(HOW) CAN TEACHING DISRUPT RACISM AND OPPRESSION?

Deborah Loewenberg Ball
College of William and Mary • Hauben Distinguished Lecture
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@deborah_ball

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

TeachingWorks
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
“Education as the practice of freedom ... denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world.”

(Freire, p. 81)
WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT TEACHING?

1. Teaching is powerful.
TEACHING EFFECTS

**COMPOUND EFFECTS**

- Teacher sequence can affect student achievement by up to 50 percentile points after only three years.
- Low achieving students have the most to gain from an effective teacher.
- The top quintile of teachers facilitate appropriate to excellent gains for students of all achievement levels.

**VARIATION IN TEACHER QUALITY**

- The most important in-school factor affecting student learning is the teacher.
- There is wide variation in effectiveness among teachers.

Wright, Horn, & Sanders (1997)

**DISCIPLINE**

- Latinx, Black, and Native/Indigenous students are punished more often and more harshly than other groups.
- Black girls are disproportionately subjected to exclusionary discipline practices.
- Students with disabilities are punished more often and more harshly than other groups.
- Discipline disparities for Black students, boys, and students with disabilities are observed as early as pre-K.

Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera (2010)
Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin (2011)
Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Daresbourg (2011)
Morris (2016)
Noltemeyer & Moloughlin (2010)

**LONG-TERM IMPACT**

- Children who do not read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out.
- Workers with a bachelor’s degree or more earned almost twice as much as workers with only a high school diploma.

Fiester (2013)
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WHAT MORE DO WE KNOW ABOUT TEACHING?

2. Teaching involves enormous discretion.

3. How that discretion is exercised can either reproduce oppression and inequity—or it can disrupt it.
Teaching is constrained by policies, curriculum, testing regimes.

Teaching is highly idiosyncratic and individual.

Lipsky (1980), Shulman (1983)
THE PARADOX OF CONSTRAINT AND DISCRETION IN TEACHING

CONSTRAINTS CAN:
- Support efforts to disrupt inequity.
- Restrict teachers’ professional freedom through standardization.
- Reproduce racism and other forms of oppression.
- Impede efforts to make schools responsive, contextual, culturally relevant.

DISCRETION CAN:
- Make possible teachers’ efforts to teach in contextually sensitive and culturally responsive ways.
- Enable teachers to connect school to the world.
- Enable racism and other forms of oppression to flow into schools and schools.

(e.g., Aguirre, Celédon-Pattichis, Civil, Dewey, Gutiérrez, Ladson-Bilings, Paris, Walker, Winn)

12 November 1, 2018
Teacher

Who would like to try to explain what you think the answer is? And show us your reasoning by coming up to the board?

Student

Okay, Anyone?

Other children

Playing with hair

Laying on arms

Teacher

When someone's presenting at the board, what should you be doing?

Student

Looking at them.

Teacher

Looking at that person.

Any other...

You want me to write it?

Teacher

You're trying to make what you think the number is and explain how you figured it out.

Teacher

Listen closely and see what you think about her reasoning and her answer. (Student writes 10 by the orange one.)

Teacher

I put one seventh because there's 1.

Teacher

Did she say one seventh?

Any other...

Same as Teacher 1.

Teacher

Before you agree or disagree, I want you to ask questions if there's something you don't understand about what she did. No agreeing and disagreeing. Just, if you can do it right now is ask anyone questions. Who has a question for her?

Teacher

Okay, Tom, what's your question for her?

Dante

You did not.

Teacher

Why did? (laughs at another student who says something to her from across the room)

Dante

Go ahead, it's your turn.

You did not.

Why did you pick one-seventh?

Teacher

You did not.

Who is correct? (laughs at another student who says something to her from across the room)

Teacher

Let's listen to her answer now. That was a very good question.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Talk</th>
<th>Disciplinary space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teacher   | Who would like to try to explain what you think the answer is? And show us your reasoning by coming up to the board? | 1. eliciting when to begin to direct the discussion  
2. eliciting what to do to sustain discussion  
3. framing the expectation for participating  
4. making of what is "sustaining the board" entails |
| Teacher   | Okay. Anyone?                                                       | 5. sustaining a solution to problem  
6. eliciting whether to comment  
7. eliciting whether to comment |
| Student 1 | Playing with her hair                                               | 8. eliciting whether to comment  
9. eliciting whether to comment |
| Student 2 | Laying on arms                                                       | 10. taking up an individual student's question  
11. guiding discourse |
| Student 3 | Looking at them.                                                     | 12. taking up an individual student's question  
13. negotiating the task for the other students |
| Student 4 | Looking at that person                                              | 14. negotiating the task for the other students |
| Student 5 | Um huh?                                                             | 15. responding to student |
| Student 6 | You want me to write it?                                            | 16. responding to student |
| Student 7 | You're trying to mark what you think this number is and explain how you figured it out | 17. responding to student |
| Student 8 | Listen closely and see what you think about her reasoning and her answer. (Joi@i writes 1/6 by the orange one). | 18. responding to student |
| Student 9 | I just one-seventh because there's                                | 19. responding to student |
| Student 10| Still the way one-seventh?                                          | 20. responding to student |
| Student 11| Sorry to Tend head... (continue to slate) Because there's seven equal parts, two, one; two, three, four, five, six, and seven. (Joi@i writes 1/6 by the orange one). | 21. responding to student |
| Student 12| Before you agree or disagree, I want you to ask questions of there's something you don't understand about what she did. No agreeing and disagreeing. Just: All you can do right now is ask answer questions. Who has a question for her? | 22. responding to student |
| Student 13| Okay. Tom, what's your question for her?                           | 23. responding to student |
| Student 14| You did right!                                                      | 24. responding to student |
| Student 15| Why did? (dreams of another student who says something to her from across the room) | 25. responding to student |
| Student 16| Go ahead, it's your turn.                                           | 26. responding to student |
| Student 17| Why did you pick one-seventh?                                      | 27. responding to student |
| Student 18| You did right!                                                      | 28. responding to student |
| Student 19| Left to listen to her answer now. That was a very good question.    | 29. responding to student |
| Student 20|                                                                   | 30. responding to student |

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TEACHING IS DENSE WITH “DISCRETIONARY SPACES”
WHAT REGULARLY FILLS THE DISCRETIONARY SPACES IN TEACHING?

1. Teachers’ experiences in a society filled with racism and oppression.
2. Normalized practices in schools that institutionalize dominant values and habits.

Lortie (1975), Banks, Grant and Koskela, Moll
Anyon (1981), Heath, Martin, Tuck
Ball (2018)
How do macro-structures play out in the micro-moments of Black and Brown children’s experiences in classrooms?

Gholson & Wilkes, 2016
What number does the orange arrow point to? Explain how you figured it out.

0 1 2
LAKEYA

What number does the orange arrow point to?

\[ \frac{1}{2} \]

Explain how you know: because there are equal parts and you are pointing to the second one so it's \( \frac{1}{2} \).

JAMARI

What number does the orange arrow point to?

\[ \frac{5}{2}, \frac{3}{2}, \frac{1}{2}, \frac{1}{2} \]

Explain how you know: first I thought it was 5 because the zero messed me up.

MARIANA

What number does the orange arrow point to?

\[ \frac{1}{2} \]

Explain how you know: how I know its zero is that it's a interval from one to one there was 2 line between 0 and 1.

LARRY

What number does the orange arrow point to?

\[ \frac{1}{2} \]

Explain how you know: I count it by 1 and keep going.

Write a complete sentence with one goal for yourself for our math class today. Give an example of what it looks like to do this really well.

Learn more about the number line.
ANIYAH AND TONI
VIDEO: ANIYAH AND TONI

This video and additional supporting materials are available online here.
DISCRETIONARY SPACES IN JUST THESE FEW SECONDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Talk</th>
<th>Discretionary space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Who would like to try to explain what you think the answer is? And show us your reasoning by coming up to the board?</td>
<td>1. Deciding when to open whole-group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And you know, it might not be right. That's okay because we're learning something new. Would like someone to come up and sort of be the teacher and explain how you are thinking about it. Would like to try that this morning.</td>
<td>2. Deciding what to do to launch discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Framing the expectation for presenting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Framing of what it 'coming to the board' entails</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tami</td>
<td>Okay, Anyah?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Playing with hair</td>
<td>6. Deciding whether to comment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Laying on arms</td>
<td>7. Deciding whether to comment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>When someone's presenting at the board, what should you be doing?</td>
<td>8. Setting tasks for what to do when a student is presenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Looking at them.</td>
<td>9. Responding to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in</td>
<td></td>
<td>10. Taking up an individual student question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td>11. Clarifying task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Listen closely and see what you think about her reasoning and her answer. (Anyah writes it on the orange line.)</td>
<td>12. Setting task for the other students</td>
</tr>
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<td>Anyah</td>
<td>You want me to write it?</td>
<td>13. Responding to the student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>14. Setting task for responding to student explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tami</td>
<td>Did she say one-seventh?</td>
<td>15. Responding to student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyah</td>
<td>(tells to Tami) &quot;Yeah, (continues to clap) Because there's seven equal parts, like one, two, three, four, five, six, and then seven. (Uses her fingers to count the parts on the number line.)</td>
<td>16. Responding to student speaking across room</td>
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<td>17. Responding to student laughing</td>
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<td>Tami</td>
<td>Okay, Tami, what's your question for her?</td>
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<td>Peeta</td>
<td>You did tell</td>
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<td>Early listen to her answer now. What was a very good question.</td>
<td>23. Setting tasks for class</td>
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</tbody>
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DISCRETIONARY SPACES IN JUST THESE FEW SECONDS

25 November 1, 2018

[Image of a classroom scene with a student raising their hand]

[Diagram showing interaction between a teacher and a student named Toni]

Toni: Did she say one-seventh?

Toni: Why did- (laughs at another student who says something to her from across the room)

Toni: Why did you pick one-seventh?
## DISCRETIONARY SPACES IN JUST THESE FEW SECONDS

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<td>Toni</td>
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<td>9. Selecting whether to comment</td>
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<td>10. Responding to students</td>
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<td>13. Selecting task for the other students</td>
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VIDEO: RE-VIEW AND RE-LISTEN TO THESE DISCRETIONARY SPACES

These videos and additional supporting materials are available online here.
Toni is asking a question of Aniyah.

Toni is laughing and playing with her hair.

Toni and Aniyah are Black girls, who are positioned with different statuses in the classroom, have different physical embodiments, and perform their meanings and understandings of their Black-girlness in different ways.

What to do next?
WHAT TO DO NEXT IN DISCRETIONARY SPACE #19?

1. “Toni, when you’re ready to participate appropriately by not playing with your hair and laughing, and have a question to ask, I will come back to you.”

2. “You need to be a better listener, Toni. Aniyah already explained why she picked one-seventh. Who else has a real question for Aniyah?”

3. “What do others think?”
WHAT DOES EACH OF THESE DIFFERENT EXERCISES OF DISCRETION DO?

POSSIBLE NEXT MOVES

1. “Toni, when you’re ready to participate appropriately by not playing with your hair and laughing, and have a question to ask, I will come back to you.”

2. “You need to be a better listener, Toni. Aniyah already explained why she picked one-seventh. Who else has a real question for Aniyah?”

3. “What do others think?”

POSSIBLE RESULTS

1. Toni is publicly excluded from the discussion.

2. Toni is judged to not be listening, her question is judged as not good, and she is excluded from the discussion.

3. Toni is excluded and her mathematical point is sidelined.

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WHAT DO THESE THREE DIFFERENT TEACHING MOVES DO TO TONI?

- Her contributions to the class are not positioned as appropriate or valuable.
- Her participation and mathematical attentiveness are made invisible.
- She is seen as being a distraction, mocking Aniyah, and as playing with her hair.
- These combine to eclipse her humanity.
LOOKING AT THE MICRO THROUGH THE MACRO: BLACK GIRLS’ RATES OF SUSPENSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black girls</th>
<th>White girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of enrollment</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of in-school suspensions</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of single suspensions</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of multiple suspensions</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Epstein, Blake, & González (2017)

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BLACK GIRLS MORE LIKELY TO BE DISCIPLINED FOR SUBJECTIVE INFRACTIONS

For minor violations (dress code violations, inappropriate cell phone use, loitering) 2X
For disobedience 2.5X
For disruptive behavior 3X
For bullying/harassment 3X

Epstein, Blake, & González (2017)

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WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO DISRUPT THE PATTERNS THROUGH WHICH BLACK GIRLS ARE MARGINALIZED?

- Seeing Aniyah’s solution as mathematically robust and Toni’s question as key to the class’s work
- Taking as axiomatic the brilliance of Black children, and thus Toni and Aniyah


Knowing and using mathematics in teaching (MKT)
Interpreting Toni as asking a mathematical question that she means
TONI AND HER CONTRIBUTIONS

- Listens closely to a classmate's presentation
- Uses norm of not beginning with agreeing/disagreeing
- Uses the definition for a fraction to ask how Aniyah decided on 7 parts
- Asks a mathematical question that is crucial for the collective work
WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO DISRUPT THE PATTERNS THROUGH WHICH A BLACK GIRL IS MARGINALIZED?

- Seeing Toni’s question as key to the class’s work
- Taking as axiomatic the brilliance of Black children, and thus Toni and Aniyah
- . . . AND having something different to **DO**

VIDEO: ANIYAH AND TONI

Okay, Toni, what's your question for her?

This video and additional supporting materials are available online here.
USING DISCRETION TO DELIBERATELY DISRUPT THE PATTERNS THROUGH WHICH BLACK GIRLS ARE MARGINALIZED

COUNTERING THE PATTERN

- Acknowledge publicly the importance of Toni’s question.

POSSIBLE RESULT

- Toni is trusted, seen, and recognized for her contribution to the mathematical work:
  - The mathematical precision of her question
  - Asking Aniyah a question instead of disagreeing.
ANIYAH
- Identified the "whole" as 0 to 1 on the number line

TONI
- Modeled at the board a complete explanation of how to understand and identify a fraction on the line

THE OTHER CHILDREN
- Developed a depth of understanding of fractions as numbers on the line and how to explain them
- Saw Black girls’ brilliance
We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the **fierce urgency of now**. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late.

Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter—but beautiful—struggle for a new world.

April 4, 1967
SO, WHAT ABOUT TEACHER EDUCATION?

4. It’s necessary. Managing the personal and the professional in practice is not natural. It is most likely to reproduce oppression.

5. Teacher education can be a force to shape the just exercise of professional discretion—or it can reproduce normalized practice.
HOW DO WE GET THERE?

6. The work to make teacher education a force for justice is collective work of our profession, across contexts and settings. This, too, is not the norm:

- *What* to work on and support beginning teachers to learn and to learn to DO
- *How*: Our own pedagogy—the teaching *of* teaching
THE IMPERATIVE THAT TEACHING (AND TEACHER EDUCATION) BE A FORCE FOR JUSTICE

1. Teaching is powerful.
2. Teaching involves enormous discretion.
3. How that discretion is exercised can either reproduce oppression and inequity—or it can disrupt it.
4. Teacher education is necessary. Managing the personal and the professional in practice is not natural. It is most likely to reproduce oppression.
5. Teacher education can be a force to shape the just exercise of professional discretion—or it can reproduce normalized practice.
6. The work to make teacher education a force for justice is collective work of our profession, across contexts and settings. This, too, is not the norm.
VIDEO: BRANDON
“Teaching is a revolutionary act.”

Dr. Marcelle Haddix

Reaching for the possibilities and the power must be our collective work.
THANK YOU!

dball@umich.edu

Slides will be available on my website

https://deborahloewenbergball.com/

(“Google” Deborah Ball)
CREDITS

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Image on slide 40:
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