HIGHER EDUCATION

Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silence. Megan Boler (Ed.). New York: Peter Lang. 2004. ISBN: 0820463191, 157 pp.

ZOE BURKHOLDER, *New York University's Steinhardt School of Education*

Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silence edited by Megan Boler is a philosophical inquiry into the merits of fostering democratic dialogue in the college classroom through the selective silencing and voicing of student participants. The contributors offer creative and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the use of dialogue in the classroom; however, all are critical theorists committed to empowering minority students and challenging discrimination. Drawing from well-known scholars ranging from Paulo Freire to Michel de Certeau to Judith Butler, the authors make complex claims that challenge academics to critically reconsider the ways classroom practices can either passively advocate or actively dismantle dominant ideologies of racism, sexism, and homophobia.

The excellent essays in *Democratic Dialogue in Education* respond to Boler's initial proposal for "affirmative action pedagogy" that intentionally silences dominant voices in order to foreground the experiences of marginalized groups. Boler's goal is to cultivate democratic dialogue in college classrooms, which she defines as a conversation where any expression of racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism, ableism, or classism is critically analyzed. According to Boler, "an affirmative action pedagogy seeks to ensure that we bear witness to marginalized voices in our classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting dominant ones" (p. 4). In this case, dominant voices belong to white, heterosexual, middle-class men and sometimes women. The idea is to deliberately silence these students to create a space for nonprivileged students to speak out, a process Boler justifies through "historicized ethics" (p. 7). Boler asserts that despite the nation's promise of free speech, America's violent history of minority oppression has created a

Teachers College Record Volume 108, Number 5, May 2006, pp. 831–840
Copyright © by Teachers College, Columbia University
0161-4681

situation where all voices are not equal. Drawing on the same logic that supports affirmative action in college admissions, Boler believes this inequality justifies privileging minority voices that are otherwise excluded from classroom dialogue.

Although affirmative action pedagogy is a relatively simple and at times seductive theory of education, Boler is the first to recognize the ambiguities and tensions inherent in such a practice. Exploring the different forms that her pedagogy might take in the classroom, she describes one colleague who invites students to express "any views they wish" (p. 6) while another professor circumscribes topics for class discussion through an elaborate list of rules. Yet, according to Boler, these are both potential versions of affirmative action pedagogy since one encourages the voicing of hostilities so they can be critically examined while the other fosters a space for the "unheard to be heard" (p. 7).

Boler's ideas here are intriguing, although ultimately not convincing. What makes this book a pleasure to read are the engaging responses that develop and criticize Boler's main argument. The book's format reflects Boler's idealized vision of a democratic dialogue, as many of the authors speak to other essays in the collection. Furthermore, each writer actively challenges some aspect of affirmative action pedagogy and suggests new ways to envision strategies for teaching social justice. To take just one example, a number of authors here contest Boler's central claim that fostering democratic dialogue in a classroom is a desirable goal for liberatory pedagogy. The most convincing challenge to the ideal of democratic dialogue is made by Alison Jones, a professor in New Zealand concerned with empowering minority Maori and Pacific students in majority white classrooms. She describes an experiment in which she separated Maori students from their white colleagues in order to cultivate a private space for critical discussion about discrimination. She discovered that while the Maori students found the experience empowering, the white students responded with suspicion and outright hostility at being excluded. The white students informed Jones they wanted to "share" in the experiences of their minority friends. Jones reflects, "Curiously perhaps, white students' anger at the loss of this 'sharing' was not evident when all the students were together, even though the Maori and Pacific students tended not to share their differences in experiences with their white peers in the mixed classroom" (p. 62). She found that white students had a powerful desire to learn in a mixed classroom, but that they had no ability to reflect critically on the significant silences found there. Not only does Jones argue that democratic dialogue as envisioned by scholars like Boler is a "dominant group fantasy or romance about access to a unity with the other" (p. 62), she makes the further point that forcing minority students to share their opinions and experiences with racism in the classroom can serve as an unintended form of colonialist

violence. Jones desires a more cautious approach to democratic dialogue. Instead of requiring minority students to speak out in class, Jones suggests teaching majority students to learn to listen for what may be unfamiliar forms of communication from their minority classmates.

Taken as a whole, the essays in the collection offer no single answer to professors committed to challenging their students' deeply engrained prejudices. Instead, as Nicholas C. Burbules discusses in his useful introductory chapter, these essays are intended to provoke new ways of thinking about how to combat bigotry through college teaching. Fighting racism and homophobia in the classroom requires a deep level of commitment by the educator, including a willingness to actively disempower or inflict pain on certain students. If some professors view this price as ultimately too steep, the writers here will convince many that the cost of avoiding issues of power and domination is more than we can bear.

Despite the authors' intense scrutiny of affirmative action pedagogy, some answers will doubtless remain in readers' minds. For example, none of the scholars consider what happens when minority students themselves voice ideas that resonate with dominant racist or sexist discourse. The writers here assume that minority students are, by definition, politically and socially sophisticated enough to challenge dominant ideology. Yet, my own experience teaching affirmative action policies has revealed that some minority students are adamantly opposed to affirmative action in college admissions, which they repeatedly refer to as "reverse racism." Instead, it is often white students who articulate a thoughtful critique of antiaffirmative action, successfully challenging the views of their nonwhite classmates. This example also suggests that it may not be as easy as the authors here assume for teachers to visibly identify "minority" and "majority" students in a large and diverse classroom and to know if they are necessarily silencing or empowering the right individuals.

Finally, it would be helpful to contextualize the range of antiracist pedagogies presented here in a broader historical context. Since the Second World War, educators and social activists have launched programs like intercultural and multicultural education designed to reduce student prejudice and promote tolerance. A major component of the intercultural movement in the 1940s, for example, contended that students could only learn to understand one another by working and talking together. Some even offered explicit lessons on the nature of racial and cultural identity, which frankly addressed questions of prejudice and discrimination (Banks, 1996; McGee Banks, 2005). How should we consider these earlier attempts to foster dialogue in the classroom? What new problems did they create that current modes of "democratic dialogue" must contend with? How does the history of antiracist teaching offer its own lessons on strategies to promote social justice in schools?

Democratic Dialogue in Education makes a vital contribution to the literature in antiracist teaching and the philosophy of education by interrogating concepts like democratic dialogue, silence, and speaking that many academics take for granted. By reconsidering the implication of these everyday teaching practices, the authors suggest exciting new strategies to fight racism and discrimination in critically engaged college classrooms.

References

Banks, James A. (Ed.). (1996). *Multicultural education, transformative knowledge, and action: Historical and contemporary perspectives*. New York: Teachers College Press.

McGee Banks, Cherry A. (2005). *Improving multicultural education: Lessons for the intergroup education movement*. New York: Teachers College Press.

ZOE BURKHOLDER is a doctoral candidate in the history of education program at New York University's Steinhardt School of Education, where she also teaches in the department of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Professions. She is completing work on her dissertation Teaching Race, Learning Culture: Racial Discourse in American Public Schools, 1900–1954.

Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line. David L. Kirp. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2004. ISBN: 0674016343, 328 pp.

SIMON MARGINSON, *Monash University, Australia*

David Kirp has written a fine book on higher education. Perhaps it tells us more about universities than any other book currently offered. *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line* is also easily and immensely readable, written in Kirp's trademark style, which is a superior magazine prose—at home with ideas, good at posing difficult questions, stopping just short of aphorisms, informed less by abstractions than by sharp and systematic observations with plenty of colour. As a public policy specialist located in a major research university, Kirp has a fine eye for power and the foibles of celebrity presidents and professors. It is journalism in depth and with conscience—an exemplary medium for one kind of contribution to public debate. Kirp and his collaborators (several chapters are jointly authored) have interviewed many of the players and been informed by more. He knows his history; and where he uses statistics, which is not very often, he does so effectively. And he is grappling with an important issue, perhaps *the* educational problem. Higher education is reinventing itself. Competitive pressures have

intensified, and money exercises an unparalleled power. Public goods are fading. In many institutions, the educational process is just a means to the real ends—status and profit. What price the liberal curriculum, the knowledge "commons" and social equity in this dystopian landscape, in which the public good is reduced to nothing more than the sum of each person's (or each university's) self-interest in the competition game? Can the market genie be pushed back into the university bottle or at least placed under control? Will the "soul" of the university survive?

Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line does not cover everything. There's not much on community colleges, or access and diversity, despite Kirp's interest in the public good; or on the larger legislative politics of higher education; or on its contribution to national culture and the global realm. As is the case with 98% of American texts on higher education, foreign scholars will search in vain for awareness of the profound effects of American universities in other countries. More fundamentally, the book is not theorized; and so it lacks the tools to dig deeply into the political, social, and cultural foundations. The book lacks critical thinking in the deeper sense, such as imagining a different kind of higher education (rather than just a return to tradition, which is Kirp's first reflex) and thus providing a strategic alternative. There are no answers here. The end of the book restates the same dilemmas that shape the beginning. This is a limitation. Perhaps the book exemplifies the weaknesses as well as the strengths of a certain kind of public intellectualism. In responding to the manner in which a one-dimensional conservatism is constraining the public space, *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line* does not assert a counter-certainty. Instead it asserts the virtues of openness and pluralism. But openness and pluralism are important values, and so is maximizing audience reach. Kirp has eschewed normative closure because in this book he has chosen to democratize the problem of the universities, rather than to solve it.

Kirp's chosen method is the case study, and he has selected an effective set of cases that together take us across most of the key sites and issues. At a cracking pace *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line* passes through one institution, or group of institutions, after another, punctuated by wry observations. The lively opening chapter explains how status positioning and enrolment management now set university mission and priorities. Needs-based aid shrinks. Merit aid grows. The purpose of institutional strategy making is not the old public goal of improving access, but the private goal of intensifying the scarcity of places so as to drive up status. Kirp knows that status is the true coin of the university realm, at least in the top half of the institutions. He contrasts makeovers at the University of Chicago and New York University, Dickinson College, and the New York Law School. He works through the dog-eat-dog logic of "every tub on its own bottom" business management at Universities of Southern California and Michigan.

He paints a stunning and salutary picture of the one-way deal that constitutes the privatization of the Darden Business School at the University of Virginia, which has fissured Mr Jefferson's "academical village."

Five chapters focus on aspects of information and communication technologies in education and training. Kirp has no illusions about the potential of online programs to replace face-to-face programs—it is the latter that students want. But at the same time he is aware that technology is changing what bricks and mortar universities do, and also that the education/technology intersection sustains many of the moves to the market. There is a sympathetic discussion of the differing initiatives of Fathom at Columbia, and the Open Courseware project at MIT. MIT was almost the only university that understood that course materials are a public good. The technology of reproduction alone ensures they are nonexcludable. In the economic as distinct from the legal sense, the relevant private goods are not course materials but the teaching itself, the experience of university, and the status of the degree. By attaching its name to the dissemination of its courseware as public goods, MIT was able to build the "symbolic capital" of its degree and its research. This was worth the $100 million spent on Open Courseware. Most other universities tried to make money offering online course materials, attached to low-intensive (not interactive) teaching and the attenuated degree status of an online qualification, and they charged a price. They tried to make serious commercial money distributing public goods. It is not surprising all the big e-U's collapsed. Kirp also probes with a sense of regret the failure of the British Open University, a high-quality distance education provider brought down by other kinds of problems: slow accreditation, shallow pockets—the British could invest only $20 million, and "too much Queen and cricket" (pp. 198–199) in the course materials for an insular national market uninterested in foreign providers. He looks at a consortium of classics departments using online technologies to create a new public. The chapter on collaboration between tech companies and Berkeley researchers shows that commercialization doesn't always lead to closure. The study of IT certification at Cisco and Microsoft and the provider competition among public universities, community colleges, and for-profits, is a microcosm of the sector.

The final case study is a for-profit, but rather than the obvious candidate, Phoenix, it's De Vry University. Here Kirp describes a for-profit that is often like a public provider: Fifty percent of teaching is by full-time staff, a third of students are in general education programs rather than the "practical arts," and De Vry graduates more African Americans and Hispanics than any other university. No doubt if De Vry had a liberal arts program, *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line* would praise it louder. There is a hint here of the desire to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. It is almost as if Kirp wants to reconcile market forces with the traditional university; as

if the dichotomy he opened at the heart of the book can and should be closed. At times Kirp seems to be quite uncertain. There is ambiguity in what he sees and what he wants and in his understanding of the agency that is responsible for reshaping the values of our universities (governments? market automata? capitalism? globalization? university presidents? human nature?). The Introduction (p. 7) talks of "schools that have learned how to combine the best of both worlds, the academic commons and the marketplace, and thus becoming successful and principled competitors." It contrasts these schools with a different sort, those that have struck "Faustian" bargains, sacrificing the academic commons to the market. It is almost as if university strategy is a free choice, and any wise executive leader worth her or his salt will achieve a happy American compromise.

Kirp often focuses on institutional leaders. He admires entrepreneurial leaders—presidents that have built the *US News and World Report* performance of their colleges, despite the flaws he identifies in the *USNWR* process and the many downsides of the positional war. Again, the characteristic ambivalence about market forces shows through. And while he is collegial in his expectations *within* the universities, he is more sanguine about the role of competition *between* them, which he sees as unstoppable—a key concession (p. 32). Like many people who have earned their success in universities, Kirp has a love-hate relationship with the "higher education bazaar."

This raises the question of what is under threat, amid the gathering storm of "market forces." Kirp moves between different understandings of the public good. The final page of the book talks about the development of citizens, social mobility, the spread of knowledge, social cohesion, and economic development. Familiar stuff, though hard to make real, but it figures little in the book. More precise, and much more central to *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line*, is the reference to "the belief in a community of scholars and not a confederacy of self-seekers; in the idea of openness and not ownership; in a professor as a pursuer of truth and not an entrepreneur; in the student as an acolyte whose preferences are to be formed, not a consumer whose preferences are to be satisfied"; in short, in "the enduring values of a liberal education" (pp. 7, 259). This is where Kirp's heart is. It leads to penetrating insights into the curriculum, epistemological conflict (there is a marvellous account of philosophy wars at Chicago), and the critiques of free choice and dumbing down in undergraduate education. It is an attractive ideal and might be feasible under some conditions, but the implications for Kirp's argument are unclear. It is not immediately apparent that three decades of decline in the proportion of undergraduates in liberal programs, from 50 to 25%, can be simply put down to commercialization or the status market or that this is widely seen as a matter of public interest. Here Kirp skates over troubling questions of social elitism and cultural hegemony. There are more chapters to be written.

All of this suggests that *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line* should be not the end but the beginning of discussion. Like Barbara Tuchman, David Kirp has held up the mirror to an age. Like Tuchman he is encyclopaedic in his coverage; and like Tuchman, the verve of the writing and clarity of observation ensure that his work will have lasting value. In his sensibilities, in his ambivalence, in his day-to-day skills, and in his strategic irresolution, pulled this way and that by academic tradition and market forces, Kirp is representative of the higher education sector itself. But universities worried about the future cannot afford to adopt an "it's-all-in-the-balance" irresolution.

If the universities wait for the dice to fall, there is every chance that they (especially the public universities) will fall along with the dice. They need to reshape the game. Above all, universities need to collaborate with each other to escape their version of the prisoner's dilemma—they must loosen the ever more vice-like grip of the status competition among them. That "winner-take-all" status competition is pitched against democratic objectives and accountability; it is leading to ever greater wastage as universities try to outspend each other on prestige, building investments in faculty and facilities; and it is withering public support for public goods in higher education.

SIMON MARGINSON is Professor of Education at Monash University, Australia, and Director of the Monash Centre for Research in International Education.

College Knowledge: What It Really Takes for Students to Succeed and What We Can Do to Get Them Ready. David T. Conley. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. 2004. ISBN: 0787973971, 350 pp.

ANDREA SILVA MCMANUS, *New England Culinary Institute*

David Conley delivers an overdue and insightful book to help high schools prepare students for college. The book offers a starting point for concrete action for improving the transition to college level learning. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students at the secondary level will find *College Knowledge* a tool box of information and a road map to ensure students have the skills and knowledge they need in English, mathematics, natural sciences, second languages, social sciences, and the arts. Each chapter contains questions to ask and suggested actions high schools can employ to develop what Conley terms *"intellectually coherent programs of study."*

College Knowledge should be required reading for all secondary education majors and graduate students who will work with high school students

preparing for college. Officials responsible for high school reform in State Departments of Education will also find *College Knowledge* valuable. Conley accurately describes the cross system collaboration needed and the steps high schools can take to develop educational systems that get more students *college ready* versus *college eligible*.

Conley asserts *college eligible* means students meet entrance requirements to enter postsecondary education based on the state university system. Being *college ready* means students are ready for college level academics. Conley is especially insightful about the needs of first-generation college students and the challenges they will face. Conley does the best job I've seen of explaining how to mobilize the high expectations for all explicit in the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which is no small feat.

Conley divides the book into three distinct and sensible parts. Part one examines current college admission systems and illustrates how to align the high school curriculum to ensure that students will be *college ready*. His overview of the history of secondary and postsecondary education helps the reader understand how admission systems developed and how secondary curriculum developed to meet admissions demands, not necessarily to create intellectually coherent programs of study.

College Knowledge reaches beyond the rhetoric of preparing students for postsecondary success, including dual enrollment, early college high schools, increasing Advanced Placement courses, implementing the International Baccalaureate curriculum, strengthening the senior year, and teaching senior seminars designed to model the demand and rigor of the first year college experience.

Conley uses three narrative examples of students, Alicia, Derrick, and Teresa, bringing to life the human cost of not being adequately prepared for college. Conley shows us through the narratives of these students just what is at stake for each of them. Part two shifts to the college experience and what students can expect to face academically during the first year. He provides benchmarks for the reading, writing and higher-level critical thinking skills required of students. He also addresses the fact that students will receive straightforward critiques of their work, perhaps for the first time. Part three is a useful review of Knowledge and Skills and University Success (KSUS) resulting from Conley's three-year study of what actually happens in high school as students prepare for college-level work. Appendix A offers a checklist for college readiness.

As a student affairs professional, a teacher and an administrator, I would have liked to see more about how students can prepare for the "student life" aspects of higher education including balancing the demands of social and academic life and understanding when and where to seek help for personal or academic problems. Though this was not the focus of the present book, this addition would strengthen an already strong book.

ANDREA SILVA MCMANUS is Chair of Dual Enrollment programs at the New England Culinary Institute, in Montpelier, Vermont. She is also an adjunct faculty member at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont, teaching ethics courses. She served as a consultant for the Vermont Department of Education providing early and crucial leadership to Vermont's high school reform efforts including guiding the development of Vermont's vision for high school reform, High Schools on the Move. In that effort, she served as the State Coordinator for the High Schools That Work school improvement model of the Southern Regional Education Board.