INTRODUCTION

The Talk and the Walk of Democratic Teacher Education

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Where should we begin in our pursuit of democratic ideals? If democracy is to become a way of life in contemporary North American society, we certainly need to have schools with strong democratic commitments. This is no easy task. However, if we are going to have democratic schools, we certainly need teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for developing sustained democratic ways of educating. This too is no easy accomplishment. Following this line of logic still further, if we are going to seek and sustain democratic teachers, we will also need to have democratic teacher educators: committed and down-to-earth teachers of teachers who can call forth democratic possibilities in a wide variety of situations. This book focuses on the delicate and precarious work of democratic teacher educators, but also by necessity connects with democratic projects in schools and society.

In this book we will look at the unique and complex work of a varied collection of democratic teacher educators from throughout North America as they describe their attempts to transform public schools, higher education, and societal practices. Using a diverse group of democratic educational projects, we will tap into the ways democratic teacher educators from large state institutions, small rural colleges, urban private universities, new academic programs, and special teacher development centers are working to create the resources and opportunities for teachers to develop the perspective, skills, support, and confidence necessary to promote sustained democratic practices. The diverse work of these teacher educators has important implications for down-to-earth democratic theory and practice.

Democratic teacher educators have to be down-to-earth as they develop theories, principles, and strategies for making democratic practices take hold. Their focus is on the deliberate process of preparing, sustaining, and transforming those involved in classrooms and other learning settings with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for them and their students to meaningfully participate in the self-rule of all in their society. This too is certainly no easy task. It is even more difficult because teacher educators involved in such participative democratic projects not only have to "know their stuff," they also have to model and make available for inspection their approaches to democratic

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teaching. These teachers of teachers feel the pressure and obligation not only to "talk the democratic talk" but also to "walk the democratic walk." This doubly difficult task requires sound thinking, solid interpersonal skills, and thoughtful articulation. However, they do not have to start from scratch because a democratic tradition is available to them. Their work can be seen as continuing and extending the democratic project of John Dewey.

Democratic Talk

Certainly, any talk of democratic teacher education has to involve John Dewey and his evolving conceptualization of democracy. Dewey, the author of the seminal text, *Democracy and Education*,[1] saw the vital links among democracy, philosophy, and education and focused a great deal of his professional work on the articulation of this seamless web. For Dewey, a social philosopher through and through, democracy is a type of associative living which enables us to hold things in common by way of communication and thus live in community; "philosophy is the theory of education as a deliberately conducted practice";[2] and education is the laboratory in which we can see what difference philosophical insight can make in the practice of living a meaningful life. Thus, Dewey's democratic educational philosophy emphasizes the importance of maintaining, protecting, and enhancing deliberative and self-correcting communicative practices in and out of schools for the sake of sharing, savoring, critiquing, and extending the goods found in experience.

No ivory tower speculator, from 1896 to 1904 Dewey tested and refined his philosophical, democratic, and educational ideas in his work with the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. Putting ideas into practice and testing and refining both ideas and practices as a result of reflective inquiry were integral to the Deweyan method. So strong was Dewey's interest in this self-correcting educational method and its connection to philosophy that he once wrote to his wife, "I sometimes think I will drop teaching philosophy directly, and teach it via pedagogy."[3] Although he did not drop teaching philosophy directly, his talk and thoughts were constantly in democratic and educational places.

But why is this Deweyan concept of democracy important? What light does it shine on the work of the democratic teacher educators highlighted in this volume? Quite simply, Dewey developed a cogent and comprehensive notion of participative democracy that is essentially linked with a pragmatic approach to experience, inquiry, and education. Each of the chapters in this text comes in contact, often implicitly, with Deweyan notions of participative democracy, pragmatism, experience, inquiry, and education. Let's turn first to Dewey's notion of participative democracy.

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In a recent and extensive biography of John Dewey, Robert Westbrook[4] uses the concept of democracy as the integrating idea in Dewey's lifework. According to Westbrook, Dewey's philosophical work began in, and returned to, an attempt to more clearly articulate the implications of a democratic way of life. Westbrook thinks Dewey was quite successful and states emphatically in the introduction of his book:

> Among liberal intellectuals of the 20th century, Dewey was the most important advocate of participatory democracy, that is, of the belief that democracy as an ethical ideal calls upon men and women to build communities in which the necessary opportunities and resources are available for every individual to realize fully his or her particular capacities and powers through participation in political, social and cultural life.[5]

It should be noted that Dewey's participatory democracy, with its vital link to the quality of everyday social life and the character development of all people, is very different from the notion of democracy proffered by the late Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Soul of Today's Students*.[6] For Bloom, a strong critic of Dewey's approach to education and democracy, democracy is important because it is the best way for the best to get to the top. Higher education has failed because it has lost sight of the truths which enable the best to succeed. From a Deweyan perspective, this is a very limited and questionable notion of democracy. For Dewey, "democracy is the name of a way of life of free and enriching communion in which free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication".[7] Thus, for Dewey, democracy serves as an ethical ideal worth seeking because of its communicative and educative effects. Seeking this ethical ideal was deeply grounded in Dewey's pragmatism.

Dewey's pragmatism is a down-to-earth philosophy that focuses on the integration of theory and practice, and provides alternatives to time-worn pursuits. In doing so, it goes against the grain. For example, rather than pursuing THE GOOD, THE TRUE, and THE BEAUTIFUL, it could be said that Dewey's pragmatism is more interested in seeking the better, the warranted, and the enlivening. This difference is not mere semantics but instead has serious implications for our orientation to everyday endeavors. For example, by seeking the "better" in concrete situations Dewey felt we could appreciate what is good in situations and build on the tensions, realities, and ideals also present in these same situations. By seeking the warranted, we could think in terms of communicating that which we can make intersubjectively available and give evidence for, but, in the process, always remain open to the possibilities of correcting or refining our perspectives (or even of perceiving the importance of viewing things from very different vantage points). By seeking the enlivening,

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we could become aware of aesthetic possibilities in our everyday situations and try to creatively experiment so as to make these possibilities actualities. Thus, Dewey's pragmatism is grounded in everyday life practices and the desire to use experience and creative inquiry to construct a life worth living, a life with many and varied connections to others that seeks deeper and more meaningful experiences.

Experience and inquiry are the essence of Dewey's pragmatic democratic education. For Dewey, experience represents the totality of our transactions with our environment and the felt quality of our existence. It is the noncognitive live connection from which thinking begins and returns as we deal with life situations. Quite simply, what Dewey seeks is "education of, by, and for experience."[8] Inquiry is the deliberate process of examining felt difficulties in experience. To inquire in order to bring the better, the warranted, and the enlivening into our experiences involves the self-correcting use of reflection, imagination, experimentation, observation, and judgment. It should be noted that these same qualities of inquiry are demonstrated in the best of scientific and aesthetic thinking and, from a Deweyan perspective, should serve as basics for a down-to-earth focus for democratic education.

Returning full circle, participative democracy to Dewey is an important ethical ideal because it is the best means for getting educated, that is for getting smarter about things that matter and processes that enhance life experiences. This goes well beyond the view of education offered by Mortimer Adler, an early critic and late admirer of Dewey. Adler dedicates his *Paideia Proposal*[9] to Dewey for holding steady on the vital connection between democracy and education. However, although Adler offers practical suggestions and strong policy proposals for the realization of more equality in public education, he is only touching the surface of the ubiquity of Dewey's notion of democratic education, change, and values.

Dewey's pragmatic democratic educational philosophy is no value-free philosophy of mere change. It is vitally concerned with the responsibility of "conserving, transmitting, rectifying, and expanding the heritage of values we have received";[10] it is grounded in values people bring to situations, but it does not stop there. The values people bring to situations are the down-to-earth starting places for much of our inquiry. The practice of participating in, questioning, and bettering these values is much of what education is all about. Certainly this involves what we do in classrooms and how we structure our schools, but it also goes well beyond this to all aspects of our cultural life. That is, we get smarter about life and develop our individuality and connectedness when we engage in cultural practices as thoughtful and creative participants capable of sustained inquiry and conversation. This is the shared value of democracy and education; this is what connects the talk about pragmatism, experience, and inquiry. Putting this talk to work is the goal of the democratic teacher educators in this volume.

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Democratic Walks

Although Dewey spent most of his professional life deepening his conceptualization of democracy, and a significant part of it encouraging democratic work in schools and in the larger society, he was well aware of the practical complexities involved in democratic teacher education. His Lab School, a bastion of democratic experiences and experimentation, was not open to or for the production of new teachers. Dewey felt that the work in the Lab School required competence well beyond what new candidates could be expected to display. Also, Dewey's personal teaching style, which was memorable to only a few, could, at best, be called traditional. Although his lectures were certainly rich in democratic content, he was not a classroom embodiment of democratic pedagogy.

To further complicate matters, Dewey's essential democratic educational ideas are much more easily professed than practiced. There is a seductive consummatory quality in being able to sound Deweyan. Perhaps because it takes some intellectual effort to understand and articulate Deweyan thoughts, teacher educators who are so inclined may sometimes feel they need not, or can not, go any further. They may feel that just articulating the words has the power to bring about democratic change. Dewey was aware of this. As Alan Ryan points out, "Dewey himself thought that teacher training institutions often paid lip service to his ideas, but that he had made very little difference to the practice of elementary schools."[11] This certainly must have been discouraging to a philosopher of democratic change. However, Dewey, true to form, tried to find ways to learn from this experience. This led him in his later years to more deeply articulate the concept of democracy and the necessity for, and difficulties with, working in schools and society in democratic ways. Difficulties and all, Dewey stayed committed to the concept that the cure for the problems of democracy is not less democracy but more democracy.

The teacher educators in this book have taken up and extended Dewey's call for more democracy. They too have gone against the grain in developing down-to-earth ways to extend experience and inquiry through democratic participation. In addition, they have focused a significant part of their work on the daily activities of teachers and have attempted to create, display, and defend democratic ways of becoming and continuing to be a democratic teacher. The programs and processes they are working with are not without their problems, as they so honestly point out, but examining their work certainly adds to the prospect of developing wider-eyed democratic talk and more substantive and imaginative democratic walks.

The following 13 chapters are divided into programs and processes. Although this clear-cut division does not exist in the chapters themselves or in the actual work of these democratic teacher educators, this differentiation

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enables us to see the importance of organizing and networking for democratic ends in addition to the quality of interpersonal relationships and deliberative skills that are necessary to function democratically in the classroom.

NOTES

1. Found in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Vol. 9, 1916, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardville: Southern Illinois Press, 1980). Dewey said this was the best statement of his social philosophy up to that time. In the 20s and 30s he deepened his notion of democracy by showing its connections to aesthetic, social, psychological, epistemological, "metaphysical," and religious issues.

2. Ibid., p. 342.

3. Quoted in Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 95.

4. Ibid. On the jacket for this book, Richard Bernstein says "This is without doubt the finest, most comprehensive, and informative book on Dewey that has ever been written." No small praise from a noted pragmatist who also has written a book on Dewey.

5. Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.

6. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Soul of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

7. Westbrook, p. xviii.

8. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier, 1963), p. 29.

9. Mortimer Adler, *The Paideia Proposal* (New York: Macmillan, 1982). Dewey is one of the three in the dedication. The other two are Horace Mann and Robert Hutchins. Adler writes they "would have been our leaders were they alive today" (p. v). Perhaps they might have been our leaders, but I do not think they would have been leading toward the same end.

10. John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 87.

11. Allan Ryan, "Twenty-First Century Limited," *New York Review* (November 19, 1992), p. 23.

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