Abstract

Literature about the significance of cultivating democratic relationships in universities and schools abounds. However, very little has been said about the importance of friendship in engendering democratic relations. In this essay I argue for a complementary view of friendship based on mutuality and love with reference to the seminal ideas of Nancy Sherman and Jacques Derrida. Our view is that human relations ought to be used as pedagogical spaces to nurture forms of friendship which not only encourage mutuality but also love in order to make possible the taking of risks on the part of leaders and their colleagues. And, if leaders and their colleagues act with mutuality and love they would be more favourably positioned in their society to take risks and to sustain democratic relationships.

In this essay we shall show how both Nancy Sherman’s (1997) and Jacques Derrida’s (1997) ideas of friendship can be used to nurture human relations which involve taking risks. Our argument in defence of taking risks through friendships is hopefully a move away from fostering democratic interactions among leaders and colleagues, which could potentially ignore forms of action which involve challenging, undermining and disagreeing with one’s friends.

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education through the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy of 2001 undeniably places the onus on South African public schools to cultivate virtues of democratic citizenship education. This means that schools should teach and engage learners in what it means to engender democracy, social justice, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, ubuntu (human dignity), an open society, accountability (responsibility), the rule of law, respect, and reconciliation – all those virtues connected with the achievement of social change in post-apartheid society. Carter, Harber and Serf (2003) suggest that some values, such as democracy, tolerance and responsibility, grow only with experience of them.
Therefore, schools need to practice what they seek to promote. The schools (universities) must be organised along democratic lines, taking into account that democracy is best learned in a democratic setting in which participation is encouraged, freedom of expression and a sense of justice and fairness prevails and democratic approaches function which allow the nurture of qualities such as participation, innovation, cooperation, autonomy and initiative in learners and staff (Starkey 1991). Davies cited in Davies, Harber and Schweisfurth (2002) argues that a democratic theory of education is concerned with the process of ‘double democratisation’, the simultaneous democratisation of both education and society. This suggests that without the democratic development of a society, a more democratic system of education cannot be promoted. Conversely, without a more democratic system of education, the development of a democratic society is unlikely to occur.

There can be very little wrong to make schools the seedbeds of civic virtue and one would hope that schools actually endeavour to embark on such a virtuous project, particularly in the light of escalating levels of violence, crime, xenophobic prejudice, intolerance, disrespect, bigotry and insecurity which seem to permeate and threaten our public spaces. In addition, Carter et al. (2003) contend that it is necessary for learners to practise democratic skills, and by so doing they will be able to learn these skills, which will become instilled in their minds as their part of everyday lives. They contend that this is because these skills are not naturally acquired but are learnt:

Democratic skills and values are learned, and it cannot just be assumed that people will somehow develop them naturally or by chance. Much of this learning will come from continual experience of democratic structures to function as efficiently as possible and as quickly as possible some prior training is of considerable value (Carter et al. 2003, 23).

We agree with Zygmunt Bauman (2003) that today’s world is rife with xenophobia, suspicions, animosities, ethnic hatred, crime and violence which undeniably exacerbate the ‘frailty of human bonds’. Therefore, we urgently need people who can build institutions which can contribute towards restoring security, building trust and making meaningful interaction with others possible (Bauman 2001, 99). We share this view of Bauman and want to suggest that our schools require leaders who can contribute towards remedying the ‘discomforts of insecurity’ – more specifically, our schools need to nurture people who can act autonomously, that is, assume responsibility to make choices and build identities in organic relation with others. But for this to happen, we require autonomous leaders (whether teachers or managers).

In this essay we shall make an argument for deliberative democratic leaders who possess the dispositions and freedoms to create enabling conditions for colleagues to become autonomous beings. Only then, the possibility that schools
leaders and universities) could become public spaces which can contribute towards enacting social change could be realised. This brings us to the question: What makes deliberative democratic leaders what they are and how can they potentially cultivate friendship and take risks? What interests me more, and of specific relevance to nurturing relationships, is an Aristotelian idea of friendship which Patricia White (1998) considers as important to sustaining a democratic community. White (1998, 82–83) argues that self-respecting citizens intent on cultivating a democratic community cannot ignore the mutual values of trust, confidence, care, openness, sharing, loyalty and support towards one another – all constitutive features of friendship. In as much as White’s argument in defence of friendship advances democratic relationships, it seems to be biased towards a form of mutuality based on intimacy and commitment towards one another – one which seems to be silent on the taking of risks, which is so important in fostering democratic relations. In our view, friendship cannot merely be about nurturing intimate relations without some sort of risk taking, otherwise such relations would merely result in carefully contrived ‘policed’ activities where the possibility of vehemently disagreeing with one’s friends becomes highly unlikely.

In this essay we shall show how both Nancy Sherman’s (1997) and Jacques Derrida’s (1997) ideas of friendship can be used to nurture human relations which involve taking risks. Our argument in defence of taking risks through friendships is hopefully a move away from fostering democratic interactions among leaders and colleagues, which could potentially ignore forms of action which involve challenging, undermining and disagreeing with one’s friends.

Nancy Sherman’s (1997) Aristotelian account of friendship seems to be more compelling in developing plausible democratic relationships. Firstly, friendship can take the form of mutual attachment – a matter of doing things together – where both leaders and colleagues demonstrate a willingness to give priority to one another in terms of time and resources. In other words, when people interact, they avoid being dismissive of one another, that is, they listen with interest and appreciation to one another. In this way, the possibility that they correct one another as well as learning from the strengths of wisdom of one another in an atmosphere of trust, goodwill and mutual benefit are enhanced (Sherman 1997, 206–207). When they do so, they attend to one another with interest and appreciation in an atmosphere of non-dismissiveness, they care for one another in such a way that both their potentialities are evoked. For instance, when educators produce arguments, they are not afraid of being corrected by school principals. They are also not concerned that their judgements would be dismissed by principals. This situation in turn gives rise to democratic relationships because educators’ judgements are attended to and reflected upon with interest and, in turn, educators have to give an account of their reasons which would invariably be taken
into systematic controversy by principals and colleagues. In a different way, we find our colleagues becoming more democratic if we become attached to them – that is, their views are listened to with interest, appreciation and care. In turn, colleagues expect to be corrected if their reasons cannot be justified. In this way, friendship is nurtured and the possibility of attending to the reasons of colleagues in an atmosphere of respect and sharing would carry considerable weight.

Secondly, Sherman (1997, 208) argues that friendship involves people becoming mutually attuned to one another. In other words, they relax their boundaries and become stimulated by one another through argument. When people engage in argumentation on the basis that they relax their boundaries, it seems rather unlikely that their deliberations would result in hostile antagonism and conflicts which could potentially thwart their dialogical engagement. However, our potential critic might quite correctly claim that deliberative argumentation favours those people who are eloquent and that not all people could defensibly articulate their views. We agree, and for this reason we want to complement Sherman’s idea of mutual attunement with Iris Marion Young’s (1996) idea of listening to the stories of others, irrespective of whether these narratives are recounted in ways which do not attend to strict rules of argumentation. If leaders do so, the possibility of mutual attunement would further be enhanced. Failing to create spaces for inarticulate, non-eloquent voices would not only exclude legitimate educator voices from activities, but would also truncate critical engagement – to openly and fairly evaluate the reasons of others, at the same time showing respect for others’ points of view no matter how inarticulate these might be. We cannot imagine our colleagues acting democratically if they are prematurely excluded from our interactions on the grounds that they lack certain levels of articulation.

Thirdly, Sherman’s idea of mutual action (1997, 212) to occur among people is in some ways linked to Hannah Arendt’s (1998) notion of initiating people into new ways of doing. This means that when leaders lead they initiate others into new understandings and meanings not perhaps thought of before. Similarly, when others are led, they (de)construct meanings in ways which open up new possibilities for their new ways of doing. In this way, human relations are continuous, because every initiative leaders and the being led take is considered as opening up possibilities to see things anew – that is, meanings are always in the rendering the outcomes of relations as inconclusive. What follows from such a view of engagement is that the outcomes of relationships are always incomplete and the possibility of something new arising always seems to be present. Such a form of mutual action would give much hope for democratic engagement on the basis that such a form of human interaction is connected to something new arising.

Sherman’s idea of friendship as mutuality would invariably sustain democratic relations, for the reason that it has in mind that people connect with one another, engage deliberatively through argument and narrative, and (de)construct meanings which are always inconclusive. However, such an account of friendship is not sufficient to ensure that relationships. Why not? Mutual attachment can have the
effect that people listen with interest and appreciation to one another; mutual attunement can create possibilities for deliberative engagement; and mutual action can ensure that the outcomes of relations are inconclusive and the products of new initiatives. Yet, such forms of mutuality are not sufficient to ensure that relationships are ongoing in the sense that new possibilities are opened up which can sustain criticality. For instance, when people analyse, evaluate and modify arguments and judgements, the possibility exists that they abandon previously held preferences, opinions and views, and explore alternatives even if it means taking undue risks. Likewise, risk taking happens when people do not merely restrict their interaction to the achievement of expected or perhaps unexpected outcomes. This would mark the end of relationships, because people have not ventured far enough in pursuit of the unintended or the lucky find – that is, they have not taken sufficient risks and have thus limited their explorations. Such a situation in turn would also limit friendship, because the latter cannot last unless leaders have confidence in those being led – friends – to take risks without knowing in advance what the outcomes might be – that is, without necessarily expecting something positive in return. It is for this reason that we are also attracted to the views of Jacques Derrida (1997), who develops a conception of friendship which can contribute positively towards addressing some of the limitations of mutuality – in particular encouraging people to take risks.

II

We shall now extend the idea of friendship as mutuality to a friendship of ‘love’ as found in the seminal thoughts of Derrida. Derrida (1997) raises the question of the positive contribution friendship can make in dialogue with others. For him, friendship is the act of loving (philia) rather than letting oneself be loved or being loved – what he refers to as inducing love (Derrida 1997, 8). Of course, it is possible that one can be loved without knowing it. But it is impossible to love without knowing it. Derrida (1997, 9) makes the claim that ‘the friend is the person who loves (and declares his or her love) before being the person who is loved’. And if one thinks friendship, one is to start with the ‘friend-who-loves’ not with the ‘friend-who-is-loved’ (Derrida 1997, 9). Thus, when people consider themselves as friends, they willingly declare their love to one another to ‘the limit of its possibility’ (Derrida 1997, 12). We feel ourselves loving our colleagues when we care for them in a way that evokes their potentialities in order that they come up with possibilities we might not even have thought of. Without being affectionate towards them, we cultivate in them the capacity to reach their own justifiable conclusions to which they are to be held accountable by and to others – referred to by MacIntyre (1999, 83) as the ability to evaluate, modify or reject their own practical judgments. Only then can we consider ourselves as ‘friends-who-love’, since we do not expect being loved in return, that is, when colleagues reach their own justifiable conclusions about educational issues, they do so without having to
please us – without loving us in return. Similarly when colleagues come up with sufficiently good reasons for acting and imagining alternative possibilities so as to be able to rationally re-educate themselves about educational issues without having to please me, they can be said to be ‘friends-who-love’. It is this idea of friendship which can go some way towards achieving critical engagement.

Why? If I engage with colleagues, then I must first declare myself a ‘friend-who-loves’, since I would not to be loved in return. Erich Fromm in *The Art of Loving* describes such a loving relationship as an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to others in the context in which they find themselves (Fromm 1957, 36). In other words, loving relationships are ‘brotherly’ (sisterly) because they invoke a sense of responsibility, care and respect towards others (Fromm 1957, 37). This would imply that as the leaders we should create conditions whereby people engage authentically, which requires that the following moves to be put in place: encouraging people to imagine situations in and beyond the parameters of their own interests, where things would be better – that is, to be caring towards others; democratizing our interactions, whereby people can take the initiative to imagine possibilities not otherwise thought of – that is, to be responsible towards others; and connecting with people’s storytelling with the aim of discovering untapped possibilities – that is, to be respectful towards others. So, a leader not only connects with colleagues, deliberates with them, and nurtures activities in ways that allow for outcomes not necessarily intended, but also establishes possibilities whereby others can come up with meanings which they might not have expected. In other words, through their interaction, the possibility exists for people to come up with defensible meanings irrespective of what their colleagues might want. In order for this to happen, people should be encouraged to take risks (as leaders’ friends), because taking risks involves venturing into the unknown and unexpected, and from which unforeseen possibilities might arise. So, leaders who ‘love’ their colleagues as friends are concerned that engagement should result in unimagined possibilities – ways of doing which leaders had not perhaps thought of before, nor expect colleagues to come up with. For instance, when a person engages with another person, then the unexpected can be expected, that is, the person is capable of performing what is ‘infinitely improbable’ (Arendt 1998, 178). In doing so, a person not only announces what (s)he does, has done and intends to do, but also seeks to do the unexpected (Arendt 1998, 179). One way of ensuring that one acts without knowing what to expect can be to stand back or detach oneself from one’s own reasons and asking if others’ reasons are in fact justifiable or not. MacIntyre (1999, 96) argues that we come to know when we are able not just to evaluate our reasons as better or worse, but also when we detach ourselves from the immediacy of our own desires in order to ‘imagine alternative realistic futures’ which might give rise to unexpected results. Detaching oneself from one’s own reasons in relation to one’s evaluation of arguments suggests that arguments cannot be dealt with uncritically or as uncontroversial. The mere fact that one acts through evaluation and detachment brings into question the
underlying assumptions of arguments. Only then can the unexpected be anticipated, which suggests that only then is one acting – and seriously connecting with others.

Thus far, we have argued that democratic relations can best be achieved by means of mutuality and love – more specifically complementary forms of friendship. These forms of friendship have in mind what democratic relations set out to achieve: taking risks to cultivate sharing, deliberative engagement and the recognition that others’ rights have to be respected. We shall now explore how such a notion of friendship can bring about democratic justice in relation.

III

We have shown that cultivating friendship through mutuality and love can contribute towards people taking risks. And if leaders and colleagues are prepared to take risks, then the possibility exists for them to engage with the commonalities and differences of others. In this way, friendship makes urgent the task of creating democratic citizens who share a sufficiently cohesive identity. Put differently, people acting as friends would honour ‘the sources of diversity that thrive within the boundaries of a strong common citizenship, and yet supports a judicious tolerance to ways of life that conflict with some of its demands’. The pursuit of a collective identity without discounting the differences of others could do much to prevent ethnic hatred and religious intolerance (Callan 1997, 221). Our focus is preventing ethnic hatred and religious intolerance. (South) Africa’s past history has been marred by ethnic violence and religious bigotry – Zulus fighting with Xhosas, and Afrikaners resenting English-speaking peoples in South Africa and vice versa, Muslims and non-Muslims attacking and hurting one another in Nigeria, and the Zimbabwean government confiscating White farmers’ properties and evicting them. It is here that relationships along the lines of friendship (through taking risks) can provide enabling conditions for democratic engagement, more specifically pursuing a pathway of collective political identity. This implies that leaders should not merely listen to narratives of others, but actually encourage a spirit of living together in diversity – that is, through dialogical action leaders and colleagues should together establish dialogical opportunities which take into account people’s linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious commonalities and diversities. The idea of finding a dialogical space for the sharing of different people’s commonalities is based on the understanding that people need to learn to live with the otherness of others whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own. And, by creating a dialogical space, referred to by Benhabib (2002, 127) as ‘intercultural dialogue’, whereby people can enact what they have in common and at the same time make public their competing narratives and significations, people might have a real opportunity to co-exist. In this way they would not only establish a community of conversation and interdependence (that is, they share commonalities), but also one of disagreement (that is, they do not share
commonalities) without disrespecting others’ life-worlds (Benhabib 2002, 35 and 41). Put differently, when people are engaged in a conversation underpinned by interdependence and disagreement (albeit with risks), they engage in friendship with a collective identity – they share commonalities and differences so vital to the realisation of democratic relationships.

Moreover, taking risks would evoke in leaders and colleagues the capacity to confront one another through deliberation. For Callan the idea of deliberation is not an attempt ‘to achieve dialogical victory over our adversaries, but rather the attempt to find and enact terms of political coexistence that we and they can reasonably endorse as morally acceptable’ (Callan 1997, 215). Through deliberation, leaders and colleagues disturb doubts about the correctness of their moral beliefs or about the importance of the differences between what they and others believe (a matter of arousing distress) accompanied by a rough process of struggle and ethical confrontation – that is, belligerence (Callan 1997, 211). If this happens, belligerence and distress give way eventually to moments of ethical conciliation, when the truth and error in rival positions have been made clear and a fitting synthesis of factional viewpoints is achieved (Callan 1997, 212); this is an idea of deliberation – with which we agree – where no one has the right to silence dissent and where participants can speak their minds. And when leaders and colleagues can speak their minds, they are also prepared to take risks which would place them favourably in relation to effecting democracy in their society. Iris Marion Young (2000) contends that democratic norms mandates inclusion as a criterion of political legitimacy. And democracy implies that all members of polity are included equally in the decision-making process, and, as such, such decisions would be considered by all as legitimate. Marrion speaks of two types of inclusions namely external exclusion – where some individuals are kept out of the fora for debates and dialogues or decision-making processes, and internal exclusion – these are such exclusions where the individuals are normally included in the group but are still excluded for example by the interaction privileges, language issues, and participation of others dismissed as irrelevant (Young 2000). Leaders and colleagues who are prepared to challenge forms of injustice such as poverty and racism in their society do so for the sake of achieving democratic education – they act as friends willing to take the risk of speaking their minds.

Finally, taking risks as friends does not merely call for recognition and respect of other’s rights (whether civil, political and social), but also taking responsibility for the rights of others. Taking rights seriously means ‘accepting appropriate responsibility for the rights of others, not just making a fuss about our own’ (Callan 1997, 73). For instance, people who champion the right to employment in their countries also consider as important the cause of others to take responsibility to meet the needs of those who are jobless. Acting responsibly as friends would instil in leaders and colleagues qualities which can help to build a better country – one free from social oppression (drug and alcohol abuse, gangsterism and human rights abuses), economic marginalisation (unemployment is rife among the majority of
the previously disadvantaged) and subtle forms of racist exclusion (the most lucrative jobs are still occupied by those who were privileged in the past). The point is that unless schools and universities become havens of friendship aimed at producing a better future for all people, we cannot seriously engage with challenges of the unexpected.

REFERENCES
