to take the respective educational claims – that is the Rawlsian claim and the critical-theory-inspired claim – for the exercise of liberal political autonomy and critical/conceptual autonomy seriously, and if at the same time such claims can be considered as being exclusive of each other, then evaluative questions need to be asked as to which of the two approaches – or a synthesis of both – will genuinely facilitate the kind of democratic ideals that they both make claim to; and which, as a result, may be judged as most appropriate in the formulation of an education system that contributes to wider human and social justice, equality, and diversity. In the following section I attempt to evaluate an example of educational policy (namely, teacher led code-switching) that explicitly arises from the first of these two conceptions of autonomy, hoping to use a critical theory based conceptual framework to further elucidate where the two approaches might depart from each other, and the educational implications that follow.

Adorno, Levinson and the case of code-switching

By means of framing such an evaluation, it is worth noting two passages in ‘Education After Auschwitz’ in which Adorno describes ‘reified consciousness’ as,

a disastrous state of conscious and unconscious thought [that] includes the erroneous idea that one’s own particular way of being – that one is just so and not otherwise – is nature, an unalterable given, and not a historical evolution ... a consciousness blinded to all historical past, all insight into one’s own conditionedness, and posits as absolute what exists contingently. If this coercive mechanism were once ruptured, then, I think, something would be gained. (Adorno 1967, 7)

A large part of Adorno’s project within the 1966 radio broadcast, ‘Education After Auschwitz’, is to lay the foundations of a claim that education should aim towards facilitating a mode of cognition that is both concept-critical and, as a result, open to difference; namely, a form of rationality that is antithetical to both the objectifying mentality and what Adorno here refers to as ‘reified consciousness’. In a similar vein Adorno suggests that,

people who blindly slot themselves into the collective already make themselves something like inert material, extinguish themselves as self-determined beings. With this comes the willingness to treat others as an amorphous mass ... people of such a nature have, as it were, assimilated themselves to things. And then, when possible, they assimilate others to things. (Adorno 1967, 6)

Code-switching

As an example of an educational policy that aims towards emancipatory educational outcomes, but which instead – despite the best of intentions – contributes

to a widespread facilitation of a form of cognition unable to support such aims, I turn to Levinson's 2012 book *No Citizen Left Behind*. A veteran of education work among low-income, African American communities, Levinson draws on the work of African-American educationalists (including Prudence Carter 2005 and Lisa Delpit 1995) to suggest that:

If civic empowerment is our goal, then educators need to teach minority students to 'codeswitch': to represent and express themselves in ways that members of the majority group – those with political privilege and power – will naturally understand and respect. Students should learn that in every community there is a language and culture of power. If one wants to be effective through political dialogue, as opposed solely through direct action, boycotts, or radical street theatre, say, one must master and use that language and those cultural expressions. (Levinson 2012, 87)

This prescription forms part of a larger and much more nuanced book in which Levinson sets out to justify educational interventions that cultivate the correct qualities necessary for minority students to functionally engage (1) within political forums (namely, to take formal democratic action of various kinds), and (2) within professional spaces (namely, to gain employment). To this end, and particularly in the case of code-switching, Levinson argues that African-American students – especially those from low-income areas – should be taught to speak and 'act' like members of the societally dominant group; namely, white, middle-class Americans. By means of demonstrating wider support for such an approach, Levinson quotes another African-American educationalist, Prudence Carter, who similarly suggests that 'education is as much about being inculcated with the ways of the "culture of power" as it is about learning to read, count and think critically' (Carter 2005, 47).

In order to try to do proper justice to Levinson's text within limited space, it is important to make clear that Levinson's justification of an educational imperative to code-switch is accompanied by a strong condition that the 'language of power' should be taught alongside a student's own 'home-language' and 'cultural forms of knowledge' so as to ensure that students' home cultures are not erased. This, Levinson suggests, is to be achieved through translation exercises such as 'contrastive analysis', in which students 'not only translate Black English (or whatever the local language or dialect is) into Standard American English, but also translate SAE texts into their home dialect'. (Levinson 2012, 88).

As a result, rather than being encouraged into a 'wholesale abandonment of their own ways of being in the world' (89), African-American students are instead educated to be bilingual, swapping their manner of expression away from their original mode of talk, to conform to the expectations of the respective mainstream forums in which they may wish to operate when making any democratic claim to active citizenship. In this way, Levinson stresses that students should not be taught to think of themselves as necessarily excluded from the wider civic community, as neither should they be taught 'one more way in which they are deficient and will never gain power' (90). However, teachers should make it clear that as members of a minority community such students are indeed 'outsiders in the sense of having

to learn and use a language of power that is initially not their own' (90), so as to become 'strategic movers across cultural spheres' (88).

Such interventions do, of course, have the best of liberal, inclusive and democratic intentions at their core. Indeed, the second formulation of autonomy that I outlined on page 2 above, becomes pertinent here: that is, 'providing students with sufficient dominant social, cultural, and educational capital in this way, resonates with a definition of education for autonomy formulated as a preparation to exercise the freedom and ability to accumulate, negotiate, and then exercise economic and political power so as to be afforded the opportunity – as far as is democratically possible – to determine/negotiate the course of one's own life, as well as that of one's family and local community'. An education that is pursuant of these aims would, I argue, advocate for classroom practices that provide students with 'correct' cultural and educational goods in the manner that Levinson suggests, so as to gain access to streams of political and economic power or capital. Such political and economic power or capital, so the argument goes, is synonymous with (or at least prior to) the civic empowerment that Levinson outlines.

Such a definition also resonates with wider liberal and liberal education theory. Indeed, it is apparent in one formulation of autonomy offered by Levinson in an earlier book, *The Demands of Liberal Education*. On page 15, Levinson sketches a perfectionist liberal version of autonomy as being

the capacity to form a conception of the good, to evaluate one's values and ends with the genuine possibility of revising them should they be found wanting, and then to realise one's revised ends. (Levinson 1999, 15)

My working definition/characterisation of liberal autonomy (as outlined in the paragraph above) nestles into the third aspect of what Levinson offers here; namely, that in order to bring about or realise one's revised ends, an individual must have garnered the requisite political or other capital in order to effectively make and negotiate changes to their circumstances. This requires an (educational) initiation into the language and etiquette of expression necessary to be both heard and recognised by the dominant group.

However, drawing on Adorno's work, in the next section, I argue that policies such as code-switching are detrimental to the second (and potentially the first) component of this Rawlsian formulation. That is, such policies limit any genuine development of autonomy through a stifling of a student's capacity to 'evaluate their own values and ends with the genuine possibility of revising them should they be found wanting.'

Code-switching as alienation through the commodification of self

I suggest that the imperative to code-switch involves a tacit, and therefore unnoticed, move towards commodification in education.

Marx writes that a commodity is:

a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. (Marx 1995, 43)

In this way, Marx directs our attention to the manner in which the products of labour have both a 'use value' (namely, an object's utility arising out of the object's being in itself), and an 'exchange value' (a level of worth attached to an object that, rather than arising out of either the identity or the unique constitution of the object itself, is instead comparatively generated from within a market of tradable objects).

The imperative to code-switch marks a move towards commodification within education in the sense that rather than directing educational labour towards a cultivation of educational products understood as objects that inhabit their own space of being, such policies arguably encourage educational labourers to instead value the products of their work in terms of those products' exchange value when weighed against other products/objects within a comparative and competitive political market.

Here, educational labour is the work done by both teachers and, more importantly, by students. The products of that labour are the students themselves, as education acts upon and within the person to bring about a transformation of some sort. We might, then, imagine that an education that privileges the creation of use value would focus itself toward a responsiveness to the needs of the student in their own being; namely, a responsiveness to the uniquely constituted subject who both perceives the world, and functions within the world as framed by their own experience – an experience that is partly shared with their near neighbours and other members of their local community.

Conversely, an education that focuses itself towards the cultivation of the exchange value of the products of educational labour, would not be able to achieve such a responsiveness. Instead, such an education represents a commodification of the products of such labour, where such a product is the future student themselves at some end-point along their educational journey. In other words, the student is invited to envision the worth of their later, educated and therefore transformed self that they are working towards, as being dependent on the comparative value bestowed upon that future self by market forces; namely, a value deemed appropriate within an established political economy of identity that is heteronomous to the student themselves.

To step back from educational labour for a moment, it stands to reason that producers of general products for any market may, once the logic and configuration of that market has been revealed to them, seek to alter the process of production as well as the ultimate nature of their products, so as to optimise the value – that is, the exchange value – of those products.

Returning to education, and to code-switching in particular, we can see an intervention through which the logic of the current system of social and political organisation is revealed to students in such a way that they become aware of an interconnected past, present and future reality in which certain cultural modes of thinking and being are hierarchised as being more valuable (in regard to their exchange value) than others. Exchange value, here, is the measure of any product of educational labour (the educationally transformed student) when compared to established dominant norms and expectations. An appropriate set of cultural signifiers (such as the white, middle class norms in Levinson's example) are recognised and enacted as worthy tokens to provide entrance into prestigious positions within, say, the jobs market and mainstream political forums. Less worthy cultural signifiers (read, African American modes of cultural expression) are deemed indicative of less appropriate educational labour and, therefore, do not transact entrance to such forums.

Teachers work with such students to facilitate the adaptation of their educational labour so as to appropriately assimilate the end product of such labour (viz. the student) to the social, political and aesthetic imperatives that govern the particular market and/or political economy in which that product – the students themselves – will finally be both released and assessed. Such an adjustment, or transformation, is (incorrectly) deemed liberatory in the sense that by increasing the value of a student's profile within the current and given system of social, political and aesthetic conditions, such a student then has greater access to the kind of economic and political power necessary for them to gain recognition and, as a result, negotiate a path to fulfilling their life as befits their own conception of the good.

However, as I have suggested, such a mechanism of transformation instead risks a limitation of a student's capacity to 'evaluate their own values and ends with the genuine possibility of revising them should they be found wanting' (Levinson 1999, 15). This is because, despite Levinson's attempts to maintain a parity of esteem between a (minority) student's home-culture and schooled culture through techniques such as contrastive analysis, and despite any 'bilingualism' that might result, the students are additionally initiated into and immersed within an understanding and acceptance of a hierarchy of cultural signifiers and their respective, associated conceptual content. Indeed, at an early stage in such a student's critical development, they are taught to make glib, short-cut self-adjustments in order to gain recognition, without necessarily being taught about the underlying structural mechanisms underpinning the establishment and maintenance of such a hierarchisation.

To return to Marx, 'the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them [the students] as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour'. We might therefore suggest that students are encouraged to view the transition from their current selves to the selves that they will become, not as something that might arise out of their own

situatedness or subjectivity as such, but instead as a process that is sourced, driven and guided by forces external to themselves; forces which take on the appearance of an objective character, and to which they must capitulate. There is therefore a tacit imperative targeted at the students, through which they are not encouraged to speak and develop their voice as their true selves, but are instead encouraged to speak and therefore develop in a manner that is optimally appropriate. Students are incentivised to excise those aspects of their selves that do not fit the ideal image of the human being that is sanctioned by the market. As Sara Ahmed writes, 'the pressure not to 'assert one's culture' is lived as a demand to pass and integrate, not necessarily by becoming white but by being more alike' (Ahmed 2012, 158).

Minority students cannot bring their *whole* selves to this process of development: under these circumstances, students from minority communities are permitted to bring only a portion of their subjectivity into the classroom. In other words, such students may be asked to leave many aspects of their personalities at the classroom door, as such conceptual content will have no traction within those public forums in which such knowledge is not *recognised*. This is a disadvantage in comparison to their more 'mainstream' peers. Those minority students who struggle to internalise mainstream manners of expression and any accompanying conceptual content, may become alienated from both educational content, as well as from the difficult educational process through which they are being asked to become more norm-laden. Conversely, for those students who are more successful, the language that such students will develop in order to articulate their experience of the world, will not be a language that can fully reflect their lived experience, but will instead leave a disjunction between their fully experienced selves, and the self that they are able to articulate.

To return to the Adorno quotation at the top of this chapter,

People who blindly slot themselves into the collective already make themselves something like inert material, extinguish themselves as self-determined beings. With this comes the willingness to treat others as an amorphous mass ... people of such a nature have, as it were, assimilated themselves to things. And then, when possible, they assimilate others to things. (Adorno 1967, 6)

The inert nature of the students who are able to code-switch, and who therefore 'slot themselves into the collective', resides in the fact that as soon as they come to both perform, internalise, and *become* those sanctioned modes of thinking and being, they cease to act as examples of a contradiction. The important educational point here is that non-minority students can benefit, as outlined in the chapter above, from the presence of conceptual and cultural contradiction (namely minority students), particularly when they meet such difference in a relation of equal dignity so that such difference, dialectically, comes to reveal the constructed and therefore fallible nature of their own conceptual system. If this was the case, rather than re-making minority students to fit dominant norms and expectations (and often failing to do so), teachers might instead take the opportunity that the lived substance of the lives of *different* students offer; that is, teachers should facilitate

genuine dialogue between themselves and between *different* students, so as to reveal the interesting similarities, differences, and inadequacies across each conceptual regime, thereby similarly revealing the situatedness or conditionedness of each cultural standpoint. Such an intervention would truly represent an education that chases after genuine liberal ideals by allowing all students to be different, while at the same time open to the authentic (rather than the altered) voice of their respective others. In this vein Adorno writes that;

If public life has reached a state in which thought is being turned inescapably into a commodity and language into a celebration of the commodity, the attempt to trace the sources of this degradation must refuse obedience to the current linguistic and intellectual demands, before it is rendered entirely futile by the consequence of those demands. (Adorno [1944] 1972, xiv)

Instead, the remaking of minority students, and the quietening of their authentic voices, represents a perhaps accidental, and well intentioned, requisitioning of those students to support the social and political status quo; that is, to create future citizens who, rather than being in a position to criticise a conceptual system that pours scorn on their own cultural origins, are instead – along with their non-minority peers – robbed of the opportunity to see through the ‘cultural phantasmagoria’ as a result of having been crudely enmeshed within it. Minority and non-minority students alike are encouraged to ‘make sense of the ‘here and now’ in terms of the ‘there and then’ i.e., to ideas of what is *supposed* (by actors) *to be*’ (de Nora 2003, 6); that is, rather than enter into a process of constructing new ways of thinking and being in order make sense of the world, they instead rely on inherited, and sometimes tainted, categories of knowledge that carry – among other things – racial hierarchisation within them. As a result they fall victim to a reified consciousness. Simon Jarvis writes of Adorno and this process:

What Marx is thus able to uncover is the way in which a discourse with apparently exemplary liberal and enlightened credentials ... in fact keeps relying on archaic and mythical categories which it cannot afford to question. It does this, not because it has simply got the facts wrong, but because it reproduces a logic of misidentification which is already present in capitalist exchange and production itself. An outstanding instance of this, and one of central importance for Adorno, is provided by Marx’s analysis ‘the fetishism of the commodity and its secret’. (Jarvis 2004, 88)

In conclusion, educational interventions that seek to promote empowerment through the provision of centrally sanctioned social, cultural and educational goods, where access to such goods is deemed advantageous in regard to acceptance within mainstream public and political forums, have an effect that is in practical and conceptual tension with a genuinely robust notion of civic empowerment. Indeed, such interventions might be read as the provision of sets of performed signifiers (e.g. linguistic or behavioural norms) that elicit trust from dominant groups, while also reframing the pre-existing competency of non-dominant individuals within the language and expectations of those more dominant groups. In this way, as revealed through the above analysis, students who embody and signify

difference through the lived substance of their lives, are encouraged to abandon such qualities in such a way that not only jeopardises an integral sense of self, but also precludes the possibility of genuine dialectical encounters in otherwise one-dimensional educational spaces.

Therefore, in this paper, I hope to have laid out the case for an increased capacity for conceptual and cultural diversity in educational spaces. I have also advocated on behalf of, and pointed towards, educational policies that facilitate a kind genuine dialectical engagement; that is, a dialectical engagement that – through the development of a kind of critical conceptual autonomy – can advance the agenda of civic empowerment by providing the epistemological conditions for both majority and minority students alike to see beyond their current conceptual regimes, and think towards new possibilities in regard to principles of social and political (and racial) organisation. Or as Adorno writes:

An emancipated society ... would not be a unitary state, but the realisation of universality in the reconciliation of differences. Politics that are still seriously concerned with such a society ought not, therefore, propound the abstract equality of men even as an idea. Instead they should point to the bad equality today ... and conceive the better state as one in which people could be different without fear. (Adorno [1974] 2005, 103)

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