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**Teacher Development as Deliberative Democratic Practice:
A Precursor to Educating for Democratic Citizenship**

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“I had never made a direct connection between education and democracy before taking this class. (I’m actually ashamed to admit this because it now seems so obvious.)” This is only one among many similar comments from the students—all practicing teachers—whom we teach. What is it about teachers’ professional lives that so obscures the democratic mission of schools?

The answer lies, at least in part, beyond school walls. Since the inception of public schools in the United States, at least three fundamental goals for them have vied for ascendancy in the social imagination. One, inspired by the rhetoric of our country's founders, particularly Thomas Jefferson, exhorts the schools to educate for a participatory democratic citizenry. Another, rooted in America's can-do pioneer spirit and Emersonian self-reliance, urges schools to prepare economically self-sufficient and productive workers. A third harkens to the Greek notion of *paidia*, educating each individual in his/her own unique way to contribute to the common good of the culture. All of these goals hold considerable merit, and there is obviously clear overlap among them. In fact, preparing students for democratic citizenship, economic viability, personal development and moral responsibility are all crucial to their future lives as adults.

Nevertheless, for too long public rhetoric on education, heavy with references to economic competitiveness and changing workplace demands, has highlighted economic concerns and conflated them with the common good, eclipsing a focus on personal development and moral citizenship. Despite scholarly voices like Michael Apple and James Beane, John Dewey, John Goodlad, Roger Soder and Bonnie McDaniel, Maxine Greene, Amy Gutmann, Richard Rorty, and Michael Rose who caution that the quality of democratic life depends on a participatory, engaged public and that such a public is unlikely to emerge unless society supports the teaching of democratic ideals and practices¹, citizenship goals for education often fade to the background. Recently, however, there has been a hopeful resurgence of calls for schools to take seriously their role in preparing students for democratic citizenship, and those calls seem to be getting louder and better heeded. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, has argued powerfully that educators need to prepare students for self-reflective, empathic citizenship.² In doing so, she has joined a chorus of others reminding the American people that critically reflective citizens whose own humanity is cultivated sufficiently to ask the best of and for themselves while also recognizing the humanity in others are the *sine qua non* of a democracy.³

¹ Michael Apple and James Beane, *Democratic Schools: Lessons in Powerful Education* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Press, 2007); John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1954); John Goodlad, Roger Soder, and Bonnie McDaniel, *Education and the Making of a Democratic People* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008); Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988); Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Group, 2000); Michael Rose, *Why School?: Reclaiming Education for All of Us* (New York: The New Press, 2009).

² Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Public Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

³ Apple and Bean, *Democratic Schools*; Goodlad, Soder, and McDaniel, *Democratic People*; Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, University Press, 2004); Lorraine McDonnell, P. Michael Timpane, and Roger Benjamin, *Rediscovering the Democratic Purposes of Schools* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000); Deborah Meier, *In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Trust in an Era of Testing and Standardization* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003); Norman Nie, Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Barry, *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago

We concur with Martha Nussbaum. Schools ought to help students learn to participate in civic life and to contribute to the common good. Moreover, we agree with John Dewey that actually engaging students in democratic experiences and practices is the best possible approach.⁴ It is simply not enough to teach students *about* democratic life; they must experience it. And yet, before asking teachers to be responsible for creating these opportunities and imbuing these values in their students, it is essential to recognize that teachers are not afforded similar opportunities in the schools where they work.

Unfortunately, most teachers live their professional lives in hierarchical, bureaucratic institutions and have little say in political and institutional policies that affect their work. While being exhorted to teach for democracy, most have precious few opportunities to be engaged in democratic practices in their schools. Thus, students witness the adults in the schools where they spend so much of their young lives following orders and customs rather than participating in democratic life.⁵ As John Dewey and Amy Gutmann have so effectively argued, teaching for democratic citizenship should be undertaken by those actually committed to democratic ideals that they embed in their daily educational practices.⁶ Thus, any call for democratic education for K-12 students simply must be accompanied by a similar call for democratic approaches to the in-service and pre-service education of teachers as well as more democratically structured public schools.

Moreover, a serious and daunting obstacle is the current educational policy context emphasizing standardization and testing. Such a political agenda narrows the curriculum in order to emphasize content that can be easily tested. It discourages teachers from focusing on the overall development of their students, including their critical thinking skills and civic involvement. This 2nd grade teacher's reflection serves to highlight the conundrum many teachers face:

When I first began my teaching career, teaching was about exploration, discovery and excitement for learning. My class and I could happen upon a butterfly or a group of workers fixing electrical lines outside of school. We could then take time to think, discover and learn about what we had encountered. It was pertinent to my students' lives and personal experience. Maybe we would become entomologists and learn more about butterflies or maybe we'd be electrical engineers and discover how electricity is made and how it is transported from house to house. We would spend time questioning, researching, thinking, recording data, reporting, discussing, and problem solving. Today,

Press, 1996); Walter Parker, *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002).

⁴ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1916).

⁵ Deborah Meier, *The Power of their Ideas* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002).

⁶ Dewey, *Public and its Problems*; Gutmann, *Democratic Education*.

education has been reduced to memorizing facts and bubbling in circles with a number two pencil. The amount of curriculum pounded into the head of a seven year old second grader is disturbing. . . High stakes standardized testing, such as that mandated in *No Child Left Behind* legislation, does not measure learning. It measures memorization and children are being left behind all over this country. The children being brought up in this era of *No Child Left Behind* testing are not going to be able to solve the problems of our country and world, such as the energy crisis, because they are not being taught to be problem solvers or thinkers. They are not being taught civic responsibility to their community or country. They are not being taught democratic thinking, the foundation of education.

This teacher sees clearly the connection between teacher agency and voice, on the one hand, and teacher responsibility to educate students for democratic participation, on the other:

...Teachers need to have voice in the education of their students. Educational reform should start with the ideas and philosophies of those working directly with students, not administrations or agencies that have little hands-on experience with children and what happens daily in the classroom... Students need to be taught to be productive members of society. They need to learn democratic thinking and how to serve and be a responsible member of the community. Students need to be involved in the community that they live. Students need to be taught how to be problem-solvers. They need to learn to question issues and problems found within their community and school. They need to learn how to name, reflect and act.

In this article, we begin by providing a theoretical framework that makes a case for why ideals and practices of deliberative democracy ought to be a primary aim of teacher education and public schooling. Next, we describe two different teacher education programs designed around principles of deliberative democracy and ground our arguments in the realities we've faced and new possibilities we've opened. Subsequently, we elucidate persistent constraints and obstacles in grounding these programs in deliberative democratic practices. We end on a hopeful note drawing on words of several teachers for whom this approach made a telling difference.

Deliberative Democracy for *Both* Students and Teachers

We, the three authors of this paper, teach veteran teachers in cohort-based Master's programs. Committed to reminding teachers of the democratic mission of the public schools, we have been struck repeatedly with how easily this mission gets lost in the whirlwind of demands on teachers' lives. The reasons are myriad and culturally-entrenched. Certainly, the conflict over goals for public schools, discussed above, contributes to the problem. The history of the teaching profession itself provides further clues. Public school teaching evolved as "women's work" once the U.S. system began educating for the masses. Women who entered teaching were drawn into the profession because of their "natural" affinity for children and then were

expected to obey the policies of their supervisors and school boards, both of whom were predominately men.⁷ This hierarchical structure of public schools has endured, and most teachers, whether men or women, are still expected to implement decisions rather than make them. Such a structure melded nicely with a “technical rationality” model for teaching practices, an ideology developed by Frederick Taylor at the turn of the 20th century.⁸ This model set up a linear relationship with theoreticians at the top as knowledge constructors, practitioner educators as “middlemen” and translators, and teachers as implementers of the strategies. Accordingly, teachers were not only divorced from decision-making but also from professional knowledge. Based on principles of expert knowledge, efficient operation, and faithful implementation, technical rationality made of the educational system an ideal vehicle for the standardized test movement that emerged in the 20th century.

Currently, in fact, accountability translates to fulfillment of standards, measured by test scores, which are imposed from outside the profession. As a result, teachers have little input into expectations for their profession. Worse, they continue to be denied the opportunity to affect policy, and policy-makers continue to be denied the inside knowledge built from teaching practice that could significantly inform their work. For several decades now, standards themselves have been created in response to “manufactured crises”, which rally the public’s concern about the performance of public schools while simultaneously discrediting the teaching profession.⁹ All the while, the resultant controversy serves specific political agendas. Consequently, trust is eroded among stakeholders, schools and the teaching profession. Accountability ought to be rooted in authentic democratic communities whose members actually *account* to one another regarding their contributions toward shared values and goals—that is, toward the common good of their students, their profession, and the community.¹⁰

That kind of accountability requires that teachers and the general public engage in the deliberative democratic practices that they will need to navigate legitimate controversies about public schooling.¹¹ We ascribe to Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson’s definition of deliberative democracy, “a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are

⁷ Madeleine Grumet, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst, NY: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Gutmann, *Democratic Education*; Nancy Hoffman, *Woman’s “True” Profession: Voices from the History of Teaching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2003).

⁸ Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1995).

⁹ David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attacks on America’s Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

¹⁰ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*; Deborah Meier and George Wood, *Many Children Left Behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act is Damaging Our Children and Our Schools* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2004); Diane R. Wood, “Teachers’ Learning Communities: Catalyst for Change or Infrastructure for the Status Quo?” *Teachers College Record* 109: 3 (2007).

¹¹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*; Gutmann, *Democratic Education*; Meier, *Schools we Trust*; Parker, *Teaching Democracy*.

mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future.”¹² Thus, citizens ought to hold an authentic concern for the public good, form opinions about furthering it, make reasons for their opinions public, listen in humility to others’ opinions and reasons, and deliberate in good faith toward resolution.¹³ Citizens committed to deliberative democracy understand that conclusions and decisions are binding in the short run for the sake of the public good, but that they must remain open to reasonable challenges and better ideas. Such citizens also understand that deliberative dialogue must be as inclusive and respectful as possible. Walter Parker concurs, arguing eloquently that dialogue across human differences is particularly important:

Deliberation with diverse others hopes to bring into existence a wise decision to act, certainly wiser than what results when people do not think together about the problems they face. This is its point. A ‘we’ is deciding an issue, and each member will be bound by it.¹⁴

In a similar vein, Patrick Jenlink, in making a case for the revitalization and recommitment to Deweyan educational principles, explains:

Dewey believed that communication is what holds a democracy together. The process of people discussing their individual and group desires, needs, and prospective actions allows them to discover their shared interests in the consequences of their actions. This is what generates “social consciousness,” or “general will,” and creates the ability to act on collective goals. It is this process of communication and deliberation over collective goals that constitutes a democratic public.¹⁵

Thus, deliberative democratic practices, aimed at fulfillment of shared aims, produce wiser, more informed ways for human beings to be and act together; but they will not and cannot develop in a vacuum. Our hope is that these practices might also lead to wiser, more purposeful, and better informed decisions about public education. Opportunities to engage in the messiness of democracy ought to be a part of everyone’s education, and it is our hope that teachers who experience democratic learning environments will afford similar opportunities for their students.

¹² Gutmann and Thompson, *Deliberative Democracy*, p. 7.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Parker, *Teaching Democracy*, p. 86.

¹⁵ Patrick M. Jenlink, *Dewey's Democracy and Education Revisited: Contemporary Discourses for Democratic Education and Leadership* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2009), p. xx.

In our work with teachers, therefore, we strive to set up an environment where teachers experience democratic practices, realizing all the while that it is an environment that runs quite counter to those found in many K-12 schools. Thus, we ask teachers to mount opinions about what they are learning; to offer justifications for those opinions; to attend respectfully to multiple and diverse perspectives on various topics; to develop criteria for credibility and trustworthiness; to evaluate contradictory opinions and justifications; to dig deeply for understandings by weighing perspectives different than their own; to work with colleagues using democratic practices, such as negotiation, critique, conflict resolution, consensus building, compromise, and dissent. All of the above demands that we demystify expertise and theory and encourage teachers to see themselves as builders of knowledge and theory and not simply purveyors and/or consumers of them.

In other words, we ask teachers to be citizens in our programs, as we strive to create “small d” democratic communities. Of course, we recognize that graduate school is, by nature, hierarchical and that we wield more power than our students. Nevertheless, we try to de-center ourselves as experts and authorities, highlight teachers’ practitioner knowledge, engage them in collegial deliberation, and encourage them to reflect on democratic pedagogical approaches. Teachers’ voices, perspectives, and collegiality are highlighted throughout the curriculum; but we also encourage throughout an “inquiry stance”¹⁶ by immersing them in the centerpieces of our curriculum: critical pedagogy and teacher research. An “inquiry stance” helps them to recognize the contingency of human knowledge, motivates them to continue seeking answers, and opens them to perspectives of those quite different from themselves—all characteristics of deliberative social practices.

Creating a Democratic Curriculum for Teachers

The structure and curriculum design of both programs incorporate collaboration as a central feature: Teachers work in school teams and a team of faculty co-construct curriculum in ways that provide continual opportunities for critical dialogue and collaboration among the participants. Because we believe that the individual and collaborative skills necessary to engage in a deliberative democracy are similar to those at the core of teacher research and critical pedagogy, the latter have become centerpieces of our curriculum. Teachers develop as teacher researchers and critical educators guided by democratic principles such as shared purpose, shared vision, transparency, fairness, dialogue, listening, and reflection. As they engage in critical reflection, critical dialogue, and informed and thoughtful social action and participation, deliberative practices (i.e., giving reasons for opinions, weighing those opinions against others’ perspectives, holding them open for critique and new knowledge, and so forth) become habits of mind. Working with others toward the common goal of improving the educational experiences of all awakens shared purpose for and deep commitment to these principles and practices in their

¹⁶ Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle, *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research in the Next Generation* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009).

own classrooms (see Figure 1). Thus, teachers have an opportunity to *live* democracy and, as a result, have the skills and the motivation to create similar opportunities for their own students.¹⁷

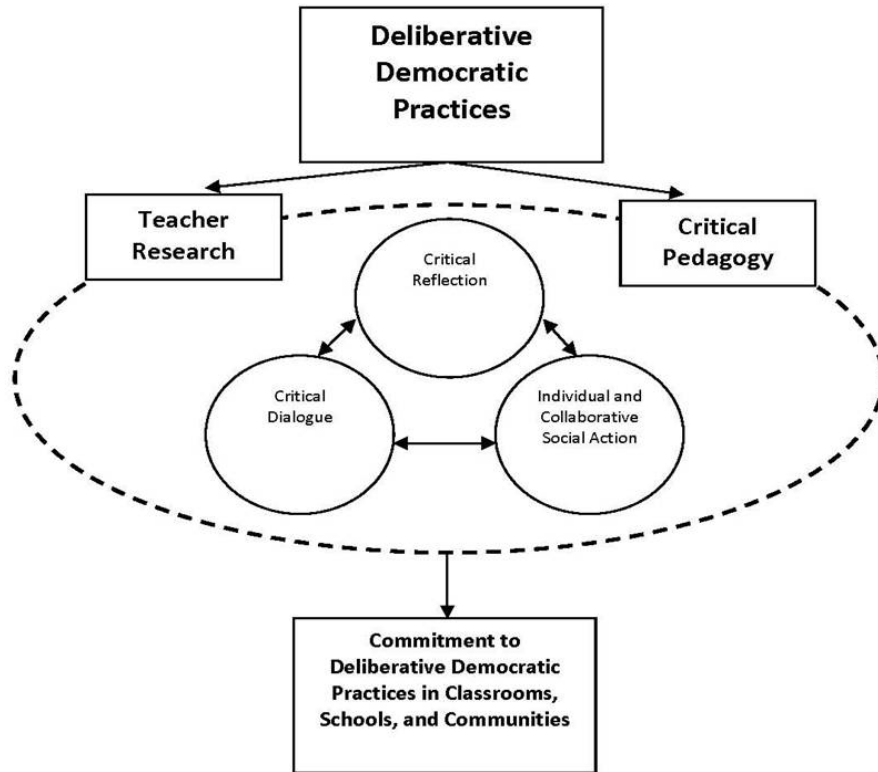


Figure 1. We encourage teachers to develop as teacher researchers and critical educators guided by democratic principles. Working with others toward the common goal of improving the educational experiences of all awakens shared purpose for and deep commitment to these principles and practices in their own classrooms.

Since teacher research is a core, ongoing component of the curriculum that supports the development of a teacher’s critical pedagogy, the goals and processes involved in teacher research need further description. Teacher research is fundamentally research that evolves from and orients toward teaching practice. It is a form of qualitative research, usually naturalistic

¹⁷ Diane R. Wood, “Teacher as Citizen: Professional Development and Democratic Responsibility.” in *Transforming Teacher Education: Lessons in Professional Development*, eds. Hugh T. Sockett, Elizabeth K. DeMulder, Pamela C. LePage, & Diane R. Wood (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2001) p. 33-47.

inquiry, with a basic purpose: to create more constructive, productive, and generative learning experiences for students.¹⁸ Teacher research can take many forms – some of which emanate from the social sciences and others from the humanities. The best teacher research involves systematic and critical reflection and dialogue, and it requires a systematic plan and process of inquiry. Teacher research, while technically a methodology, is actually grounded in the paradigm of action and social change. It addresses questions such as: What is understood about the teaching and learning process, but more importantly what is *not* understood about the process? What actions can be taken to learn more about what students need and to create more meaningful learning experiences for and with them? How can teachers and students transform the teaching and learning process in the classroom? Much of the literature on teacher research is driven by this call to action and change.¹⁹

While teacher research is often viewed as a means toward identifying “best practices,” we imagine this process as going well beyond the development of effective teaching strategies. In accord with Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis, our approach emphasizes that the essential aim of teacher research, as in other forms of action research, is to improve social practice with the participation of those involved in the practice.²⁰ The “cycle of action research” is seen as an “embodiment of democratic principles in research, allowing participants to influence, if not determine, the conditions of their own lives and work, and collaboratively to develop critiques of social conditions which sustain dependence, inequality or exploitation.”²¹ This cycle of research supports teachers to develop “inquiry as stance”; in other words to develop:

a way of knowing and being in the world of educational practice that carries across educational contexts and various points in one’s professional career and that links individuals to larger groups and social movements intended to challenge the inequities perpetuated by the educational status quo.²²

In our curricula, the inquiry process is grounded in critical reflection, which, according to Stephen Brookfield, is reflection that has two essential purposes: to understand issues of power in educational processes and interactions and to question assumptions and practices that on the

¹⁸ Cynthia A. Lassonde and Susan E. Israel, eds. *Teachers Taking Action: A Comprehensive Guide to Teacher Research* (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2008); Geoffrey E. Mills, *Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher 2nd ed.* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2003).

¹⁹ Cochran-Smith and Lytle, *Inquiry as Stance*; Cher Hendricks, *Improving Schools through Action Research: A Comprehensive Guide for Educators* (New York: Pearson, 2006); Stacia M. Stribling, Elizabeth K. DeMulder, and Elavie Ndura. “Introduction to the Case Studies” accompanying *Teachers taking action: A comprehensive guide to teacher research* (Newark: International Reading Association, Inc., 2008), <http://www.reading.org/downloads/publications/books/463/bk463-OS-Intro.pdf>

²⁰ Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge, and Action Research* (London: Falmer, 1986).

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 164.

²² Cochran-Smith and Lytle, *Inquiry as Stance*, viii.

surface seem to make teaching easier yet in actuality work against our intended educational goals and interests.²³ It is through this critical reflection that teachers can then take informed action, develop a rationale for their practice, enliven their classrooms, and increase democratic trust.²⁴

The inquiry process of teacher research as enacted in our curricula is also dependent on critical dialogue with peers, colleagues, students, parents, and community members. As teachers develop trusting and respectful relationships with others through the teacher research process, critical reflection and critical dialogue can lead to informed and thoughtful action. Thus the teacher research process has the potential to impact teaching and learning practices that support critical pedagogy and deliberative democracy as teachers and students learn to:

- express their values and opinions while remaining open to those of others
- raise and discipline their voices, and
- take informed and thoughtful action, "going public" with knowledge, ideas, and concerns in order to participate in making needed changes in their classrooms and school communities.

We do require that our teachers keep written documentation of their critical reflections as they engage in the inquiry process and in critical dialogue with others. Written reflections can take many forms: weekly journal entries, on-going stance papers, end of semester reflections, autobiographical narratives, research memos, and end-of-class day reflections are just a few of these forms. These reflections might be in the form of a paper shared with the instructor or might be posted in an on-line environment for consideration within the larger class community. The on-line postings extend the audience for teachers' reflections, serving to strengthen public voices and to spark public dialogue. Sometimes we assign a topic for reflection and other times teachers are free to choose their own pressing issue or topic. Examples of these written reflections are used throughout the paper as powerful evidence of teachers' engagement with deliberative democratic practices as they and their students begin to develop their voices, consider multiple viewpoints, and take thoughtful action toward the development of more inclusive and just school communities.

Challenges Teachers and Teacher Educators Face

Lest we give the impression that the potential of these deliberative democratic practices is easily realized, we want to impose a critical frame to highlight some of the impediments (structural and otherwise) that challenge the efforts of teachers and teacher educators to work toward deliberative democracy in their classrooms. As was discussed earlier, the culture of schools is such that teachers now expect to be told what is important to know and what they are expected to do. Thus, a deliberative democratic curriculum design that de-centers faculty

²³ Stephen D. Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 1995).

²⁴ *ibid*, p. 22-25.

expertise and authority challenges some participants. Teachers are quite familiar and therefore comfortable with the more traditional didactic methods of instruction with the teacher as “sage on the stage” (often experienced throughout their own education and in their teacher training). In contrast, a deliberative, constructivist approach such as ours leaves open opportunities for participants, individually and collaboratively, to drive their own learning with the teacher as “guide on the side” and the learning outcomes do not have a preordained result; the results are necessarily negotiated. For many teachers, the common initial and sometimes long term reaction to this unfamiliar educational experience is a sense of discomfort, as illustrated here:

What pops out the most to me is my comfort level with the structure of the class. On the first few days I said more than once, "I want to hear your expertise." Now I get it! It became clearer to me with the discussion in the class meeting on Relationships. I now better understand that you were trying to guide us to our own learning in order for us to feel empowered and connected to our learning. A common theme that I see going across the two weeks is the power and importance of teaming. I mentioned several times about how successful occasions of learning were enhanced by working with my team.

In a hierarchical school culture, teachers have been socialized to follow rules, policies, and standards with little expectation that their knowledge and experience will or should guide practices in their classrooms and schools. Thus, even when a teacher’s careful research reveals strong evidence of a need for changes in practice, some teachers worry that if they voice concerns or change accepted practice, they are in jeopardy of getting fired. A teacher expresses her frustration with her peers who have this concern:

I get so frustrated constantly hearing people say they can't take action because it puts their job in jeopardy. I do not believe your job will be in jeopardy if you have a discussion with your class about accepting and respecting people for who they are. I wish teachers would realize that they are not as powerless as some would have them believe. It is not as easy for a teacher to lose their job as they might think. I have taken a stand in a number of controversial situations at my school/class this past year and have either been respected/applauded for them or ignored. Not everyone has agreed and I directly butted heads with my principal on one matter, but NEVER has anyone threatened to remove me from my position.

Teachers recognize not only the power wielded over them but the power they wield over their students and they grapple with the cost and benefits of giving up some of that power in the service of creating more democratic classrooms, as a teacher indicated in this reflection:

It is easy for the teacher to be the dictator of the classroom. However, it takes a much stronger and more confident teacher for them to take a step back and put the power in the hands of the students. I plan on trying to follow this philosophy as much as possible. Not only will this help my students grow as learners, but it will help me grow as a teacher.

Cost-benefit analyses are also evident when teachers come up against perspectives and world views that challenge their own. Many teachers respond to cognitive dissonance (the discomfort experienced when a new perspective or experience conflicts with long held beliefs or prior experiences) with an open-minded attitude and an enthusiasm for critical dialogue. Others feel so threatened or uncomfortable by the experience that they use resistance strategies (e.g., rationalization, avoidance, and so forth) to shut down dialogue and opportunities for learning, as this reflection suggests:

The most unsettling thing for me as we continue to explore this topic [race and racism] and grapple with the feelings and issues that arise, is the complete and total unwillingness of some people to even consider true participation. I'm actually disgusted by some of the responses of a few people in particular who are just too cool for school when it comes to these topics... It just really, really disappoints me as we continue to try and develop relationships with each other as a community of critical moral professionals in an effort to better the whole of our vocation and ourselves, that people are just turning up their noses and refusing to be bothered.

As teacher educators, we need to respond appropriately and sensitively to teachers as they face their own challenges, supporting them as best we can so that they can move forward as full participants and as empowered educators. We are not impervious to other challenges, including biases and narrow-thinking. We need to critique ourselves and each other and ask ourselves hard questions about our own practices and the culture in which we practice. We are aware that our commitments to deliberative democratic practices and to social justice are ideological frames that may eclipse the voices of others, and, particularly when challenged, we need to be careful to practice the deliberative democratic practices that we “preach.”

Another important challenge involves the disconnection between the classroom culture we attempt to co-construct with teachers and the wider university culture in which we teach. While K-12 teachers work in a hierarchical culture in schools, so too do teacher educators in universities, and that culture necessarily impacts the power dynamics of the environment we create with teachers. Teachers receive grades from us for the work they do in graduate school that serve as a measure of their “performance.” However much we profess to attempt a leveling of the hierarchy, the university structure, particularly the requirement that we impose grades, limits our abilities to create environments that emphasize deliberation and collaboration among all participants. In turn, our work as teacher educators is evaluated by our students through required standardized university faculty evaluations that emphasize qualities of traditional classrooms. As noted above, the unfamiliar, less “clear” learning environment and the dialogue around important yet controversial topics often involves discomfort, and this discomfort is sometimes reflected in faculty evaluations, particularly in the early months of the program. These evaluations have important implications for promotion and tenure at the university. Thus, ironically, a challenge for faculty is to engage in deliberative democratic teaching practices that

may negatively affect their ability in the long term to continue the work. The overwhelming evidence from participants suggests that it is valuable work to continue. This reflection written at the end of the program highlights the ways that many teachers, over time, re-orient their goals, come to understand and appreciate the curriculum, and incorporate ideas into their own practice:

When I entered the program, I knew that I wanted to be a better teacher. I was looking for techniques/lesson ideas that I could use in my classroom. Then the questions that I brought with me were answered with even more ideas and questions with [the program]. Now as I look back at my time over the past two years, I have become more comfortable with questioning and working toward answers. The black and white ideas are no longer valid, instead I search out multiple perspectives and want to think about the issues in a more complex way. I also encourage the students who I teach to do the same. Questioning leads to understanding and helps your ideas evolve. Using this questioning/reflective mentality is a goal that I have for the rest of my teaching career.

As suggested here, despite the challenges that teachers and teacher educators face, evidence suggests that efforts to create learning environments that support teachers' engagement in deliberative democratic practices can reap huge benefits for teachers and their students. The following case studies illustrate two of the transformative paths teachers have taken.

CASE 1: Andrea's Engagement with Deliberative Democratic Practices

Andrea is a teacher whose story illustrates how engagement with our teaching philosophy and practices helped her to express her values and opinions while remaining open to those of others, to raise and discipline her voice, and to take informed and thoughtful action in order to make needed changes in her own classroom. These then became skills that she sought to foster in her own students through her teacher research project.

Andrea had been teaching for six years before joining the Initiatives in Educational Transformation (IET) Master's Program. The IET program was developed in large part to address the disconnect that often exists between degree programs and the work teachers do in their classrooms. Through a focus on collaboration, deliberative democratic practices, reflective practice, school-based inquiry, and continuous improvement, faculty use teachers' experiences to draw out their collective knowledge and subsequently scaffold their growth as critical educators. Teachers join in school teams, with other teachers from their schools or from neighboring schools. Faculty model the collaborative process by working in teams of three to five. Each team consists of a combination of full-time, tenure-track faculty and part-time instructors who co-plan and co-teach the curriculum for the 30-credit, two-year program.

In the beginning, there were aspects of the program that challenged Andrea. She was a "good" student who had succeeded in her educational endeavors in the past by following the rules and doing exactly what was asked of her. In this new democratic environment, she

articulated “struggling at times” with aspects she felt were “unclear in the program.” One of these “unclear” aspects was the grading process. Andrea was used to a grading system that laid out very specific learning objectives with clear and instrumental procedures for meeting them. However, we introduced broad themes and asked students to find relevance and meaning for themselves, which required open-endedness and continuing dialogue as we nudged for deeper, more critical responses. This emphasis on personal growth was often in tension with the traditional school emphasis on meeting specific objectives. Andrea reflected on this tension: “I will admit that I am working to accept the grading structure within the class...I am pledging to work to get over that feeling, and be content with doing the best I can.” Even though the structure of the program was a challenge, Andrea remained committed to engaging in democratic practices and learning from them.

Although Andrea struggled with open-endedness regarding grades, she learned to be far more comfortable with it as she engaged in collegial dialogue. One of the more powerful aspects of the program for Andrea was the collaborative structure. Her teammate was another elementary teacher with whom she had taught for several years. She identified her teammate as “a great source of information and discussion” who held her “accountable” to the work and to her goal of improving her practice. Having the opportunity to collaborate with peers in the class was also beneficial for Andrea. As she stated, “I always process better when I am able to talk things out with other people. Listening to other people's ideas in cohort was powerful in providing direction and clarity to my thoughts.” Of course, not all of Andrea’s classmates were comfortable in a dialogue process that introduced multiple perspectives. She sometimes expressed her frustration with those who struggled to engage in conversations that challenged their thinking. As she reflected, “I feel that we are all in this course to grow as people and as educators. In order to do that we have to open our minds up to the opinions of others.”

The deliberative democratic practices that were explicitly tied to the teacher research process proved powerful learning experiences for Andrea. Before asking the teachers to take on a teacher research project, we engaged them in activities that helped them better understand different research methods and develop valuable data collection skills. In an exploration of interviewing and case study methods, we asked Andrea and her classmates to read several case studies about special education students and their families that captured the importance of developing cultural reciprocity with families.²⁵ One of the cases was about a high school student named Silvia whose family was intent on adding reading goals to her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) even though the school system wanted to focus on social skills and job skills. Through the process of cultural reciprocity, the researchers and teachers examined their own beliefs, values, and assumptions in order to create a “third space” where they could engage in dialogue with the family about their beliefs, values, and assumptions resulting in a deeper

²⁵ Beth Harry, Maya Kalyanpur, and Monimalika Day, *Building Cultural Reciprocity with Families: Case Studies in Special Education* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks, 1999).

understanding of how to best meet the needs of the student. Andrea connected with the power of this process and reflected on her developing ability to express her values and opinions while remaining open to those of others:

It was interesting for me to try to separate and understand the difference between my beliefs, values, and assumptions. For me it is learning to be aware of these and how they are a bias in certain situations. I still struggle with looking to find the "right" answer and am now working to value and understand the opinions of others. Discussing Silvia's situation furthered my appreciation in understanding the value conflicts we struggle with everyday. It is trying to hear and understand the opinions of others without viewing that as "wrong" simply because it is different...My way isn't better, it is just different and another way. I feel like working harder to understand parents will allow me to create a third space with those parents from my class.

When she then had an opportunity to conduct her own mini-case study, Andrea used the dialogue process with her colleagues in order to come to a better understanding of how engaging in dialogue with her student's family could be beneficial. She reflected on this new insight:

Honestly, I am still struggling with the delivery of my perspective with the family of the child for my case study. However, after discussions today with colleagues and my advisor, I saw a little more clarity in the benefit of this discussion. Feeling almost certain that my student falls within the autism spectrum and knowing that her parents don't want a label, I was struggling with where to go next. I respect their decision not to label her, but was lacking direction in the benefit of further discussion. I have made decisions about structuring group work and facilitating positive peer relationships with other students she is getting closer to. After discussion today I have been convinced to share this action plan with the parents.

In the process of disciplining her own voice and determining how that voice could work in collaboration with the voices of others, Andrea recognized how powerful it would be to engage her own students in deliberative democratic practices. She decided to embark on a teacher research project that explored ways to give her students voice by creating a student-centered classroom community. She instituted classroom meetings where students were able to "open up about their thoughts and feelings about the processes and systems" that were in place in their classroom. For students who might not be comfortable with jumping right into dialogue, Andrea provided them opportunities to journal about their concerns in order to organize their thoughts before sharing with the group. Using this classroom meeting forum, she and the students reorganized the structure of the classroom; students helped identify essential classroom "jobs" that would contribute to the betterment of the community. In one of her research memos, Andrea noted how powerful this space for dialogue became. She wrote, "Students are connecting to each other through discussions and are truly beginning to listen and understand each other and the different needs that exist within these walls."

This understanding was best illustrated in what unfolded with one of the students in Andrea's class. Shannon was a student who struggled with peer relationships at the beginning of the year and had a difficult time with many academic concepts. As the school year progressed, however, the other students found ways to make Shannon feel like an integral part of the community and to address her unique needs. Andrea noted, "On numerous occasions I have overheard students giving Shannon gentle reminders to complete tasks that seem redundant to the rest of us. The girls often drew pictures for her at recess and the Good Deed Catchers worked extra hard to make sure she was caught doing well." As time went on, Shannon relied less on physical violence to express her feelings and more on the power of her words.

Part way through the year, Shannon was found eligible for special education services, and the team of evaluators thought it would be best for her to receive these services in a self-contained setting at another school. Balancing her concern for Shannon's education with her commitment to considering multiple perspectives, Andrea requested that she visit the setting to determine whether or not it would be an appropriate fit for Shannon. After visiting the other classroom, Andrea realized that the strong democratic community she had created in her own classroom was really what Shannon needed. Andrea compiled the data she had collected for her research project that highlighted Shannon's growth and developed an argument to present to her administration for why Shannon should remain in her current setting. The administration agreed, and Shannon was able to finish out the year in an environment that supported her growth as a vital member of a democratic community.

CASE 2: "We're Just Trying to Learn to Do Our Jobs Better"

When Alan, Dan, and Jeremy began a three-year, cohort-based program with a New England University where one of the authors taught, they were grateful to have the chance to get a head start on their Master's degrees. Eager to attend classes at a learning center much closer to their homes and schools than the main university campus, they were happy about earning the twenty-one graduate credits, which the program offered them. They liked the idea of being only twelve credits away from degree completion by the end of the program. Besides convenience of location, another real draw for them was the idea of working in teams; their particular school sent six teachers. Other reasons for enrolling in the program ranged from moving up on the district salary scale to seizing an opportunity for professional development. All taught courses at a regional vocation center housed in a large, comprehensive high school, and all were committed teachers. As Dan put it, "We're just trying to learn to do our jobs better."

The program was more than they bargained for, however. During two very intense summer weeks at the beginning of their experience, they chafed at the disparity between their own internalized expectations of what an innovative Masters program should be doing for teachers and the actual experiences they were having in the program. Imminently practical, all three had committed to experiential education for *their* students, and the amount of writing and

reading required for their summer course “seemed like too much.” Moreover, they thought the course focused too much on “pie-in-the-sky ideas” about democracy that had little direct relevance to what they were trying to accomplish for their students.

Dubbed “The Professional Teacher in a Democratic Society,” the program cohered around themes of teacher professionalism and democratic aims for education, as well as the intersections between the two. Not only did Alan, Dan, and Jeremy doubt the relevance of the program’s goals to their teaching, they also began to lose some of their teammates. One of their colleagues dropped out after the first course because he deemed the program “too demanding,” and another left a semester later when she relocated to another state. Yet another colleague who was part of the team also left, deciding about halfway through to transfer his credits to an educational administration program. He wrote “This experience has made me want to become a principal so I’ll be in a better position to change things.” Alan, Dan, and Jeremy stayed the course, however. Ultimately, they would come to see teachers can make changes as well.

The curriculum of The Professional Teacher in a Democratic Society built on the foundation of critical reflection, dialogue, reading, and inquiry. As is true in many Masters programs for teachers, students read philosophical and research texts on education, discussed them with professors and colleagues, and wrote reflections on them. But the two keystones of the curriculum were: 1) an educational platform and 2) teacher research.

The platform was an evolving document that students worked on throughout the three years they worked with us. In that document, they stated, revisited and revised their latest stand on a variety of educational issues which unfolded over time in their courses, e.g., education and democratic aims, effective and inclusive pedagogies, equitable learning environments, role of educational research, curriculum controversies, professionalism, accountability, and so forth. By the end of the program, they had created a well thought out philosophy of education, honed by their reading, collegial dialogue, critical reflection, and action research. We hoped that document would provide tangible evidence of how knowledge, commitment, and understanding can shift and deepen with intellectual discipline and a continuing stance of inquiry. Teachers also conducted two action research projects, one in the second year, and the other in the third. The first one they conducted as individuals and the second in collegial teams.

That first summer Alan, Dan, and Jeremy ho-hummed their way through Gerald Grant and Christine Murray’s award-winning book *Teaching in America*, which traces the historical roots and cultural conditions of teaching in the U.S. and argues for its professionalization.²⁶ Although they criticized Dewey’s dense prose, the three teachers did resonate with his view on pedagogy in *Experience and Education*, but said “he’s not telling us anything new.” Their first real breakthrough came as they struggled to land on a question for their individual research

²⁶ Gerald Grant and Christine Murray, *Teaching in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

project. Admirably committed to their students, they looked around their classrooms and schools to figure out what they might study that would make a difference. Many of their students were from working class and poor families and found themselves routed into vocational courses because they weren't performing well enough in their home high schools to be in college preparation courses. As they thought about educational equity, Alan, Dan, and Jeremy took a hard look at their students' present and future lives. They began to observe their students more closely in their classrooms. Increasingly, they became disturbed by what seemed to be a serious lack of reading and writing skills. Dan said, "They can't really read manuals, and they can't really express themselves. Jobs are going to be changing a lot. These kids have to be able to read and write reports."

The team had landed on their first research project. Their question became, "How can vocational education teachers incorporate the teaching of literacy skills in their courses?" Alan, who teaches landscaping and horticulture, Dan, who teaches electrical engineering, and Jeremy, who teaches videography, worked for a year as individuals on that question, while regularly coming together to report on their progress. They shared data, read books on literacy ("very unusual for us," said Jeremy), and tried new methods like explicitly teaching reading comprehension skills and asking students to keep journals about their learning. In addition, they brought their research to the larger group on cohort days as a part of each of those days was structured so teams would come together; report on their status; and discuss problems, obstacles, and emerging understandings. Teams were to provide encouragement and support but also rigorous critique.

By the end of that year, the three teachers had read scores of student journal entries, and they had interviewed a number of students about their experiences working on reading and writing in vocational education classes. An unintended consequence for them was learning a lot about students' perspectives about school. Their focus began to shift as they realized how much they were assuming about their students without really asking them. They became convinced that raising students' voices and then really hearing what they had to say was extraordinarily important. Moreover, they began to frame this argument in democratic terms. Alan said, "I'm a good teacher and I care about kids. But I didn't really know about what's going on with these kids. They don't think anybody cares much what they're thinking so they're learning just to shut up—not to be citizens." Jeremy added, "And it's not just about being citizens; these kids don't think they matter much and they're not putting much thought into their futures. They don't really think they can ever be somebody important."

According to their supervisor, something quite dramatic was happening to these three teachers, especially in terms of their relationships with colleagues. For one thing, as they worked to incorporate reading and writing strategies in their curricula, they found themselves consulting with a reading specialist and an English teacher in the high school (their vocational education center, though not directly affiliated, was housed in a high school). They found themselves bringing their research up at the vocational center's faculty meetings and in casual conversation

with counselors and other teachers, always highlighting students' perspectives and what they were learning from them. Before long, many of the staff at both the high school and at the vocational education center got wind of what they were doing; some offered suggestions and encouragement while others asked what they were learning. As their supervisor said, "Their interdisciplinary project became part of the culture at the center." She went on to explain that even some of the high school teachers were expressing respect for what "three guys are doing over there."

Meanwhile, news spread among the students in the vocational education center about the research project. Students who had been interviewed talked about the experience with other teachers and students. They granted permission for their words to be used at faculty meetings. Some began to express appreciation to Alan, Dan, and Jeremy—all popular teachers from the beginning—for taking so much interest in them and representing their views to other teachers. As they wrote in the conclusion of their research project:

- "Students do not seem to understand how their actions or inactions can affect their future."
- "For all the interventions we tried, we feel none of them would have worked if it wasn't for the individual attention each student received from the teachers as well as the guidance counselors.... With so many people checking up on each student, it seems that they realized that we care and wanted them to succeed."
- "More should be done in the school to understand generational poverty. By learning more about our students, we will increase our chances of success with more students."

Thus, Alan, Dan, and Jeremy, as is indicated in the above bulleted points, had learned for themselves the crucial importance of observing students closely and listening to them, of collegial collaboration for the sake of students, and of ongoing professional learning. Professional success had become for them a deliberative process between themselves and their students and between themselves and their colleagues.

Over the summer session between their second and third year in the program, the teachers were asked to develop some ideas for their second research project, this time a team project. Despite the insights they had gained from their individual literacy projects, they wanted to move to bigger issues. They kept focusing on voice and participation; but they also continued to be worried that so many students seemed to have few plans for life after high school. Dan put it succinctly, "I've been hearing a lot about kids and aspirations. These kids don't have aspirations."

Ultimately, they designed an action research project to engage tenth and eleventh graders in developing aspirations for post-secondary education. They introduced them to web-based personality inventories. They found career counseling sites and introduced them to their students. They met with their school-based counselors regularly and actively involved them in their work,

which pleased the counselors a great deal. They asked their students to keep logs about emerging ideas, hopes, and dreams. The three teachers met with parents and provided parent programs. They made a requirement of their courses filling out an application to a post-secondary educational experience and a financial aid application. Most important of all, they held regular meetings with their students to ask about their plans.

Once again, news of the project spread throughout the vocational education center and into the high school. Several high school counselors crossed the divide to the center to ask the men directly what they were doing. The three teachers' supervisor started boasting about their important work at the district office, and an official there recommended they write a grant, which they did and got. Within months, the men were presenting their project not only to their colleagues in the Masters program but they were on the road, presenting to state education officials and other schools. Throughout, they involved students asking them to speak for themselves and for their classmates. One member of the team, Dan, began serving on an "Aspirations Committee" for his county and eventually the state. He said, "It became clear that I could be a leader and still be a teacher . . . Once I learned how to be a leader in the school, it is hard *not* to be one." He went on, "The defining characteristic of a professional teacher is one that continually looks for ways to improve not only their teaching but also to look at the bigger picture and find ways to improve the school environment."

In a reflection at the end of the program, one of the teachers wrote, "This program helped me believe that I have the ability to help all students to succeed. I am more apt to find a way to help a student. Before I may have gotten frustrated, but now I feel better able to ask questions that help me to understand the student." A year and a half after the program ended, Dan wrote about other ways he had found to exercise his professionalism in deliberative processes:

I have been extremely active in school renewal. I have participated in a visioning process that helped create a concept for a new kind of school and out of that process I am leading a pilot project to have academic teachers team with vocational teachers to teach math and English to vocational students using applications from the vocational programs.

Jeremy concurred and has decided to enter an educational administration certificate program. All three of these teachers had decided to "go public" and to contribute as much as possible to the policy direction of their school and district—all for the sake of students.

Conclusion

Both Master's programs we have described immersed teachers in deliberative discursive practices so that they could experience for themselves the power of democratic forms of collaboration. Both programs supported teachers as they developed stronger voices as advocates for productive, humane, and effective learning environments for their students. We, the authors of this paper, found most of the teachers in our program invigorated by the opportunity to

develop critical lenses for viewing educational policies, theories, and practices, as well as their own grounded and contextualized theories and practices, while participating in a challenging and yet supportive collegial community.

The journey has not always been easy. We have met with some resistance. We remain committed to this work because most teachers, in time, resonate with the learning environment and the curriculum, and they indicate through their research, reflections and feedback to us that the experiences profoundly transform their thinking and their teaching practice for the better. While they too sometimes meet with resistance as they attempt to improve their practice and their school, they too say that they remain committed to the work for their own sake and for the sake of their students. We end as we started with the voice of a teacher reflecting on her experience:

I feel now that I am so much more conscious of meeting the needs of each individual student. Finding my own voice more has given me the courage to let them also use their voices. I approach my classroom with a completely different perspective, and I'm not so afraid to be "out there" and take risks with trying something new. I'm not so fearful of what is different from me, and I'm more curious and open to finding out differing perspectives and not being so stinkin' judgmental of them! I'm not so afraid to be vulnerable with others, knowing it's OK to mess up, and I don't have to wear the perfect teacher face all the time. It's OK to hurt, and wonder, and question, and not know the answers, and it's OK for my students to know that about me. It gives them the freedom to do that too, I think. I guess in the end, my goal is to keep growing, keep transforming, keep learning, keep this journey going.....even though the formal experience has ended, in my heart and mind, it will never end.

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