

LISTENING FOR THE ECHOES:

RADICAL LISTENING AS EDUCATOR-ACTIVIST PRAXIS

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Abstract

Using a postformal approach to co/autoethnography, the authors examine narrative reflections of their own teaching practice to draw forth implications for radical listening as educator-activist praxis. By using the controlling metaphor of noise, the authors illuminate the challenges of listening radically amidst the “white noise” of hegemony. The authors demonstrate radical listening as echoes of an imperfect praxis of being and becoming that must be revisited repeatedly over time.

Keywords: radical listening, co/autoethnography, postformalism, educator activism, praxis

INTRODUCTION

Kimberly: Tricia asked me to collaborate on this paper after I fell short trying to meet my first dissertation benchmark. I have taught high school English for 15-years, so when I went into Tricia's office, I was licking my wounds and trying to figure out how to rewrite a paper that would "pass". On that day Tricia was already listening radically—The first thing she did was tell me not to change my style, thus losing my voice. The second thing was to invite me to coauthor this piece.

Tricia: When I read Kimberly's paper, I was blown away by her powerful writing style that captured the reality of urban education as she experienced it. She clearly listened to her students. It was vivid, and I could envision myself in the school with her. It pained me that the paper hadn't "passed" because it was more a matter of not meeting the particular expectations of this very traditional academic benchmark rather than a matter of Kimberly's capabilities as a scholar. I wanted to hear more of what Kimberly had to say, to guide her in staying true to herself, and to allow other readers to hear her too, so I invited her to coauthor this piece.

As educators, we (Tricia and Kimberly) both recognize the importance of being educator-activists, to stand up for and with our students embracing the diversity of who we all are—a diversity that includes race, gender, native language, and culture, as well as the diversity of experiences that form each of us as an individual. Tricia is currently a professor in a doctoral program for in-service urban educators, and Kimberly, a National Board Certified Teacher is one of her doctoral students. Like Freire (1999/2007), we hold the position that teaching is a political act whether we work against oppressive status quo discourse or we ignore it, thereby allowing it to go unchallenged and unchanged. Through our teaching, we seek to open up dialogue in which we and others can engage in processes of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation leading to self/other transformation, key to changing the larger social discourse and material conditions that both shape and are shaped by the daily actions of people (ourselves included). Freire (1999/2007) charges us that one cannot dialogue without “a profound love” not just for others, but for the world itself (p.70). This is challenging when one forgets to love while distracted by “noise” that prevents us from

listening to a student (dress code violations, belligerent tones, or, more insidiously, benchmarks and tests) and can also prevent us from remembering the tenet of love. Dangerous too is only *doing* something about it. Freire (1999/2007) reminds us that words must be accompanied by action, but action alone, “makes dialogue impossible” (p. 69). Action must always be accompanied by reflection, and vice versa. This action-reflection duality is central to Freire’s notion of praxis, that is, one’s ability to enact his or her philosophy* in his or her practice in the classroom and beyond (Winchell & Kress, 2013).

In this article, we are inspired by the works of Paulo Freire, Joe Kincheloe and other critical scholars, mindfully developing a praxis of radical listening that is fueled by radical love. Guided by postformalism** as described by Thomas and Kincheloe (2006) and taking a co/autoethnographic approach (Coia & Taylor, 2009), we analyze reflections of our teaching practice and draw forth implications regarding the potential and challenges of enacting radical listening as activism in teaching praxis. In doing so, our aim is to tease apart the internal and external noise that limits our scope of “what is” to open a conversation about what it means to be educators who are also radically listening, radically loving, activists working in the interest of students and teachers in urban schools. By utilizing “noise” as our controlling metaphor, we unpack the ways in which we attempt to embody a radical listening stance in our daily practice. Specifically, we examine “echoes,” moments from our teaching, when we attempted to radically listen to students’ vocalizations, visual cues, and silences. Our analysis reveals

*For Freire (1999/2007), a person’s philosophy is a reflection of his or her social commitments, what he or she values, supports, stands for or against. While he wrote about praxis within a context of social transformation via education, praxis in general is not necessarily transformative. In this article, we use the word “philosophy” to represent the theory behind the actions we take as teachers, which, for us, reflect our commitments to creating a more just world through education.

**Kincheloe (2005) defines postformal thinking as: “emerging from postformalism, postformal thinking moves beyond Jean Piaget’s notion of formal thinking as the highest order of human thinking. Challenging Cartesian-Newtonian forms of cognition, postformal thinking assumes that there is more to phenomena than initially seems and works to uncover the hidden forces that shape both the phenomena we encounter and the observer’s frames of reference” (pp. 116-117).

radical listening as an imperfect praxis of historicity in which the present is always also a reflection of the past and a trajectory toward a possible future. Praxis is very much like sound projected across an expanse. The echoes that return are reverberations of the original events*, and they remind us to continually attempt to improve upon our practice over time.

RADICALLY LISTENING IN AND BEYOND THE WHITE NOISE OF “WHAT IS”

According to Kincheloe (1999), taking a postformal approach in our work means that we assume knowledge is situated and partial, and being attuned to our intuition and embodied forms of knowing is crucial to the development of new awarenesses about ourselves, others and the world (i.e., conscientization). Kress (2012) explains postformalism as a kaleidoscopic way of approaching social inquiry that encourages inquirers to look through multiple lenses and from various angles in order to see the world anew. It encourages nontraditional and “irreverent” ways of seeing, with metaphor as a particularly useful and appropriate tool in postformal analyses. Thomas and Kincheloe (2006) encourage the use of metaphor for developing insights about social phenomena and one’s lived experience. As Kincheloe (in Thomas & Kincheloe, 2006) explains, an appropriate metaphor is close enough to the original event or concept in question to be familiar and recognizable, but it is different enough from the object of investigation such that it can afford new ways of seeing and, consequently, new ways of knowing and being. In the postformal tradition, this difference creates what Kincheloe (in Thomas & Kincheloe, 2006) calls a “sonic boom” of awareness. Positioning the metaphor up against the object in question helps make the familiar strange so that we can better question the “normalcy” of our day-to-day realities as educators. Accordingly, we have selected the metaphor of “noise” as a means of framing and

*This contributes to our metaphor by allowing us to acknowledge that echoes can be but are not necessarily made by people. Echoes can be generated by the voice of a single person or voices of multiple people, but also by actions committed by people (i.e., cutting down a tree, hitting a structure with a hammer), or by an event not put in motion by people but which has an impact on people nonetheless (i.e., an earthquake or an avalanche).

analyzing how we understand what it means to radically listen and the challenges of accomplishing this ideal type of praxis.

Noise is a particularly powerful metaphor for educators operating with a social justice lens. First, sound can be loud. One can easily be tempted to follow the dominant path and show students how to navigate it. Objections are easily drowned out by the familiar song on nearly everyone's lips, or obfuscated by sirens warning of the dangers of different thinking. In this scenario, the cacophony of noise is undesirable, and it is easy to go back to the familiar and safe. But unfamiliar sound can also become desirable—the high pitched clarinet in a klezmer band, the intonations of a two-stringed Chinese erhu, or the scale of a hand plucked kalimba. These sounds might be relegated to the exotic or rare, or even deemed cacophonous. But a musician will learn the unfamiliar, distant, and even discordant, incorporating it into his own music. This dialogue of instrumentation is much like the dialogic approach we continually strive to enact. Instead of simply hearing students, colleagues, and others with whom we come in contact on a daily basis, we are challenged to listen so that we may engage in the type of dialogue that Freire (1999/2007) proposes, that honors all participants in concert. Still, we recognize that dialogue may not emerge so easily or harmoniously, nor should it. If all is harmonious, nothing will change because we will be comfortable with the way things are. If all is discordant, still nothing will change; too much conflict or disagreement can create impasses. Conscientization necessitates a combination of harmony and discord characteristic of ongoing struggle; therefore, both cacophony and harmony are simultaneously important within a radical listening praxis imbued with radical love.

As urban educators, immersed in the hyperreality (Kincheloe, 2001) of the 21st century*, we are constantly faced with “noise” that both helps and hinders our developing praxis. We cannot help but hear the oppressive, unloving discourses that frame the daily lives of teachers and students in urban schools. Yet we also recognize, not all “noise” is bad. There is also noise that is harmonious with our world-views and nudges us forward toward new perspectives: political victories via policy reform, daily encounters with colleagues and students in our workplaces, conversations with family and friends. Some noise is internal to us, reflecting our cultural upbringings and internalized ways of knowing and being: our hopes and fears for the future and the joy and pain of our lived experiences. Some noise comes from external sources: coworkers and administrators, students and parents, policy makers and popular news. Some noises jar us awake, disturbing our concentration, with their reverberation of racist, classist, androcentric, heteronormative and ableist messages embedded in U.S. culture and society throughout history (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). These are noises that normalize the criminalization of youth of color via zero tolerance policies and high surveillance (Kress, 2011). They feed into dehumanizing acts in schools, such as the marginalization of queer and gender non-conforming youth (Blackburn & McCready, 2009) and students with disabilities (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004). They justify and

*For Kincheloe (2001), hyperreality is a term that describes the contemporary moment of media saturation via broadcast, mass distribution, and online spaces that alter the way that information and knowledge travel, are created, and processed. Everything is sped up (i.e., hyper) and simultaneously shortened and elongated. As information travels through sound bytes, viral videos, TED talks, etc., knowledge can be produced and consumed like fast food. At the same time, hyperreality also affords avenues for depth, longevity and extensive reach through the Internet via social networking sites, hyperlinks, multi media sources of information, and multiple media outlets. Educators experience hyperreality in multiple ways (as do all people), but within the classroom and the teacher/student/world relationships they navigate, teachers must grapple with their own consumption and production of knowledge as well as that of their students within the multiple and overlapping spaces of hyperreality. In some ways, hyperreality affords vast opportunities for conscientization because information is so easily and quickly accessed. At the same time, the speed and ease requires an intensely critical eye toward media literacy in order to generate probing questions about where, how, why, and by whom information is generated and to what end.

reinforce the destruction of diverse peoples' ways of knowing (Spring, 2009). Whether unsettling or inspiring, all of these noises are echoes of the growing pains of humanity that may make it difficult for us to hear voices that might further develop our praxis.

Giroux (2012) notes the popular noise that encourages the disposability of youth, particularly youth of color. This type of noise, which we would consider cacophony, sparks anger and frustration. But as radical listeners, we need to consider the transformative potential of all noise we encounter in concert with our own worldviews, even noise that is agitating. In *Pedagogy of Indignation*, Freire (2004) links the struggle for social change to his love for the world and his anger at the inhumane conditions under which so many people live. To him, love and anger (like harmony and discord) not only can coexist, but they can also inform each other and feed each other through processes of conscientization and praxis as people come to see themselves as historical beings and agents of change. Fueled by indignation and a profound respect for humanity, he asserts his vision of praxis as a responsibility to act toward challenging oppressive discourse and changing the material conditions of people's lives (our own and others'). In his words,

I must not, therefore, cross my arms fatalistically before such destitution, thus relieving myself of my responsibility to challenge a cynical and 'tepid' discourse about the impossibility of changing, because reality is what it is. This discourse in favor of settling, which exalts imposed silence and which results in the immobility of the silenced, the discourse of praise to adaptation, taken to mean fate or destiny, is one that negates the humanization we cannot escape responsibility for. (Freire, 2004, p. 59)

We interpret Freire's use of the word "discourse" to refer not only to words that are spoken but to the coordinating structures of power that regulate and limit human potential. Discourse is the co-construction of the spoken and unspoken rules and norms that guide our thoughts and actions. In U.S. society, hegemonic discourses reflect a long and grotesque history of colonial genocide, white supremacy, androcentrism, heteronormativity and ablism. Similar to white noise in the background, too often this goes unnoticed, and we cannot change

that which we have no words to express, that which lies outside our consciousness as historical possibility. When we accept these types of oppressive discourses (and the resulting physical conditions of oppression) as normal and inevitable and choose instead to adapt and leave these structures and conditions unchallenged, we collude in the maintenance of oppression, which is decidedly antithetical to the fierce and loving indignation that Freire sees as necessary for humanization and social change.

When teachers and students are immersed in the white noise of “what is,” conscientization may seem an impossibility. Indeed, transformation may not be seen as an existential need at all. If the world cannot or need not be changed, then adaptation to oppression is the most logical response. By dialoguing with others, however, conscientization becomes possible and desirable, as new ways of knowing emerge and allow for the “what is” to become just one possible way of being among many. As educator-activists, fostering dialogue via radical listening is essential if our classroom practice (and daily praxis) is to facilitate conscientization within ourselves and our students. Radical listening implies that listening is an intentional act undertaken as part of the process of self/world transformation. As Freire (1981) explains,

Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen. It is predominantly critical, loving, humble, communicative, and therefore a positive stance. The man who has made a radical option does not deny another man’s right to choose, nor does he try to impose his own choice. He can discuss their respective positions. (p. 10)

As we set out on the path of being (and becoming) radically listening educator-activists, it is necessary that we examine our own ways of knowing and being in order to be able to differentiate noise that is reflective of our own ways of knowing from noise that comes from social structures, institutions, and other people and to be able to identify when and how these noises and ways of knowing interact. This necessarily involves examining our own ontological constructions of self in the world and in relation to others.

Kincheloe (2005) explains, “Critical ontology demands that teachers who research the worlds of students, schools and communities also research themselves. In this context, teachers explore what it means to be human and to negotiate the social and ideological forces that shape their pedagogical consciousness” (p. 58). To accomplish this, we have opted to use a co/autoethnographic approach (Taylor & Coia, 2006), which allows us to examine our own practice, separately and together, within the context of the larger social, cultural and political ethos in which we live and work-- what Kincheloe (2001) calls one’s location within the “web of reality”. Autoethnography is particularly appropriate for examining one’s own practice because as Taylor and Coia (2006) explain, teaching is a personal act that is both individual and social. Autoethnography is useful for thinking about ourselves in the social world and the implications this has for larger collective implications about education. As Roth (2005) writes, “Because society exists in and through our membership, what we write about ourselves is also about society collectively. Both individual and collective presuppose one another. Investigating Self, or rather, our actions, gives us access to the ways in which culture is concretely realized” (p. 19). In the sections below, by sharing in the process of autoethnography, or rather, collaboratively crafting co/autoethnography by examining our own reflections about radical listening, we engage in self/other analysis in a dialogic way that is aligned with our goals of being radical listeners. Together we analyze what implications there may be for making sense of radical listening and the role it plays in being educator-activists working in the spirit of radical love.

LISTENING BETWEEN THE LINES AND WITH MORE THAN JUST THE EAR

Tricia:

“He looks like a punk,” my student said bluntly as she leaned over her desk and motioned toward the front of the room where I had projected a video of a youth of color who was wearing a black hat cocked to the side while working on a project in a science classroom.

At first, the remark was met with heavy silence. Then my colleague, who had presented to the class her research about utilizing cogenera-

*tive dialogue** with urban middle schoolers, responded, “what is it about his appearance that makes you think he looks like a punk?”

“Well, he’s got that hat on, and just the whole way he presents himself. It’s just not appropriate. He looks like a punk,” the student replied.

My colleague, a woman of color, seasoned educator, and researcher, responded gently, “Well, sometimes, when our concern is about helping students to access learning, their attire might not be the most urgent issue to address in the classroom. If asking him to take his hat off creates an issue that gets in the way of teaching and learning, it might be better to let him wear the hat.”

The conversation continued and became emotionally charged. My colleague told the class about how this particular student was from a lower income neighborhood but traveled to an affluent community to attend a better school than the one in his neighborhood. For him, maintaining his identity and connection to his neighborhood through his attire, specifically wearing his hat, helped him to maintain his sense of self in an unfamiliar environment. The students in my class, most of them white females, then engaged in a lively debate about student attire, school disciplinary policies, the purpose of schooling (e.g., career readiness vs. self-expression vs. knowledge acquisition and/or creation, etc.), and respect for authority and expected decorum. My colleague and I attempted to redirect their attention to the power dynamics at play in enforcing policies of “proper” attire in schools (and potentially other venues in life).

*Cogenerative dialogues describe a teaching/research practice that is used to “cogenerate” new culture in classrooms. It has been used especially in urban schools. According to Roth and Tobin (2004), “the goals and roles of participants in cogenerative dialogues [are] to emphasize the cogeneration of collective agreements on what is happening, contradictions that occur, and ways in which the contradictions can be removed—either by eliminating them or increasing their occurrence” (para. 6).

Kimberly:

I was grading the first set of writing assignments for the new school year.

“I identify as gender non-conforming.”

First the noise enters—I think... “I know all about this. I went to a lecture... I’m ahead of the curve.”

But it’s not about me. I need to listen.

“In my class... there’s no gender neutral pass”.

No noise, stunned silence. I’m listening.

By the end of the week I changed my passes. I now have a generic bathroom pass, and a generic hallway pass. Other students noticed. One class pressed me. “Why are the passes so big?” “What happened to the old ones?”

About 10-years ago “teachable moments” were all the rage in education. Here I was with one. I told the class about the essay that changed my mind. Something remarkable happened. They changed their minds too. My awkwardly fashioned homemade passes made sense.

But the comment about the pass stuck with me... bothered me... for almost two days. I try to not be insensitive to my students. How had I missed something so simple?

After the above sequences transpired, I returned to the student’s essay. At the end was something I missed. The assignment had asked “who can tell your story?” The student’s response was in the final sentence. One does not have to be gender-non conforming to tell their story, but it is necessary that “they understand it and tell other people how we struggle”.*

In the above narratives, listening, as an exercise in paying attention to words that are spoken, draws our attention to the major players in the dialogues. In Tricia’s narrative, Tricia’s student and colleague/guest lecturer take center stage with Tricia and the remainder of the class as supporting voices. In Kimberly’s narrative, Kimberly’s student and

*“Their” is used as the student-selected neutral pronoun.

Kimberly's inner contemplative voice work in conversation. In both cases, we see that radical listening is about hearing what is said, but it is also about situating the discussion in context, deciphering visual messages, and revisiting listening moments with an ear for transformative potential.

Tricia's example is a conversation that has happened many times in many educational spaces, and it seems almost redundant to rehash it. Most people who have spent time in urban schools would be familiar with the "hat issue;" it is typical for students to not be allowed to wear hats in school. Indeed, when we (Tricia and Kimberly) were discussing this narrative, Kimberly expressed her fatigue with this particular theme. Yet, there is more to what is being said here than the actual words, and there is more to this issue than whether or not youth should be able to wear hats in school. Tricia's student's interpretation of the youth's attire on the video's (i.e., "he looks like a punk") indicates dominant discourse that classifies people as having particular value in society based on their appearance. Similarly, Kimberly's use of gendered hall passes silently ascribed to a gender normative viewpoint, unintentionally alienating at least one student. For urban youth of color (Tricia's example) and gender non-conforming students (Kimberly's example), the policing of their bodies (via their appearance from skin color to hair texture or style to attire) reinforces dominant social schemas that afford white, middle class, and heteronormative privilege and uphold institutional racism, classism and gender bias with schools being a vehicle in this process.

For individual students, this is problematic for a number of reasons. First, students across the spectrum of gender identity need a safe space to be who they are without being expected to or pressured to fit into socially sanctioned norms. But also, they need a place safe from bullying from others in the school community. For educators who seek to be anti-oppression activists in their daily practice, it is important to create spaces where all students are valued, but without listening, we might not know when and how our practices devalue particular students and therefore in what ways our practice might be improved. While Kimberly's crafting of new hall passes might seem at a glance to be a minor gesture, it showed all her students that she was listening

and that she was willing to alter the school structures and practices to be more inclusive of everyone in her classroom. Furthermore, changing the hall passes also created an opening for expanding the dialogue with other students. A private conversation between Kimberly's student and Kimberly's inner contemplative voice became a springboard for a shift in her thinking. Change has not magically come to the entire school, which continues to wrestle with mandated protections of the rights of gender nonconforming students and honoring students who do not want their traditionally gendered spaces compromised. Radical listening *has* allowed Kimberly to move beyond compliance, but this same radical listening makes her sympathetic to students who hold fast to the dominant mindset. It is important to employ listening strategies in order to alter teaching practices and school structures such that students feel respected and recognized as capable learners, for urban youth of color as well. These youths are often subsumed into dominant stereotypes and judgments made about them accordingly, effectively reducing them to caricatures (Kress, 2012) and making it easy to underestimate their academic potential and not listen to them or their concerns. Yet, as Tricia's colleague pointed out, if our objective is teaching and learning, then perhaps attire, should not be our primary occupation in the classroom. And classrooms should be places where issues of appearance or gender do not overshadow this key purpose. In both cases, critical dialogue emerged and opportunities for transformation presented themselves. While it is beyond our knowledge to know precisely the reach these moments had, we can assume that they made a difference, at least for some students.

If we consider that radical listening as praxis also has both individual and collective implications, by situating the discussion in context we can begin deciphering visual messages that provide insights into the ways in which radical listening can contribute to transformation of social institutions like schools. The contexts in these narratives are multiple and overlapping. In Tricia's narrative, the teacher education class in which the dialogue took place, the science class in which the youth on the video wore the hat, and the larger society in general. The teacher education classroom was located in New York City, and the course took place at night, since the students in the class were all ca-

reer changers pursuing their alternative teaching certifications and MA degrees. Nearly all the students in the class were white and female, most from middle class backgrounds. From Tricia's student's location in the "web of reality" (Kincheloe, 2001), wearing a hat in school was inappropriate and whatever the message was that the youth in the video was trying to express was irrelevant. If the goal of the school was to prepare young people to be college and career ready, enforcing the no hat rule and requiring youth to abide by the standards of decorum expected in the middle class (white) culture was a necessary part of their education.

In Kimberly's class, the passes have been the same over a number of years and for multiple classes that travel through her room. Students who openly identify as transgendered or gender nonconforming are rare. Had Kimberly *not* changed the passes, likely only the student in the narrative would have cared, or maybe another student in a few years. Furthermore, the passes were consistent with the bathroom designations in the building, which remain completely gendered spaces. While this standard is slowly shifting in commercial spaces, like their hat-wearing counterparts, these students learn that to "just pick" is easier than trailblazing.

In both cases, by going against dominant culture expectations, the youth made visible the hidden curriculum of school (McLaren, 2015)--young people are not in school simply to learn information, they are there to be assimilated into hegemonic culture, including the norms of dress, submission to authority and use of language, to name a few. The discourse of career and college readiness has become so commonplace that it seems monotone, and the power implications within this discourse easily fade into the background. Meanwhile, other goals of school that are related to socialization of youth continue to play on a loop, to the extent that it seems to simply be the ways things are and should be. For Tricia, her student's labeling of the youth in the video was offensive, but at the same time, as one who strives to radically listen, it is necessary to try to hear where the student was coming from as a person who was shifting careers and understood the demands of a corporate workplace, including expectations around appearance and deference to authority. For Kimberly, it seemed immediately neces-

sary to affirm and accept her student, but it was important to listen for the echoes--first in the essay, and eventually in conversation with the student. A challenge for the teacher who is listening radically is being open to the change happening within herself and not always looking for a change to happen within the students.

LISTENING ACROSS AN EXPANSE

Kimberly:

Angelica was sitting on a bench outside of the front office. Again. It was the second day of the second marking term, and Angelica had already been suspended once this year. As I walked over, not sure of what admonishment I would hand down, she started to talk. "I don't want to get into trouble." She had walked out of class, earnestly upset about her grades, but was still working on how to talk to the teacher in a register that would not result in being disciplined. In the breath before I could reprimand her for being out of class, before I could join the chorus of teachers holding her accountable, she was able to raise her voice. This was not the dissonant voice that was usually Angie. Instead it was an aching, soulful solo, tentatively testing the notes of a new song, a song I might have missed if I had gone with my first reaction. She was desperate to find the notes that would work, a way to maintain her grade, meet the teacher's expectations, but admit that she needed his help when he was absent due to an illness. As I listened, I invited her to listen too... to the song of a new teacher who got sick the same week that grades were due. She quickly acknowledged the dissonance, then shifted her song in search of a way to harmonize the needs of a her teacher, and her desire to improve work completed past the end-of-term-deadlines.

Tricia:

Sometimes, and more often than I would like, I have missed my students' nonverbal cues or I didn't pick up on a muttered phrase from a student in the back of the room. I can't help but think back to the time I missed the misogynistic insult muttered by a male student in the midst of a flurry of lively discussion about the treatment of women in a popular television show. A female student did hear, however, and left the room in a huff and hurry as soon as the class was over. When

*I approached her about it, she was in tears in the ladies room. I also recall the heavy silence of an entire class when two students gave a presentation about children with disabilities. While the class as a group was typically chatty, this time there was no discussion, no questions or comments for the presenters, reaffirming what the one presenter already believed -- disability makes people uncomfortable. That discomfort was palpable that day as the presenters were "othered" by their classmates' silence. Or the time when, early on in my career, an African American student came to me after class and gave me the book *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison as a recommendation for including in my syllabus in the future. It was then I realized the texts on my syllabus were all white and nearly all male. I carried that text with me for years and remember finally reading it in a laundromat the year I moved to Boston for my first tenure track appointment. Sometimes dialogue is loudest when little or nothing is said at all. As a teacher, I need to better train my ear to listen for the narrative of power beneath the surface of that silence and to cue my students into this as well.*

Radical listening implies being intentional about *hearing* and that listening is an ongoing act such that we continue to listen even after what is spoken has faded into the past. In this regard, participating in dialogue involves creating distance between us and our own symphony and, instead, listening for echoes across an expanse. As we listen, we assume an open and humble stance as we stand at the edge of ever-expanding possibility for our developing praxis and for the transformation of self/other and world. By radically listening, we may begin to envision how society might be configured differently and how we might live in this world together in a way that affords more opportunity for all. We cannot fathom what sorts of social and self transformations will be required to achieve social justice in the not too distant future, but by engaging in dialogue in which we actively and intently listen, perhaps we can catalyze this process. From the perspective of a radical listener, the classroom therefore becomes a site of struggle, potential, and incremental change, analogous to what Bakhtin (1982) calls "the inconclusive present", or the world of the novel. By contrast, the epic is the finished, poetic, and accepted past, a grand history that

is unchanging. The novel gives us room to be unfinished. The novel is always evolving (Bakhtin, 1982).

Listening for echoes to inform our current and future practice (and praxis) can be understood as a state of being but also a process of becoming as we recognize that our practice is imperfect and we further commit to be(com)ing educator-activists who practice a radical (i.e. critical) pedagogy in the quest for social justice. To listen radically means becoming increasingly radical over time or engaging in a process of radicalization, which Freire (1981) explains, “involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen. It is predominantly critical, loving, humble, communicative, and therefore a positive stance” (p. 10). It is tempting to give up on a student like Angelica, or to remain furious with the “misogynistic male”. Thus, the very act of loving all students may at first seem radical, but it is remembering to listen to the challenging students--and those who are hurt by those who challenge, that is the radical part. It is also hard to resist being the oppressor--to shut down a comment with which you disagree, to order Angie back to class (again), or to tell students who are made uncomfortable by disability how they ought to feel about and engage with disability. As “conductors” in the classroom, we are in the position to say “my tune is right,” but in the silences of time and space, we can learn to hear differently. Sometimes the silences between echoes afford the opportunity to hear something new. Other times we can hear the reverberations of what was said.

There is an ethereal quality to an echo as sound is altered by the surfaces upon which sound waves bounce, and the amazement that this sound comes from nature rarefies the very cry that first went out. At a camp where Kimberly used to work, if all the campers gathered at the lakeside amphitheater and shouted simultaneously, they could get the echo to bounce seven times. However, if every camper did not immediately silence themselves, the first echo would be lost. It only worked when the head counselor perfectly orchestrated the shout. It was never easy to accomplish those seven echoes. Without the proper conditions you could miss or drown out the sound. Individually and separately, all participants had to learn to control the volume, try to intuit the proper timing, and then be still and listen for the echoes to come. As

educators, when we reflect on our practice, we sometimes impatiently wonder how we can recreate the “perfect” conditions for all possible echoes to come back to us, so that we can come to a point of mastery in our praxis. In Tricia’s narrative, she wonders, “why did I not hear it then? How can I better listen next time?” And yet, she values the reverberation because she still hears those moments today, differently than in the past and different still from how she will hear them tomorrow.

For Kimberly, sometimes the echoes of one student is revived by a new student years after the first voice has been placed aside--with the same yet different sameness we are constantly looking for. Other students, like Angelica, continuously force us to listen and love them as they grow from freshmen to seniors. In reflecting on echoes of our practice, we are reminded of historicity (Lake & Kress, 2013)-- paths to becoming are not linear but spiral outward into the future, back into the past and present, and then forward again into another possible future. Those students from our memory are still in play even though they are not in front of us anymore, but it may take a while for the echoes to even hit us. If we are listening radically we will hear each of them when the sound arrives. And so we wait “patiently impatient” (Freire, 1999/2007) for the echoes, knowing that the student who benefits from these moments may or may not be the students in the original stories. It will make a difference for the next student, not just the one who looks like her but all the students who are different or whom we would like to engage with difference. There is more to the story, so we need to listen for it, whether in the next classroom, the faculty lounge, the professional development activity, or even years later, over the background hum of the laundromat.

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