

Democratic Teacher Education: From Theory to Praxis

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Introduction

Since the founding of the United States, many Americans have recognized the “fragility and rarity” of democracy (Michelli & Keiser, 2005, p. 246). As a result, many have called for schools to inculcate the values of democracy in American youth (Barber, 1994). As one would expect, the nature of these calls has shifted over time as the perceived needs of the nation have fluctuated. This paper is yet another call for democratic education, an education that is as Ayers (2009) argues “eye-popping and mind-blowing” (p. 3), an education that not only promotes and inspires democratic dispositions, knowledge, and values in students, but leads students through and engages them in the deliberative and collaborative processes of democracy. While contemporary scholars have called for democratic education at the K-12 level in order to increase civic participation (Apple & Beane, 2007; Ayers, 2009; Collins, 2009; Mitra & Serriere, 2015), I join the ranks of those scholars who call for the democratization of teacher education programs as a means to that same end. Soder (1996) explains that while “much has been said about the importance of schools in a democracy...many of those very same people...lapse into uncharacteristic silence as to the education of educators in these matters” (p. 249). In the twenty years since Soder made this claim, more has indeed been written, but arguably the silence around democratic teacher education has been raised to barely a whisper.

This paper is an attempt to bridge the divide between the scholarship calling for democratic education in our K-12 schools and the scholarship calling for the democratization of the institutions that educate and prepare our nation’s teachers. More specifically, I argue that any attempt to promote democratic education in K-12 schools

must first begin by engaging teachers in the process of democratic education (Apple, 2000; Michelli, 2005), a shift that requires a drastic turn from the status quo and more mechanistic or methods-oriented models of teacher education. Indeed, “if democratic principles are to become an integral part of public education, such understanding must be incorporated into teacher education programs” (Pearl & Pryor, 2005, p. x). Incorporating democratic pedagogies and redesigning teacher education to be more democratic, then, is necessary if we wish to develop democratic citizenship in K-12 students. To foster a move towards democratic teacher education, I offer in this article both a philosophical framework for democratic teacher education and, tied to this framework, examples of democratic pedagogies, structures, and content that democratic teacher education programs may wish to implement to live up to the demands of a thriving democracy.

Rationale

Perhaps the greatest challenge in any democracy is cultivating democratic citizens (Parker, 1996). Democratic thinking is not natural; it is a learned habit rather than an innate human disposition (Michelli, 2005). In short, “Democrats are not born but educated” (Banks, 1996, p. xi). In a democratic society such as the United States, one would expect a thriving system of public education dedicated to the cultivation of citizens who are daily engaged in the processes of democracy, what Collins (2009) claims to be both “a way of building community and getting business done” (p. 12).

The reality, however, is quite the opposite. Across the country time spent on liberal arts education in K-12 schools is declining (von Zastrow & Janc, 2004) and student knowledge of civics and history is dismally low (Gimpel, Lay, &

Schuknecht, 2003). Kanter (2015) explains, “Few Americans can name all three branches of government, or one Supreme Court justice, or the current vice president” (p. 66). Those who do have civic knowledge generally hail from the middle-to-upper class, revealing an ominous civic achievement gap that disadvantages lower income students (Nieves, 2013). This lack of civic competence “leads to a diminished sense of citizenship” (Sehr, 1997, p. 13), as those who lack knowledge of civic affairs are significantly less likely to engage in political discussions (Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003). Interest in voting, arguably the most basic expression of citizenship, is also low. In 2014, the *New York Times* reported that voter turnout was the lowest it had been in over 70 years (Editorial Board, 2014), perhaps because of the sense of powerlessness that pervades the public consciousness (Boyte, 2015), resulting in both anger (Kluger, 2016) and apathy (Girod, 2016). “Most people have become passive listeners and viewers,” Sehr (1997) argues, “not active discussants and participants” (p. 60). In a society characterized by vast economic inequality, homelessness, joblessness, and poverty (Anyon, 2005; Sehr, 1997; Boyte, 2015), a lack of civic engagement is simply unacceptable.

Despite the contemporary challenges to democracy, teacher educators have a powerful role to play in reversing these trends. Each generation has the responsibility to cultivate democratic citizens (Levine, 2007), and in the contemporary-era policymakers have neglected these responsibilities in exchange for neoliberal policies, manifested in education through school accountability, high-stakes testing, school choice, and vouchers (Giroux, 2002; Hursh, 2013). Neoliberalism endorses “maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2007, p. 22) and to some is seen as the most democratic expression of freedom and liberty. Neoliberalism

is not without its critics, however. Giroux (2002), for example, alleges that neoliberalism

assaults all things public, mystifies the basic contradiction between democratic values and market fundamentalism, and weakens any viable notion of political agency by offering no language capable of connecting private considerations to public issues (p. 428).

In this line of thinking, the rise of neoliberalism in education reform is dangerous to the functioning of a democracy. In fact, the outcomes of neoliberal reforms have worked in opposition to the cultivation of democratic citizens, as schools have reverted to what Au (2011) calls “21st century Taylorism” in which “labour is controlled vis-à-vis high-stakes testing and pre-packaged, corporate curricula aimed specifically at teaching to the tests” (p. 25). In this environment competition is valued—not the democratic skills of cooperation, collaboration, dialogue, interdependence, and creativity necessary in the 21st century (Noddings, 2013).

Both teacher education programs and K-12 classrooms have felt the impacts of neoliberalism through the narrowing of curriculum, the deskilling of the teaching profession, the fragmentation of knowledge, and the focus on methods and techniques rather than conceptual or philosophical underpinnings (Apple, 1986; Au, 2011; Bartolome, 1994; Haerr, 2004). Under neoliberal policy, commitments to democracy are “tucked safely away in the rationale and mission statements” (Parker, 1996, p. 11) of both school districts and teacher education programs. The resulting lack of civic competence and engagement is, therefore, not surprising. In fact, it is even expected.

Although an entire system is clearly implicated in the lack of civic engagement in the United States, teacher education programs can play a critical role in reversing these negative trends by becoming more democratic. Indeed, Grumet (2010) claims, “Of all the participants in

this pageant, we still have more agency, more than the school, more than the state, to imagine and create other arrangements” (p. 66). Uniquely able to instill in prospective teachers the spirit of democratic citizenship, teacher education programs must engage prospective teachers in the processes of democratic education before they can be expected to implement democratic pedagogies in their own classrooms. It is unreasonable to assume that prospective teachers entering colleges and universities, having been educated in a neoliberal age, understand or have experienced democratic education. It is also unlikely that they are familiar with deliberative and discussion-based pedagogies or the process of co-planning with peers and teachers. It is even less likely that they enter teacher preparation programs with a sense of agency or the belief that they can make change. Studies of prospective elementary teachers confirm these assertions (Galman, 2012) and suggest that prospective elementary teachers are socialized to act in ways that protect the status quo rather than challenge it (Fry & O’Brien, 2015; Iverson & James, 2010). Coupling this reality with the assumption that teachers “must themselves know the content and possess the skills and attitudes that they are trying to develop in their students,” (Cunningham, 2011, p. 141), it is absolutely necessary for teacher education programs to begin to cultivate a democratic spirit in prospective teachers by “providing models of democratic pedagogy” (Bloom & Herzog, 1994, p. 200). If we ignore this challenge in teacher education, we can only expect more of the same—more authoritarian and oppressive forms of teaching, more standardization, more silence and inaction from our nation’s citizens and, as a result, far less democracy (Thomas & Weichel, 2011).

Democratic Education: A Philosophical Framework

Despite the dominance of neoliberal reform in education, a consistent voice of opposition remains. Current calls for democratic education—education that leads students through

processes that are both democratic and at the same time meant to cultivate the skills and dispositions necessary for democratic life—from Gutmann (1987), Noddings (2013), Nussbaum (1997), and Grumet (1988) stand in stark contrast to the current neoliberal educational environment, yet offer a sound vision of what could be. Unlike many public school advocates and reformers before them, these scholars understand democracy to be a pedagogy in and of itself. Their philosophies form the philosophical foundation of my proposed model of democratic teacher education, and were chosen specifically because they build on Dewey’s progressivism (1916/1996; 1938) while also introducing an essential feminist element missing in Dewey’s earlier calls. This feminist element is necessary as the hierarchal patriarchal system of schooling has been a stumbling block on the path towards democratic education (Grumet, 1988). Particularly as patriarchal, neoliberal policies have significantly decreased female teachers’ autonomy, and blame for poor educational outcomes have been “deflected from the men who establish these policies onto the women who teach the children who fail (Grumet, 1988, p. 23), I argue that it is perhaps time for women to guide the policymaking that they will subsequently be tasked to implement.

This framework, culled from the work of Noddings (2013), Gutmann (1987), Nussbaum (1997), and Grumet (1988), synthesizes their visions of democratic education into eight essential descriptors. The descriptors overlap, each component operating in tandem with the others. Taken together, the eight descriptors both simplify the vast theory of democratic education and at the same time reveal the inherent complexity of a democratic classroom.

Protodemocratic

An overarching principle of democratic education is the acknowledgment that the democratic classroom need not be an exact replica of a fully functioning democratic society. School, Grumet (1988) reminds us, is a liminal

space between the home and the workplace, the private and the public. It is, by definition, a site of growth and development. As a result, Grumet (1988) urges teachers to

refuse to run the classroom like a conveyance, designed to transport children from the private to the public world, but to make it instead a real space in the middle, where we can all stop and rest and work to find the political and epistemological forms that will mediate the opposition of home and workplace (p. 20).

The classroom, as the intermediate zone between private and public life, should teach students respect for the common good, and, calling on the “classical concept of *educos*, meaning ‘to lead out of,’” the classroom should be the space where children are led away from distinctly private concerns and introduced to the notion of the common good (Grumet, 1988, p. 170). Schools, then, should not be places of didactic authoritarianism where absolute rights and wrongs exist. Instead, schools should be a site of mediation where students and teachers grapple together with the complexities of democratic life (Grumet, 1988).

Participatory

Active and engaged participation in the learning process is essential to a functioning democratic classroom. Noddings (2013) explains that one method to create a participatory classroom is to offer students choice, as “choice is a basic concept in democracy” (p. 66). One single curriculum, she argues, is undemocratic, as it does not meet the myriad needs of students. Understanding that students lack competence to make fully-informed decisions, teachers must guide students through the available options, helping them ask essential questions to make the most informed choice possible.

Participatory pedagogies also engage students in “issues of current importance—

importance to them, if possible” (Noddings, 2011, p. 492). By allowing students to make connections to their personal lives, “students may begin to experience school as a place to which they can bring some meaning” (Noddings, 2011, p. 494). According to Gutmann (1987), “Participatory approaches aim to increase students’ commitment to learning by building upon and extending their existing interests in intellectually productive ways” (p. 89). Students should be engaged in the day-to-day life of the school, not because they have been disciplined to be, but because the life of the school is made to be engaging (Gutmann, 1987).

Deliberative

Perhaps the most essential feature of democratic education to Noddings (2013) and Gutmann (1987) is deliberation. Noddings (2013) explains that deliberation is not predicated on common values, but is, in fact, the method we use to establish common values. Indeed, Noddings (2013) emphasizes the impossibility of teaching democratic values “in didactic form” as democratic dispositions must be learned through participation in democratic processes. Didactic teaching in Noddings’ (2013) view, “will not produce deliberative thinkers” (p. 22).

While Noddings emphasizes deliberation as a means to establishing common understandings and values, Gutmann emphasizes its ability to reveal fundamental disagreements in order to enable cooperative solutions. She argues, “The most distinctive feature of a democratic theory of education is that it makes a democratic virtue out of our inevitable disagreement over educational problems” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 11). Similarly to Noddings, Gutmann believes that without adequate preparation in deliberative processes, children are encouraged to passively conform rather than actively question and critique.

Nonrepressive and Nondiscriminatory

Gutmann’s (1987) policies of nonrepression and nondiscrimination help to set boundaries on democratic deliberation. Put simply, these

principles set limits on individual liberty and “majority tyranny” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 97) by rendering any suggested policy, statement, or action that would repress any citizen’s potential participation in democracy outside the bounds of democratic discourse. These principles are necessary to a functioning democracy, Gutmann (1987) explains, because “A society is undemocratic...if it restricts rational deliberation or excludes some educable citizens” (p. 95). These principles remind us that democracy is not simply ‘majority rule,’ but is instead bound by certain principles and rights.

Moral

Bound by certain principles, democratic education is not neutral, nor should it be. Gutmann (1987) argues that teachers in a democracy must instill moral character in students, as “Education in character and in moral reasoning are therefore both necessary, neither sufficient, for creating democratic citizens” (p. 51). Deliberation in democratic classrooms must be guided by a commitment to “good morals,” in addition to the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination. Indeed, teachers should not respect all views and commitments in their classrooms. Instead, teachers and schools must reinforce democratic values of diversity, liberty, justice, and equality as the values that connect and unite democratic citizens (Parker, 2012). In this environment, controversial topics that challenge these aforementioned values are discussed and interrogated for their merit.

Empathetic

According to Noddings (1984), moral education is characterized by care, which should be the “primary aim of every educational institution” (Noddings, 1984, p. 172). In the classroom, the ethic of care does not ignore content or subject matter, but always places the ethical needs of the student first. Students are subjects, and should be seen as responsible humans, not objects or “a succession of roles” (Noddings, 1984, p. 183). Educators have a responsibility in this paradigm to “point out and

question the foolishness that pervades current school practice” (Noddings, 1984, p. 183). In an education system characterized by care, educators must engage in dialogue with communities, learning must be “offered freely with no demands for specific achievement” (Noddings, 1984, p. 192), and teachers must not have policy forced upon them, but instead be engaged in a cooperative process of decision-making.

Care is integral to democratic education because it is the outgrowth of empathy, which allows us to better deliberate and collaborate with others. Cultivating empathy will foster citizens who have a “responsiveness to another’s needs” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 90). As it stands currently, education is “increasingly mechanized and impersonal” making “human relationships of sufficient intimacy” nearly impossible to cultivate (Grumet, 1988, p. 56). This isolation turns teachers and students inward to their own needs rather than encouraging them to concern themselves with the common good. Indeed, the classroom community, as an embryonic society, must be made up of empathetic individuals. As a result, Noddings (2013) claims that “time spent developing relations of care and trust is not time wasted. Everything goes better as a result. Telling stories, listening to complaints, deliberating on social problems all have a place in good teaching” (p. 52-53). Without these social bonds and sense of connectedness, students are likely to retreat to self-interest (Grumet, 1988).

Global

Both Noddings (2013) and Nussbaum (1997) emphasize the importance of global thinking in a 21st century democracy. Rather than promote nationalism or authoritarian patriotism, schools should cultivate in their students a belief in global unity. Democratic education also promotes “comparative cultural study” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 55) which will help individuals realize that their customs and beliefs are not natural or inevitable. Because “ignorance...is often an essential prop of hatred”

(Nussbaum, 1997, p. 60), learning about other cultures with a detachment from one's own culture will promote peace and a better democracy, ultimately enabling us to come together in "mutual solidarity" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 60).

Critical

Critical thinking, Nussbaum (1997) argues, requires self-examination. Inspired by Socrates, self-examination is required in a democracy, as "democracy needs citizens who can think for themselves rather than simply deferring to authority" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 10). Persons who have not undergone Socratic self-examination do not think critically about their worldviews or biases and therefore cannot fully engage with others. As a result, "people talk at one another," (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 19) trading opinions that have not been tested by logic and reason. Socratic self-examination promotes good citizenship because, through logic and reason, we are able to engage in "healthy ways...as citizens" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 36). Critical thinking builds "thoughtful effective change agents" who are able to listen to others and cooperate, rather than "wild-eyed revolutionaries" (Noddings, 2013, p. 88). By reasoning collaboratively about "choices rather than just trading claims and counterclaims" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 10), individuals can embrace "genuine dialogue" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 19).

Summary

Taken together, these scholars present a coherent vision of what is necessary to be a democratic citizen, and they call for schools to cultivate in students prototypical citizenship traits. Although establishing schools that abide by these descriptors may seem impossible or idealistic, Sehr (1997) argues that this is a choice that schools, programs, individual teachers, and policymakers can make—and if we *do* make this decision,

we can remake public education to prepare young people to build a new public life and begin to reshape American society into the kind of place we've always been told it could be: a place of tolerance, care, justice, individual and social responsibility, and equal opportunity for all our citizens to develop themselves fully and prosper (p. 180).

Our choices in teacher education directly impact the choices teachers will make in K-12 classrooms (Gutmann, 1987). Teacher education programs and the faculty who build their careers within those programs cannot assume teachers will magically learn to teach democratically. We must take on the responsibility to ensure prospective teachers learn these skills. As Grumet (2010) reminds us, "Democracy is at stake every time we decide what it is that the school will teach. Democracy is at stake every time we decide who speaks and who is silent in a classroom or a meeting or what interpretations of a text make sense to us" (p. 70). If we believe in the ideals of democratic education, teacher education programs must move toward a more democratic model.

A Model of Democratic Teacher Education

Building on the philosophical framework outlined in the previous section as well as the existing literature on democratic teacher education, this section outlines suggested goals, content, and structures of democratic teacher education. Each suggested practice is connected to one or more descriptors of democratic education, although it is important to note that there is no single recipe for democratic education. Yet, even as these are suggestions, not prescriptions, a piecemeal approach to democratic education is unlikely to result in widespread or lasting change (Bucci, 2005; Michelli & Keiser, 2005; Novak, 1994). Indeed, operating a teacher education program

democratically requires no less than a paradigm shift. Tinkering at the edges of an authoritarian teacher education program guided by neoliberal policy will not produce publicly oriented democratic citizens (Novak, 1994). As Bucci (2005) contends, teacher education programs require a “multifaceted approach that permeates the program” (p. 127). As a result, democratic teacher education is less about specific processes and more about adhering to a coherent vision. Indeed, without a shared vision and commitment to democratic processes, the suggestions that follow will do little to cultivate democratic dispositions in teacher candidates. (Michelli & Keiser, 2005).

Goal

The primary goal of a democratic teacher education program is to engage teachers in the participatory, deliberative, nonrepressive and nondiscriminatory processes of democracy. Through engagement in these processes, a democratic teacher education program should cultivate in teachers a commitment to the moral, empathetic, global, and critical dimensions of citizenship. An ancillary goal, of course, is that engagement in these democratic processes ultimately encourages teachers to provide democratic experiences for students in their future classrooms.

Cultivating Democratic Processes

How might democratic teacher education programs engage prospective teachers in the participatory, deliberative, nonrepressive and nondiscriminatory processes of democracy? How can programs model democratic processes? What follows are five suggested practices and/or features of coursework that facilitate participatory, deliberative, and nonrepressive/nondiscriminatory operations in teacher education, including the co-creation of coursework, engagement with student and faculty committees, engagement in practitioner inquiry for policy change, service learning, and the development of community-district-university partnerships. Each of these suggestions

engages prospective teachers in participatory and deliberative processes that are guided by the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination.

Co-Creation of Coursework.

Democratic programs should provide prospective teachers the opportunity to co-create syllabi and coursework. Bloom and Herzog (1994) explain that if prospective teachers are offered a list of required competencies and skills, they can deliberate and decide how to best organize class syllabi to meet their needs. Through this process curriculum becomes more integrated, based on problems rather than isolated ideas or bits of knowledge to be consumed (Beane, 1997). Allowing students to co-create syllabi offers more buy-in, as “they [prospective teachers] become more comfortable with active participation in discussions and decision making”...and “they become more invested in the learning process” (Bloom & Herzog, 1994, p. 211). Experiencing this process themselves can help prospective teachers develop the necessary confidence to allow their own students the opportunity to co-create coursework.

Committee Work. Committees, while common in all schools and organizations, are often not organized democratically. Egalitarian committees guided by the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination model the deliberative aspects of the democratic system and engage students, faculty, district officials and teachers, and the community in collaborative, participatory processes to answer the question, “How shall we do it?” (Macalusco, 2005). Course committees and program committees can both be implemented to democratize teacher education and give voice to those who have previously been marginalized.

Course Committees. Course committees engage students directly in the process of democracy by asking them to provide feedback throughout a course to instructors. These students, chosen by their peers as representatives, bring concerns forward from the class and work with instructors to develop a

mutually acceptable course of action. The overarching goal of the course committee is to encourage active participation from students. Providing space for students to ‘talk back’ to instructors, to deliberate, and to even bargain (Robertson, 2008) will serve them well as teachers of record. Indeed, course committees are necessary to avoid a “top-down hierarchical decision-making structure” that encourages compliance rather than critique (Bucci, 2005, p. 130).

Program Committees. Program committees consist of instructors, students, and all relevant stakeholders in the education of prospective teachers. Program committees, like course committees, are made up of representatives, although any interested individuals should be able to attend meetings or otherwise access a record of events. Program committees serve as intermediary places where students learn more about the concerns of faculty, instructors, and school-based staff, the policy constraints that they may be under, and where all parties develop insight and empathy into the various positions recognized at the table. Inevitably these will be sites of disagreement, but Laguardia and Pearl (2005) explain that “they need not and, on important problems, should not reach consensus. A major goal of teaching is to nurture in students the idea that decisions are made by informed majorities” (p. 11). Work on committees with diverse groups will prepare teachers to make compromise and find solutions to pressing problems through deliberation.

Practitioner Inquiry for Policy Change. Teacher education coursework should prepare teachers for a political future. Prospective teachers should be not only be able to teach children how to address problems in the legal and social systems of the United States, they should know how to seek redress for problems themselves (Hess & Ganzler, 2007). To develop this participatory spirit in teachers, Heineke, Ryan, and Tocci (2015) explain that teacher education programs must stop “conceptualizing teachers as passive targets for reform efforts” (p.

392) and instead conceptualize them as actors capable of impacting educational policy. In tandem with field experiences, students in a democratic teacher education program should engage in cycles of inquiry and action research to hone an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Ligon, 2005; Pryor, 2005). Inquiry and action research, according to Rust and Meyers (2003), can inform policy “by showing how various initiatives fare in the everyday transactions of schooling. If they listen, policymakers can discern from these studies what obstacles must be overcome, and they can identify what issues must be addressed if all children are to succeed” (p. xviii). Thus, not only is inquiry an egalitarian approach to whose knowledge matters, it is participatory and action oriented. Indeed, it is what Dewey called “the pedagogical encouragement of freedom of thought” (Pryor, 2005, p. 69).

Service Learning. According to Boyle-Baise and McIntyre (2008), “Service learning allows pre-service teachers to work with and learn from local youth and adults in the process of doing something worthwhile. It can foster greater comfort with people unlike oneself” (p. 309). In this way, service learning supports the development of empathetic and global dispositions. However, service learning can also “cultivate the idea that teaching is public service and that teachers serve as educational leaders for an increasingly diverse public” (Boyle-Base & McIntyre, 2008, p. 309). Service learning, then, not only helps prospective teachers become aware of community resources and more comfortable with diverse community members, it connects them to the public and increases an interest in the common good. Scaffolding these experiences and ensuring that service learning sites operate from a democratic lens is essential.

University-Community-District Partnerships. Michelli and Keiser (2005) remind us that “teacher education programs and programs in public schools must be renewed simultaneously” (p. xx). While teacher education programs can make isolated and discrete steps

towards becoming more democratic, it is essential that all stakeholders share a similar vision to developing democratic processes (Macalusco, 2005). The development of shared vision requires “intensive university and public school faculty collaboration regarding course development, teaching, [and] field placements” (Hillkirk, 1994, p. 92). Because the education of teachers takes place in colleges of education, liberal arts departments, surrounding communities, and K-12 schools, faculty “in education, the arts and sciences, and the public schools” should serve “as equal partners in the preparation of future educators and the renewal of current educators” (Michelli & Keiser, 2005, p. xx). Collaboration and “inter-group activity” must bring these people together (Ligon, 2005, p. 3). Pearl and Pryor (2005) explain,

democratic education, at the very least, is field based; is a partnership between higher education and elementary and secondary schools; is students, teachers, parents, and administrators involved in shared decision making; and is a determined and ceaseless commitment to equality (p. xxii).

Programs that seek out diverse perspectives and abide by the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination, then, model to prospective teachers the benefit of a multiplicity of voices in democratic decision-making.

Cultivating Democratic Dispositions

Cultivating democratic dispositions such as empathy, globalism, morality, and criticality requires that programs immerse prospective teachers in the liberal arts—specifically humanities, literature, history, and philosophy courses. These courses should be guided by a commitment to constructivist pedagogy as a means of both engaging in participatory processes and fostering active engagement with diverse perspectives.

Liberal Arts Coursework. According to Nussbaum (1997), a liberal arts education fosters Socratic self-examination, world citizenship, and a narrative imagination. Liston (2011) explains that citizens in a democracy need a challenging education that forces them to rethink their fundamental values and beliefs and engage in a critical examination of self. A study of literature, with the “ability to represent the specific circumstances and problems of people of many different sorts” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 86), could develop much needed empathy and globalism within teacher candidates. Indeed, literature encountered in the liberal arts tradition allows us to “see that circumstances shape not only people’s possibilities for action, but also their aspirations and desires, hopes and fears” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 88), thus inculcating in prospective teachers an appreciation for the importance of contextual factors in individual decision making and a responsibility to the common good. A liberal arts core also engages students in deliberative processes that will enable them to “develop the type of critical thinking and analytic skills necessary of problem-posing, critical inquiry, and reflective thinking, and acquire the skills necessary to help P-12 student succeed” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 233).

Philosophy. Coursework in philosophy is essential in a program dedicated to the processes of democracy (Cunningham, 2011). Without solid background in philosophy, the chance to reflect on those philosophies, and the opportunity to see them in action in both teacher education and field experiences, prospective teachers will be “practitioners with no clothes” who “unconsciously (thus uncritically) impos[e] her or his philosophy onto the world” (Thomas & Weichel, 2011, p. 51). Thomas and Weichel (2011) warn that, “Classrooms guided by practitioners who have ignored a careful consideration of philosophy—of progressivism and critical pedagogy—slip into an authoritarian, and thus oppressive dynamic that contradicts democratic ideals by silencing students” (p. 52).

Programs that fail to guide students to an understanding of their philosophical beliefs thus do them—and their future students—a disservice by failing to empower them with the tools to understand and critique their own beliefs about teaching and learning.

Constructivist Pedagogies. Liberal arts coursework must make use of constructivist pedagogies. Constructivist learning theories assume that “learning is enriched via access to multiple perspectives, resources, and representations” (Land, Hannafin, & Oliver, 2012, p. 13), as learning is both social and mediated by context. Constructivist pedagogies, including simulations, problem-based learning, and deliberation, and have been found to increase preservice teachers’ ability to reflect (and, therefore, learn) in a way that didactic approaches do not (Sleeter, 2001). As a result, constructivist pedagogies focused on active engagement dominate the literature on democratic education (Kelly, 1994; Laguardia & Pearl, 2005; Parker, 1996; Sleeter, 2001). Indeed, Laguardia and Pearl (2005) argue that “learning how to work with others to arrive at decisions, . . . the willingness to listen and understand the arguments of others, the capacity to negotiate, [and] the willingness to work cooperatively” (p. 19) are all essential traits learned through constructivist practices that facilitate the growth of democratic dispositions.

Conclusion

If teacher education programs want to become more democratic, and indeed they should if for no other reason than the alternative is worse (Gutmann, 1990), we most certainly need models that can light the way. The model suggested here, culled from a philosophical framework of democratic education, transforms the student-teacher relationship in teacher education and reimagines the roles teachers play as the facilitators of learning. For example, neoliberal education reforms have urged teacher educators to focus on efficiency and standardization, yet democratic pedagogies

require time for deliberation. Indeed, rather than embracing didactic pedagogy, democratic teacher education urges a dialogic process. Discussion is, of course, less efficient than authoritarian modes of teaching that pervade in the neoliberal environment. The democratic classroom and democratic teacher education program must plan for this loss of efficiency, but also must acknowledge the deep bonds and conceptual learning that deliberation engenders. Interactive dialogue encourages the teacher educator to construct knowledge with students rather than transmit knowledge via scripted lecture or presentation. Competition is reduced and consensus and collaboration are emphasized, particularly as students serve on boards and committees with teacher educators and community members. Teacher and student become equal partners on a common journey in the democratic teacher education program, and, while hierarchies do exist, the decision making process becomes more egalitarian and characterized by a commitment to care.

Still, the model presented here is not prescriptive, and the list of suggested democratic practices included is by no means comprehensive. Issues of recruitment, admissions, assessment, field placements, and progression and scaffolding within programs are not adequately discussed here and should also be at the forefront of teacher education renewal efforts. Moreover, the processes of democratic teacher education must be decided by those involved in deliberations, and democratic education will look different from site to site. Ultimately, though, a democratic teacher education program must develop specific practices in line with its goals and democratic philosophy. Teacher education programs hoping to move toward developing democratic processes must expect that every program’s path to democratic processes will look different based on the actors involved and the historical context of both the institution itself and surrounding community (Engestrom, 2001). The strategies, processes, and coursework presented here, then, should not be considered binding. True to the

democratic spirit, democratic strategies must be locally determined and context dependent.

Although democracy is often touted as the goal of educational endeavors, no generation has perfected such a model. Indeed, the Founders and many after them have fallen short, often conflating a belief in democracy as synonymous with capitalism. Thus, there is no history of large-scale democratic education, and an emphasis on economic interests over the public good continues to dominate educational decision-making, suggesting that education for public democracy is but one of democracy's unfinished goals. Yet the promise of democracy remains, and, as Michael Apple (2000) reminds us, "the struggle for democracy in education does not only take place 'out there.' Those of us who are educators at colleges and universities need also to be held accountable for what we do with our own students and colleagues in the institutions in which we work" (12). It is the right and the duty of each generation to move closer to the promise of liberty, equality, and justice for all. Teacher education programs must be up to this challenge.

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