



A Time to Keep Silence and a Time to Speak

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The authors consider the implications of speaking out and remaining silent in the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. They reflect on the forms of speech available to and expected of educators and educational anthropologists in order to raise questions about whose voices are heard or ignored in the current public discourse. Drawing from their language-focused work alongside Latino immigrant communities, the authors raise questions about when and how to honor and break silences. Los autores consideran las implicaciones de hablar o guardar silencio en la escuela a la elección presidencial estadounidense del 2016. Reflexionan sobre los modos de hablar que los educadores y antropólogos educativos tienen al alcance y los que les exigen otros para preguntar sobre cuáles voces se oyen o se ignoran en el discurso público. Sacando ejemplos de su trabajo junto a comunidades latinas, plantean preguntas sobre cuándo y cómo respetar y romper el silencio. [Immigration; sanctuary; language socialization; silence; Latinos]

A Time to Keep Silence and a Time to Speak

In “Turn! Turn! Turn!,” released in 1962 as the Vietnam War escalated, Pete Seeger exhorted his listeners to reflect on the timeliness of their actions, reminding them of a time to plant and a time to reap, a time to laugh and a time to weep. However, Seeger neglected to include one line from the Biblical passage that inspired his lyrics: “a time to keep silence and a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:7). This verse is worth recovering today: the tension between remaining silent and speaking out endures. This is particularly true after the election of Donald Trump, which has brought a barrage of ill-informed, haphazardly executed, and inhumane policy decisions with accompanying destructive effects for the children and families we seek to serve in our work as educational anthropologists. We take this biblical verse as the title of our essay and reflect upon the implications of this election for our field and our future. What might we contribute—or refrain from contributing—to the discourse and activity surrounding us?

In the days leading up to and following the 2016 election, leading educational anthropologists have spoken out on the impact of political discourse on children and their teachers. We admire Mica Pollock for her *Washington Post* blog post on the damaging effects of “Trump talk” in classrooms around the country where teachers and students experienced a rise in hate speech, bullying, and violence throughout the presidential campaign (Pollock 2016). Pollock and others (e.g., Costello 2016) have called on educators to protect students by taking a stand against hate while simultaneously fostering the possibility of open dialogue among students with differing viewpoints. Our students have asked for our support, as professors and teacher educators, in reconciling the tension between fostering dialogue in K-12 classrooms while also protecting vulnerable student populations from hate and bigotry. We have had to grapple with how best to advise K-12 teachers who want to talk with their students about the impact of the election when knowing that public school teachers’ right to engage in political discussions is, at best, ambiguous in the absence of legal free speech protections within schools. Moreover, there is a palpable unease with confronting these now-unavoidable topics in the classroom: As

one of O'Connor's undergraduate students recently observed during a small-group discussion about multilingualism and globalization, "We're trying to stick to language, but we keep coming back to politics."

In our everyday work with students, colleagues, and collaborators both on and off our university campuses, we hope to develop and model ways of remaining curious and open minded while also staying committed to social justice in this moment of heightened political polarization. By crafting an academic response to the election and the Trump administration, we believe it is essential not to use the election and the administration's policies and rhetoric merely as "intellectual fodder" but to hold on to our ability to "point the finger" (Heyman 1994, 46) when necessary. Moreover, we want to name those people, policies, and practices that concern us so that we can be precise in our critique and purposeful in our response. As Catherine Lugg writes, "In an age of 'alternative facts,' triumphal White Nationalism, and 'official enemies,' truth telling is the foundation for anyone's radical pedagogy" (Lugg, under review).

We, along with many colleagues, have collaborated to write statements aiming to fill conspicuous silences on the part of university administrators, statements that name specific groups of students we are committed to standing beside in the months and years to come. At the same time, Turning Point USA's *Professor Watchlist* has raised fears of censorship and a loss of academic freedom for scholars accused of "advanc[ing] leftist propaganda" (Flaherty 2016). In Arizona within the first two weeks of 2017, legislation known as HB 2120 proposed to ban K-12 schools, universities, and community colleges from offering "courses, classes, events or activities" that "promote . . . social justice" on behalf of particular groups (Arizona 2017). State-level legislation in Iowa (SF 288) and North Carolina (H 39) sought to force public universities to take political party affiliation into account in faculty hiring decisions, in the name of "ideological diversity" but with ideological *cleansing* as its goal (Schmidt 2017). These developments beg three difficult questions: When must we respond quickly, forcefully, and collectively to threats to free speech and academic freedom? Similarly, when and how must we directly challenge policy proposals that threaten our students? When does the moment call for strategic silence and a more cautious approach? Past experiences have taught academics (in O'Connor's state of Arizona, for example) to be wary of showing their hand too soon and inadvertently giving legislators insight into how to rewrite damaging bills in more palatable ways.

As we consider the role of dialogue in schools and universities post-election, it is worth reflecting on the ways in which we and many of our colleagues have spoken out in recent months: drafting and signing open letters (to administrators, students, and others); writing, circulating, and signing petitions; taking part in protests or other public expressions of dissent and advocacy; being involved in shared governance at the university or college level; participating in civic and political organizations; and calling or emailing elected representatives.

As we work toward solidarity with marginalized communities, relevant distinctions in our social positions become salient. For example, while Mangual Figueroa shares racial and linguistic identities with the mixed-status communities that she works alongside, she differs on critical dimensions of citizenship and socio-economic status that have very real material consequences for children and families. These differences—evident in the unique subject positions occupied by speakers, and the distinct material consequences they face for speaking out—are underscored by troubling events such as the March 1, 2017, detention of Daniela Vargas in Jackson, Mississippi. Just minutes after Vargas had spoken at a news conference about the impact of Trump's policies on immigrant families, and her own fears of deportation as an undocumented young adult, she was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers (Hauser 2017). Vargas, a twenty-two year old recipient of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, had a renewal application

pending at the time and was later released from an ICE detention facility. Still, her detention sent a chilling message about the potential effects of undocumented students' speaking truth to power in the current political environment.

To be clear, we cannot compare our situation as U.S.-born professors who hold white- or lighter-skinned privilege (in the case of O'Connor and Mangual Figueroa, respectively) to the vulnerable position of undocumented and DACA-recipient students, or even visa and green card holders. Yet, there is an opening for alliances built upon a newly shared sense of precarity (Clifford 2012), now that our First Amendment rights to speak out may be more tenuous than we thought, in light of the legislative efforts to curtail and police academic speech detailed above. More troubling still, right-wing politicians threaten to repeal the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which grants birthright citizenship and legal equality for those born in the U.S. What started as a fringe movement among far-right members of Congress (e.g., H.R. 140, the Birthright Citizenship Act of 2015, sponsored by Rep. Steve King of Iowa) gained traction in the political mainstream during the race for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination (Tani 2015).

The Fourteenth Amendment was born out of the abolition of slavery in an effort to restore the humanity of formerly enslaved people of African descent living in this country (Mangual Figueroa 2014; Ngai 2007). While the Fourteenth Amendment is unlikely to be repealed (Bump 2015), any threats to this constitutional clause—which forms the basis for key educational decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and *Plyler v. Doe* (1982)—should sound alarms. In the age of Trump, rhetorical efforts to undermine the basis for equal protection under the nation's laws form part of a re-entrenchment of white nationalist ideas about what it means to be American. As such, these calls to repeal constitutional rights for all—even if not actualized in policy—intensify a sense of vulnerability for students whose right to attend American schools, and to belong and speak out within American society, has had to be continually justified and defended.

The intersecting effects of historical oppression on the material realities of racialized groups in this contemporary moment are not lost on us. Daniela Vargas was held in a detention center in Jena, Louisiana, the same city where six black teenagers were incarcerated in 2011 after a physical altercation with white peers in a local school where a white student hung a noose from a tree without reproach. The histories of enslavement, forced migration, and detention are woven through the stories of the Jena 6 and the DREAMers. Threats to the humanity of black and brown people in this country are ongoing and consequential. In this environment, our ability to continue our work—especially the ways we may or may not feel secure in stepping into the silences others have left—cannot be taken for granted.

As educational anthropologists—and as parents, teachers, and activists—we have found an intellectual and political home in the study of language and interaction in Latino communities. We have, in our subfield, a rich tradition of paying attention to what goes unsaid or unheard in classrooms and elsewhere: the social stratification that inheres in stylized, silent displays of emotion (Gilmore 1985) and the powerful impact of teachers' choosing to keep silent and listen to students (Schultz 2003); the ways that classroom routines and expectations can make students appear silent (Philips 1972) and, alternately, the ways that changes to classroom structure and practice can upset stereotypes of "nonverbal" students (McCarty et al. 1991). Students may employ silence deliberately to shield themselves from racial microaggressions or colonizing knowledges (San Pedro 2015a), while others may use silence as a weapon (San Pedro 2015b). Intolerant speech can marginalize the voices of queer students and students of color, a fact to which their silences testify (Woolley 2013).

We know that learning from silence, rather than seeing it merely as the absence of speech, can yield deep insights into our students' worlds. We also know that silence can

serve as a form of resistance for members of historically marginalized groups. Two examples from language socialization research make this clear. First, self-censorship of talk about legal status and talk in regional Spanish varieties can serve as a strategy for resisting criminalization, even at the expense of cultural expression. For the Central American migrants in Lavadenz's (2005) study, "*hablar en silencio* [speaking in silence]" was a way of protecting themselves from deportation while integrating into predominantly Mexican receiving communities in southern California (99). By adopting a variety of regional Mexican Spanish more commonly heard in Los Angeles, these Central American migrants adopted a Latino identity (in this case, second or third generation Mexican-American) in order to hide markers of difference based upon national origin and citizenship status. This is striking because of the intersectional nature of living in the margins. Assimilation to avoid deportation (via silencing) still required migrants to affiliate themselves with a historically marginalized group perceived to have obtained more stability across generations through birthright citizenship in diaspora.

Second, taking a stand doesn't necessarily mean occupying the social or political center in a visible way; it can instead involve seeking "the power that allow[s] practices to continue" in marginal spaces (Baquedano-López 2004, 228). Baquedano-López (2004) found that families and church leaders in one Mexican-heritage community made strategic choices about when speaking out enabled or undermined their power to preserve *doctrina* catechism classes in Spanish in the political context of California's xenophobic anti-immigration policy known as Proposition 187. In this case, the (catechism) director decided not to initiate a public debate regarding the merits of English-only language policy of the church; instead, she resisted these state- and church-level policies by allowing the *doctrina* classes to continue to meet in spite of edicts mandating they be changed into English. Like the migrants in Lavadenz's study, the director made a strategic decision about keeping the Spanish-language *doctrina* classes in the margins in order to ensure their survival.

Drawing on these rich examples of the power of silence, we make the case for the continuing importance of thinking critically about speech and silence during the Trump presidency. We offer two examples of our own from more recent ethnographic research conducted between 2010 and 2014 with youth in public schools in two parts of the country: undocumented Latina girls in a New York City elementary school and Latino high school students in Arizona. In each case, the students constitute a kind of *present absence* in classrooms, not unlike that of the Central American migrants disguising themselves as Spanish speakers of Mexican descent, or the *doctrina* teachers providing Spanish-language instruction behind closed doors. We share these data for three reasons: first, to distinguish between those moments when our silence is called for and those moments when we ought to speak out; second, to signal some of the challenges involved in listening closely in the midst of discursively rich classroom interactions; and third, to engage with a broader and ongoing debate over the sanctuary movement in schools and universities.

In Mangual Figueroa's study of elementary-aged girls' talk about citizenship at home and school, she found that children as young as ten and eleven years of age make strategic decisions about when to disclose or disguise their legal citizenship status (Mangual Figueroa 2017). In school, these choices were informed by students' sense of the risks attending talk about legal status as well as pedagogy and curriculum. As an ethnographer, Mangual Figueroa held privileged information about the focal children—details regarding their immigration status that the students' teachers did not have—that allowed her to *hear silences* related to citizenship to which their teachers were not attuned. Moreover, audio recording students afforded her the luxury of listening to otherwise fleeting moments of classroom talk multiple times to discern the significance of what children said and what they left unspoken.

In this study, Mangual Figueroa found that young undocumented students took risks to display their vulnerable legal status when they could relate their personal experiences to academic content rather than having to single themselves out as members of a particular marginalized group. For example, one undocumented student from Mexico chose to disclose her legal status in academic discourse in her social studies class but remained silent in face-to-face discussions of immigration-related topics during social-emotional learning classes. The students in this study disclosed their legal status during an interdisciplinary unit titled *Resistencia* [Resistance] that spanned several months and focused on social movements from abolition through civil rights into the contemporary immigrants' rights movement. This rigorous curriculum prompted the focal girls to identify with and engage with schooling on their own terms in meaningful ways. It is this very type of teaching and learning that anti-ethnic studies legislation such as Arizona's HB 2281 (2010) has sought to abolish. The students' experiences highlight the irony that well-intended multicultural curricula may put children on the spot and alienate them with expectations to speak about identity in prescribed ways—for example, with the assumption that explicitly declaring one's nationality is necessarily a source of pride and cause for celebration. Undocumented students may experience such prompting to publically declare their identities as risky rather than prideful. On the other hand, they may find freedom of expression when writing in an academic register that does not necessarily require them to speak in "I" statements about their national origin and immigration experiences.

In O'Connor's work with high school students in southern Arizona during the time of SB 1070 (2010–11) (the state's infamous anti-immigrant policing law), he similarly noticed that undocumented students made calculated decisions about where, when, and how to break the silence about their identities (O'Connor 2017). In effect, several students took advantage of "teachable moments"—opportunities that presented themselves unexpectedly in the course of everyday interaction—to refer to aspects of their identities that had previously passed without comment. At times, the students recognized relevant places to bring nationality and immigration status into the conversation on their own terms. Students whose very presence in the U.S. constituted a transgression, legally speaking, transgressed boundaries of what was expected or taken for granted in classroom interaction. For example, some students slipped references to race or immigration status into stretches of talk that did not seem to have anything to do with such issues. In doing so, they went out of their way to trouble the discursive waters at the high school, disrupting or complicating conversations from which race and immigration status were generally absent. At many other times, students chose not to talk about their identities in these terms, despite the fact that the conversation seemingly afforded them opportunities to do so. As in Mangual Figueroa's work, we are left with the difficult question of how to make sense of students' strategic silences, their careful choices to break those silences, and the interactional circumstances that favor the former or the latter.

Both studies argue for the significance of silence in school and also call for educators to learn to listen for students' meaningful decisions to maintain silence or speak out. This has moral and ethical implications for teachers and activists, to be sure, but it also raises methodological questions for researchers who engage deeply with speech and silence in classroom settings. After all, our decisions about when and how to respond—or not—will shape the possibilities for students' continued participation, not to mention the participation of family and community members and our professional colleagues. But *hearing* silence, and understanding its relevance, presents a different challenge than hearing speech, especially in the multiparty interactions that are characteristic of classrooms. When people jump into simultaneous interaction, how can we keep track of what we hear? How do we account for the voices we don't hear from? How can we tell that someone's silence is strategic? What justifies an interpretation of silence as resistance? From the participants'

point of view, does silence help to structure classroom interactions in ways that we—as teachers or researchers—can't hear or recognize? (Readers who are interested in exploring these questions further are encouraged to consult the authors' original studies cited above).

A discussion of silence is also, by implication, a discussion of voice. The voices of the students mentioned above remind us that we cannot assume that we know how to speak for others. The students' eloquent evasions and creative disruptions of the status quo remind us of Richard Ruiz's admonition (1991) to be wary of treating "empowerment as a gift from those in power to those out" (222). Ruiz writes: "Teachers do not empower or disempower anyone" on their own, but "merely create the conditions under which people can *empower themselves*, or not" (223). Ruiz appeals to Freire in portraying the development of critical consciousness as a process of understanding how one's individual voice joins the chorus of voices in a community, sometimes harmonizing, sometimes sounding a dissonant note. But sometimes creating these conditions may mean remaining silent. In a recent conversation with an undocumented youth organizer for the New York State Youth Leadership Council, Mangual Figueroa asked: What could university professors do as allies? The organizer answered thus: keep asking these questions, keep showing up at our events, and we will inform you as we discover what we need most. O'Connor and colleagues in Arizona have had similar experiences with undocumented and international student organizers, who have expressed their desire for space, resources, and supportive allies but have also indicated that we—faculty members—don't necessarily need to be part of every conversation.

As educational anthropologists, our purpose, per the CAE Mission Statement, is to make our scholarship "responsive to oppressed groups" and to bring people together to promote social justice in educational settings. "Living out this mission," the CAE Board declared in its recent call to action, "requires us to speak back to calls for academic neutrality." In asking readers to consider the power of silence, we do not advocate a version of the "professional Ketman" that Czesław Miłosz (1953) skewered in *The Captive Mind*, his classic account of intellectual life in Eastern Europe under Stalinist rule. Miłosz was a poet, not an anthropologist, but his book has been a touchstone for readers struggling with how to live out their academic calling with integrity under oppressive political conditions. While Miłosz was addressing a very different political situation, his challenge struck a chord with us as we endeavored to find a way forward during the first half of 2017. Ketman, a concept Miłosz borrowed from a book about Islam in Persia, refers to the decision to "keep silent about one's true convictions" in order to conceal "heretical" beliefs while outwardly projecting adherence to the social order (1953, 54). The professional version of Ketman is a special case: In oppressive situations, Miłosz wrote, scientists and academics are tempted to retreat into the "academic neutrality" the CAE Board urges us to avoid, pouring themselves into "a disinterested search for truth" (66) in an attempt to weather the political storms raging around them (65). "How little discomfort [this] creates for the rulers," Miłosz observes, in contrast to the unapologetic truth telling (per Lugg) that is needed at such a moment. We share a concern that calls for objectivity enable a status quo that puts us all at risk.

In order to respond appropriately, however, and to get a sense of what is required of us in any given situation, we must listen attentively—not only to students' speech but also to the purposeful silence around it. We must also heed calls from students and youth for us to time our own contributions thoughtfully, as teachers and scholars, and to stay attuned to youth's decisions about when and how to break the silence. Many among us have been involved in discussions about creating sanctuary campuses for vulnerable students, prompting support from some quarters and threats of discipline from others (as in Texas, where Gov. Abbott vowed to cut funding in response). But we might also consider how, and to what extent, we can support students who are trying to find safe spaces for their

practices and lives to continue (Baquedano-López 2004, 228). As university president Michael Olivas recently cautioned, we must be wary of promising sanctuary when we can guarantee no such thing; we should also recognize that attempting to create safe spaces is no substitute for a humane and just immigration policy (Olivas 2016). We have also seen that, even when our institutions support efforts on behalf of undocumented students and DACA recipients, we may be asked to go about this work quietly so as not to attract hostile attention. Whatever we do, we cannot put students at further risk with false promises of security or through actions that increase scrutiny on students who are working to discover for themselves what they need to move forward.

Reflecting on keeping silent and speaking out also surfaces some of the latent contradictions in our personal and professional identities. These contradictions are, to some degree, unique to our states and localities: At a public university in Arizona, O'Connor works in the shadow of a history of legislation curtailing students' and teachers' academic freedom, the near-certainty that state lawmakers will attempt to restrict the scope of teaching and learning even further, and policies that prohibit him from engaging in political activity as part of his employment. The Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) Policy Manual (n.d.) stipulates:

Employees may participate in political activity outside their employment, but shall not allow their interest in a particular party[,] candidate, or political issue to affect the objectivity of their teaching or the performance of their regular university duties.
(ABOR 6-905)

Yet, as is so often the case, policies are shot through with their own contradictions. Later in the same section, the document states that the policy "does not preclude or prevent . . . an employee expressing their personal opinion on a political or policy issue, regardless of whether that opinion is expressed inside or outside the classroom." If that is so, where do we draw the line between personal and political speech? When our professional lives are grounded in collaboration with the very communities Trump has targeted yet framed by policies that expect us to act as disinterested social scientists, where does that leave us?

We find ourselves sobered by the troubling policies and practices we've identified in our federal, state, and local governments, along with the media and the continued rise of the white nationalist movement; but we are also strengthened by the possibilities for pedagogical, political, and interpersonal solidarity that we've described in this essay. As we listen to the voices of those we've named here—Daniela Vargas, the Jena 6, pre-service and practicing teachers, elementary and secondary students in Arizona and New York, our colleagues and friends—we believe it is our responsibility as educational anthropologists to break silences, or respond to students' broken silences (cf. Rampton and Charalambous 2016), by moving our discussion into the contact zone (Pratt 1991). Breaking the silence may not mean using words but may entail standing beside and/or embracing the other as we listen closely to their words. While we cannot definitively answer the questions that we've posed throughout this essay, we invite readers to join us in carefully considering the ripple effects of the moves we make in discourse and our attendant responsibility as teachers and researchers.

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