

## Article

# Creating Spaces for Intersubjectivity: A Sustainable Vision for Democratic Citizenship Education

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**Abstract:** Responding to the multiculturalist critiques of deliberative democratic education, Amy Gutmann and Sigal Ben-Porath suggested a more inclusive version of deliberative democratic education that emphasizes toleration, public recognition, and mutual respect. Despite its benefits and possibilities, however, their concept of democratic education fails to embrace poststructuralist ideas regarding democratic education. In the pursuit of a sustainable vision for democratic citizenship education, this study sought to conceptualize hybrid spaces wherein an ontology of plurality is woven into Gutmann and Ben-Porath's idea of deliberative democratic education. By proposing an alternative way to integrate poststructuralist ideas such as intersubjective accounts of self-identity and human agency into the current practice of deliberative democratic education, the authors seek to promote continued dialogue on the purposes and possibilities of education for a more sustainable and democratic society.

**Keywords:** deliberative democracy; democratic citizenship education; intersubjectivity; human agency; sustainability



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## 1. Introduction

Every society has its own idea of how to live together, which is why citizenship education is necessary. Therefore, citizenship education is always related to regime type [1] and is thereby local and contentious [2]. For most of the 20th century, liberal democracy was regarded as a universal aspiration throughout United States and many European countries. Liberal educators taught democratic citizenship with an emphasis on knowledge (e.g., being informed about national political and juridical systems, governments, and the history of democratic institutions and practices) and reason (e.g., evidence-based critical thinking).

Since the late 20th century, however, the dominant version of democracy has been disputed, with some advocating for a liberal and deliberative democracy. Inspired by US pragmatists Dewey and Mead and the German pragmatist Habermas, deliberative democrats insist that a government is legitimate only when the decision-making process is open to public deliberation based on mutual respect and inclusive conditions of participation, in addition to free and fair elections [2–4]. Accordingly, democratic citizenship education in a liberal and deliberative democratic society emphasizes not only equipping students with knowledge and reason but also preparing students for participation in civil society with knowledge and skills for deliberation.

After Dewey [5] initiated the debate in *Democracy and Education*, the concepts of deliberative democracy expanded to the extent that deliberative communication was considered a central form of communication in classroom activities, curriculum decision-making, and educational policy development. Deliberative democratic education has also been one of the most highly advocated versions of democratic education in research circles, especially in English-speaking countries [6]. Yet deliberative democratic education is by no

means free from critique. Critical multiculturalists and pedagogues argue that deliberation might be repressive in itself, since language and communication are always shaped by relations between culture and power [7].

Responding to the critique of deliberative democratic education, Gutmann and Ben-Porath [8] suggested a more integrative version of deliberative democratic education: they incorporated toleration and recognition—two different approaches to diversity within multicultural societies—into the idea of mutual respect. However, from the standpoint of critical multiculturalists and poststructuralists, this integrative model is still discriminatory and repressive because of its ontological exclusivity. In a similar vein, agonistic democrats—influenced by Jacques Derrida’s poststructuralism in addition to Dewey’s pragmatism and cultural pluralism—argue for an ontology of plurality [6]. The agonistic democrats also criticize the consensus-oriented communication that underlies Gutmann and Ben-Porath’s [8] idea of deliberative democratic education.

Based on the assumption that a sustainable vision of democratic education seeks to foster not only epistemological but ontological pluralism, this article explores alternative ways to incorporate poststructuralist ideas regarding an ontology of plurality into the current model of deliberative democratic education. Here, the term ‘sustainable’ or ‘sustaining’ requires that democratic education be more than relevant to diverse democratic societies and communities: it requires that educators support students in sustaining the ontological stance of their communities/societies as well as provide access to the dominant version of democratic education [9]. In this regard, we attempted to conceptualize hybrid spaces wherein intersubjective accounts of self-identity and human agency are woven into Gutmann and Ben-Porath’s idea of deliberative democratic education, centering on toleration, recognition, and mutual respect.

We begin by analyzing critical responses to Gutmann and Ben-Porath’s [8] idea of democratic education, wherein the authors emphasize toleration (the principle of liberal/deliberative democracy such as “agreeing to disagree”), recognition (the principle of critical/multicultural democracy such as “being aware of and equalizing asymmetrical power relations among those from different cultural groups”), and mutual respect. We then evaluate the implications and limitations of using their idea of democratic education in light of a sustainable vision for democratic education. In the third section, we examine the intersubjective grounds of self-identity and human agency as a conceptual tool for complementing the current version of deliberative democratic education. In the fourth section, we suggest an alternative approach within which these intersubjective accounts are woven into the practice of deliberative democratic education. Finally, we conclude that the newly suggested version of democratic education, which admits an ontology of plurality, will engage young people in more inclusive, relevant, and intellectually desirable experiences of learning and enhance the sustainability of democratic education.

## 2. Gutmann and Ben-Porath’s ‘Democratic Education’: Implications and Critiques

Responding to the critiques of deliberative democratic education, Gutmann and Ben-Porath [8] suggested a new version of democratic education wherein they integrated key principles of deliberative democracy with those of critical multiculturalism by using the notions of toleration, public recognition, and mutual respect. According to Gutmann and Ben-Porath, ‘toleration’, which they define as to ‘agree to disagree about the conceptions of good life’ [8] (p. 7), represents the aspiration of liberal and deliberative democrats. In the more specific context of deliberation, they suggest that democratic education engage with cultural differences through practices whereby students and teachers ‘address controversial issues in a mutually respectful way’ (p. 5) and ‘argue and appreciate, understand and criticize, persuade and collectively decide in a way that is mutually respectable even if not universally acceptable’ (p. 5).

Recognition, meanwhile, represents the aspirations of critical multicultural democrats, such as appreciating cultural differences and being conscious of culture and power. Based on the concept of recognition, Gutmann and Ben-Porath [8] suggested the notion of ‘public

recognition' as a conceptual tool for integrating key principles of deliberative democracy (e.g., toleration and mutual respect) with those of critical multicultural discourses (e.g., cultural recognition). According to Gutmann and Ben-Porath, the concept of public recognition is distinct from the general meaning of (cultural) recognition in that the former stresses the contribution of different groups to society.

In Gutmann and Ben-Porath's model of democratic education [8], toleration and public recognition are two different approaches to the fact that democracy is multicultural, and thereby any conception of democracy needs to defend these responses. They describe in more detail how the two responses are integrated into the context of teaching and learning by providing an example of history education (see [8], p. 6). Gutmann and Ben-Porath [8] then explain that mutual respect 'encompasses both public recognition and toleration of differences' (p. 6). It accommodates the possibility for education policies and practices to promote public recognition among different groups (e.g., integrating historical experiences, narratives, and contributions of diverse groups into the mainstream school curriculum) and cultivate toleration (e.g., teaching students the right to agree to disagree about different beliefs and practices), which can foster mutual respect in a democratic society. The notion of mutual respect, which involves toleration and public recognition of different groups, is a core principle of Gutmann and Ben Porath's [8] model of democratic education, which neither subordinates deliberative democrats' and critical multiculturalists' claims nor repudiates their interconnectedness.

Gutmann and Ben-Porath [8] convincingly argue that both toleration and public recognition could and should be integrated into the K-12 school system by teaching students the value of toleration and including the histories, narratives, and cultures of diverse groups in the core curriculum. Supported by many scholars in the field of multicultural education (e.g., [10,11]), the integrative approach that encompasses the best aspects of toleration and public recognition is important to curriculum reform for multicultural democratic education. Above all, Gutmann and Ben-Porath's [10] advocacy for content integration—which focuses on the contribution of those diverse groups to the development of the nation-state—as a policy of recognition is in line with the claim that a multicultural curriculum is not just about value or status of minoritized groups but appeals to 'scientific standards for accurate and true representation' [12] (p. 138). This contribution-focused approach can be an important starting place for making mainstream citizenship education more inclusive, multicultural, and intellectually desirable.

Although the implications of integrating the contrasting claims are quite powerful both in educational policies and practices, Gutmann and Ben-Porath fail to fully embrace poststructuralist assumptions and ideas due to their rigid adherence to the liberal notion of individual autonomy. Despite their potential, Gutmann and Ben-Porath's [8] notions of toleration, public recognition, and mutual respect fail to address various perspectives on self-identity and human agency that have been broadly discussed in the post-Nietzsche era. In other words, there is little room for discussing poststructuralist ideas, such as 'a dialogical notion of self-consciousness, an inter-subjectivist model of self-identity, and a social course for ethical recognition' [13] (p. 49), within Gutmann and Ben-Porath's analysis. In addition, the liberal view of public recognition, which privileges the Other's contribution to the development of society over the development of one's self-consciousness and self-identity, may be in question: it barely reflects the notion of heteronomy or an intersubjective account of human agency and thereby may preempt ethical recognition of the Other, regarding the Other as instrumental to society [13,14].

The ontological exclusivity that underlies Gutmann and Ben-Porath's idea of democratic education prevents their model from being relevant and responsive to diverse scholars and educators in the field, and it may threaten the sustainability of democratic education. More specifically, the liberal notion of individual autonomy [15] that holds up Gutmann and Ben-Porath's [8] concepts of toleration, recognition, and mutual respect may lead to their model of democratic education bearing a false impression that the Others deserve to be recognized only when they contribute to a society. Are their suggestions for democratic

education still valid even when the liberal conception of the a priori individual comes into question? Is their model of democratic education still relevant even when more educators and researchers adopt post-structural arguments for an ontology of plurality [16,17]? Is the model sustainable even when those influenced by Derridean poststructuralism argue that ‘democracy cannot be defined in relation to any predetermined account’? [18] (p. 677). Is the concept of public recognition inclusive or comprehensive enough to accommodate appreciation for the value of the Others and their Otherness? Several political philosophers have formulated compelling critiques of the liberal notion of individual autonomy. In the remainder of this article, we will explore poststructuralist ideas with focus on some of the tensions within theories of autonomy and human agency that impact different approaches to democratic education.

### 3. Intersubjective Accounts of Human Agency: A Poststructuralist Proposal

The atomistic model of the self has formed the basis of contemporary democratic education, but more recently it has been challenged by many structuralists and poststructuralists for its excessive reliance on an unforced condition and a self-reflective disposition of individuals. In the structuralist or poststructuralist view, autonomy is an inadequate condition of existence, often requiring a less demanding condition, heteronomy. According to Swaine [14], a heteronomous person usually has a *nomos* from which she/he draws inferences and receives guidelines for living, as observed in many religious people. A various theory of autonomy/heteronomy also has many parallels with those of human agency [13]. Although those theories suggested by structuralists or poststructuralists have different foci, they commonly point out the inadequacy of liberal notions of the individual as a conscious and purposive agent.

Kögler [13] further explicates that the irreducible, non-objectifiable, and creative-reflexive dimension of the Other’s perspective works for constructing the self, which is presented to be ‘the social ground of one’s capacity for self-determination’ (p.49). Such an intersubjective account of human agency is in line with a neo-Meadian understanding of self-consciousness, wherein the (conscious) self cannot exist without taking the perspective of the Other, which means the very activity of taking the Other’s perspective is a necessary condition for self-consciousness.

What is noteworthy in Kögler’s [13] argument is that self-identity as a socially situated but agent-driven phenomenon is revealed to be ontologically and ethically indebted to the Other. The reality that human agency involves a fundamental relation to the Other demonstrates that the self is ontologically beholden to the other’s existence. Kögler [13] convincingly argues that this ontological debt signifies an ethical debt towards the Other.

In the intersubjective account of human agency, the other is a dialogically encountered subject that cannot be reduced to an interpretive scheme. The irreducible other, therefore, establishes my very existence and consciousness as a self, capable of engaging in reflexive interpretation and mutual dialogue. In this respect, the Other deserves to be recognized not only for their contribution to society’s well-being but also for their presence per se that is constituent of one’s self-development.

Another rationale for why the Other ought to be recognized comes from their ongoing contribution to reconstructing norms and signs: they create a third space [19] wherein the same norms and signs are appropriated, translated, re-historicized, re-signified, and read anew through the Other’s negotiatory acts, increasing the degree of hybridity in a multicultural society. Against an ethics based on autonomy, Judith Butler also insisted in an interview with Thomas Dumm that ‘Whatever it means to have or pursue a moral mode of being in the world, it will not be something that is exclusively ‘mine’ and so will have to be a mode of being that is bound up with others with all the difficulty and promise that implies’ [20] (p. 102). Her emphasis on ‘a moral mode of being that is bound up with others’ implies that its construction, deconstruction, and/or reconstruction are/is largely dependent upon others, which means it is socially and culturally constructed in the form of norms.

What distinguishes Butler's [21] project from those of critical pedagogues is an account of how power is reproduced by reiteration per se in the form of norms rather than a particular group of people. In her book *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler investigates twofold feature of subjection, which provides important insight into power: the idea that no oppression of any kind operates its power by itself, but rather requires the participation of the victim (e.g., the victim's fear, anxiety, imagination, reflection, interpretation, and so on). She discusses the vulnerability of one's self by illuminating the self-deconstructive path of Georg, a young man from Frantz Kafka's story, *The Judgement*. The story vividly describes how Georg, a victim of a guilt-by-association system, actively participates in the process in which the very system gains and exercises a substantive power [22].

The reality that norms are not set in stone, and that their power requires the participation of victim(s), therefore, indicates that any Others are practically the ones who often provide norms with an impetus for change. As Culbertson [22] asserts, 'our revision of norms often depends on our relationship with others' (p. 458). This intersubjective account of power, norms, and agency is also reflected in postcolonial scholarship. As discussed earlier, one example that has sparked academic attention is the concept of third space suggested by Homi Bhabha [19]. He sought to explain how one negotiates tensions between hegemonic and marginal cultures and how the negotiatory act contributes to creating a space in which 'originals' or 'essences' of the dominant culture are disrupted and re-signified. He named this hybrid space 'third space' and further specified: "Third Space . . . constitutes discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized, and read anew" [19] (p. 55).

In this respect, Others are to be recognized not only for their tangible contribution to the development of society but also for their contribution to the (re)construction of norms, which is sometimes difficult to recognize [23].

These intersubjective accounts are precisely why we need to rethink the atomistic account of human agency, which provides the ontological and ethical foundation for Gutmann and Ben-Porath's analysis. The liberalist view and the atomistic account of human agency should by no means be replaced with the poststructuralist view that supports the intersubjective account of human agency (e.g., [13]) and the discursive conditions of norms and power (e.g., [19,21,22]). Rather, we argue that public education needs to be open to an ontology of plurality and encourage the creation of free spaces in which diverse ontological stances engage with one another. We advocate for democratic education policies and practices that are more responsive and relevant to diverse democratic societies and communities. To be conscious of various discourses in relation to the conditions necessary for self-awareness, self-identity, and self-development is essential to understanding the nature of Other and determining what it means to recognize the Other. Particularly, Kögler's [13] notion of 'ontological and ethical debt to Others' implies that Gutmann and Ben-Porath's [8] concept of public recognition would need to be expanded to the extent that the Others are recognized not only for their visible contribution to the development of society but also for their contribution to (re)constructing our self-identity as well as norms and power that are bound up with us.

Ethical theories based on the principle of intersubjectivity in the development of self-awareness and self-identity or that of agency in the (re)construction of norms and power provide a concrete means of envisioning inherent Otherness. In the following section, we describe the underlying assumptions of intersubjectivity and co-agency and propose implementations of them in the field of education. The section also details how the intersubjective account of human agency and the concept of ethico-ontological debt [13] can be translated into the practice of democratic education.

#### 4. Creating Spaces for Intersubjectivity: A Sustainable Vision for Democratic Education

What if Gutmann and Ben-Porath's [8] analysis and recommendations were reconstructed with poststructuralist ideas about the intersubjective dynamics of human agency



and the ontology of plurality? What does a new democratic education—one in which the atomistic view and the intersubjective view of human agency complement one another—look like?

Gutmann and Ben-Porath [8] describe toleration as disapproving or disliking but nevertheless abstaining from suppressing it based on the principle of ‘agreeing to disagree’ (p. 7) in the specific context of deliberation. Hate speech is an example of how the liberalist model of democratic education might perceive and respond to the act of intolerance. In the liberalist/atomistic understanding of human agency, the focus is on the immorality of hate speech and those who utter the speech. Accordingly, democratic education in this view may aim to teach students to keep themselves from uttering hate speech and engage them to call for deleting, banning, and/or preventing the act of hate speech or punishing the actor of such speech [24].

On the other hand, in the poststructuralist/intersubjective view, the act of hate speech cannot be powered by itself or by those who utter such speech only; rather, it gains or loses its power when those are combined with the victim who participates in (re)signifying the speech with her/his subjectivity [13]. Whether the act of hate speech can exercise power, therefore, is partly dependent upon the victim who has capacity to (re)signify and even nullify the speech. That is, the necessary conditions for such an act to gain impetus involve both the actor and the victim. In this respect, it hardly works to label the actor (speaker) as an agent and the victim as a target. Democratic education in this view goes beyond the liberal/atomistic approach by cultivating awareness that the victim is not merely a target but an agent (or a co-agent) who can deconstruct, (re)construct, and (re)signify the power of such speech.

As a compatible principle with toleration, public recognition is defined by Gutmann and Ben-Porath [8] as respect for the contributions of different groups to a country’s history. This idea of public recognition promotes respect for marginalized groups [25]. Yet it fails to explain the ethical and ontological contribution that those marginalized groups make with their existence and agency as intersubjective Others. As Gutmann and Ben-Porath [8] indicate, reorganizing the public-school curriculum with narratives of diverse groups might lead the public to build a positive attitude toward those minorities to some degree. Despite the potentiality, however, this kind of public recognition is just a part of the practice of recognition. Furthermore, this approach is not free from controversy surrounding the commodification or instrumentalization of human beings.

In the intersubjective view, in contrast, Others as constituents of one’s self are indispensable to the awareness of self and the development of self-identity [14]. Democratic education based on inherent Otherness and co-agency goes beyond teaching the contributions of diverse groups to a country’s history: it engages students to cultivate the moral potential to orient their attitude on students’ own basis [13]. For instance, upper-level K-12 students such as high school students may be able to self-reflect while considering an intersubjective account of human agency (e.g., how their self-interpreting process is socially situated and mediated by others’ perspectives). Intersubjectivity-based democratic education also transcends the instrumental view of humans embedded in the concept of public recognition and extends one’s understanding of self. The awareness that we are ontologically and ethnically indebted to the Other and Otherness enables a more elaborated and richer understanding of self, and it will lead students to gain a deeper understanding of recognition within the framework of mutuality.

What then indicates the successful implementation of sustainable democratic education? We argue that the sustainability of democratic education depends upon the creation of hybrid spaces wherein diverse discourses of democratic education, including poststructuralist perspectives, (re)signify and (re)construct themselves [23]. In this respect, we propose three recommendations for democratic education practices. First, educators should help students realize that although others might be ‘political adversaries’ over a controversial public issue or conflict, this does not mean that they are ‘moral enemies’ [26] (p. 269). At the same time, students should be provided with rich and frequent opportunities to

understand that they are in many aspects ontologically and ethnically indebted to the Other and Otherness [13]. Second, educators should craft spaces wherein students feel safe to disagree with others and to dissent [6]. In particular, the creation of spaces for dissent expands the radius of deliberative democratic education by compensating for the limitations of consensus-oriented decision making that cannot be overcome by Gutmann and Ben-Porath's notion of toleration. Finally, schools and classrooms, similar to other public spheres, would need to be considered spaces where the meanings of democracy and democratic society are consistently deconstructed and reconstructed by students and teachers. As Snir [17] suggests, teachers and students would be able to articulate themselves with others, inside and outside school walls, to imagine and create new hegemonies. When these proposed educational practices complement rather than supplant deliberative democratic education, students will have the opportunity to do more relevant and true-to-life learning in which diverse perspectives on human and society are interwoven.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In the beginning of this article, we examined Gutmann and Ben-Porath's [8] idea of democratic education. By delving into their notions of toleration, public recognition, and mutual respect, we concluded that although their remedy for democratic education provides a powerful tool for integrating deliberative democratic education with key principles of critical multiculturalism, it does not adequately embrace poststructuralist ideas regarding democratic education, particularly due to its atomistic views of individuals and human agency. In the pursuit of a more sustainable democratic education, we sought to conceptualize hybrid spaces wherein poststructuralist ideas about democratic education, including an ontology of plurality, are integrated into the current model of deliberative democratic education. More specifically, we analyzed how the intersubjective accounts of human agency—such as inherent Otherness (*I-of-the-other*) and ethico-ontological debt to the Other [13], the fluidity of norms and power [21], and cultural hybridity and third space [19]—can inform the cultivation of self-consciousness and self-identity, which led us to redefine the concepts of toleration and recognition from a different angle. Finally, we translated both perspectives into the practice of democratic education. This study is an invitation to seek for an alternative way to integrate diverse discourses of democratic education and in a broader sense promote continued dialogue on the purposes and possibilities of education for a sustainable and democratic society.

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