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Democracy in Teacher Education: Learning From Preservice Teachers' Understandings and Perspectives

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of a teacher education inquiry project focused on teaching in a democracy. The research was conducted by the faculty in a university educational studies/foundations department (EDST) as they engaged in a curriculum development and implementation project designed to better prepare teachers for democratic participation and teaching. In this context, ongoing curriculum examination and revision and embedded data collection and analysis are utilized as important activities in evolving a curriculum delivered to teacher education candidates.

This article includes an overview of theoretical perspectives that guide and inform teacher education efforts in this department and presents a summary of a democracy focused curricular initiative. Findings from this study of candidates' understandings and perspectives on teaching in and for democracy are presented and discussed.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were utilized to develop a picture of candidates' current knowledge, skills and dispositions related to democratic teaching. Analysis and interpretation yielded seven research findings that illustrate the perspectives of teacher education candidates specific to: democratic ideals, orientations, experiences, challenges, pedagogical tools, competency, and schools. These findings will inform curricular, instructional, and programmatic adaptations.

Introduction/Overview

This article provides an overview of a teacher education inquiry project focused on teaching in a democracy. The research was conducted by the faculty in a university educational studies/foundations department (EDST) as we engaged in a curriculum development and implementation project designed to better prepare teachers for democratic participation and teaching. In our context, ongoing curriculum examination and revision and embedded data collection and analysis are utilized as important activities in evolving curricula delivered to teacher education candidates.

We include an overview of theoretical perspectives that guide and inform our departmental teacher education efforts and present a summary of our democracy-focused curricular initiative. Findings from this study of candidates' understandings and perspectives on teaching in and for democracy are presented and discussed. Both quantitative and qualitative data were utilized to develop a picture of candidates' current knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to democratic teaching. Analysis and interpretation yielded seven research findings, presented later in this article, that illustrate the perspectives of teacher education candidates in our program. These findings will inform our future curricular and instructional adaptations and should be of interest to other educators interested in better serving the interests of a thriving, participatory democracy:

Teaching is a profession with certain moral and technical expectations especially the expectation that teachers, working

collaboratively, will acquire, use, and continue to develop shared knowledge on behalf of students…in the United States, education must serve the purposes of a democracy. This latter condition means that teachers assume the purpose of enabling young people to participate fully in political, civic, and economic life in our society. It also means that education—including teaching—is intended to support equitable access to what the society has to offer. (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 303)

This inquiry is our ongoing attempt to collaboratively develop and discuss "shared knowledge on behalf of students." Our project is ultimately aimed at providing democratic teacher education and supporting the "equitable access to what the society has to offer" as noted by Darling-Hammond.

Pursuing democratic education that seeks to close the gap between democratic ideals and social reality should top our agenda. We acknowledge that this gap may never be closed but the pursuit of its closure should serve as an important function in the continual renewal of our schools and nation. We understand that it takes multiple, small, sustained efforts to make larger, long-term changes. In participating in this process, "we become part of the long tradition of people who have dared to make a difference—to look at things as they are, to imagine something better, and to plant seeds of change in themselves, in others, and in the world" (Johnson, 2001, p. 171). It should go without saying that educating informed participatory citizens who are stewards of democracy is, or should be, the primary aim of schooling and that this aim is non-negotiable (Goodlad, 2008). It is our hope that in creating and sharing this account, we further our own, our teacher education candidates', and our profession's understandings of democratic schooling.

Problems Addressed in Study

Schooling is increasingly focused on goals related to a narrow range of academic skills and achievement. This narrowing of the

curriculum is problematic, especially in that it causes a reciprocal de-emphasis on preparing responsible democratic citizens equipped with the broad understandings necessary to participate productively in a multicultural society. Some contemporary scholars assert our educational systems have lost sight of the "social purposes" of education by narrowing the curricula to "tested" subjects (as driven by NCLB) (see e.g., Meier & Wood, 2004). We no longer, as Alhadeff and Goodlad (2008) lament, "share a common public democratic mission for our schools" (p. 7). Understandably then, this national trend away from democratic (and, we include multicultural) education is problematic and an issue that we must ethically address in our teacher education programs.

Research Questions
   The following questions guided the inquiry:

- What are candidates' current understandings and perspectives specific to democracy and schooling?

- What are the essential understandings/perspectives we hope candidates acquire specific to democracy and schooling?

- How can department level teacher education curricula and pedagogical strategies be evolved to include systematic integration of democratic education concepts in ways that are meaningful to candidates and in ways that impact their personal theories of schooling, teaching and learning?

Perspective(s)/Theoretical Framework
   Few systematic approaches to teaching democracy exist, especially specific to teacher education. Democratic education theory, no doubt due to its more abstract conceptual nature, is less prescriptive and therefore interpretation of what it means to educate democratic citizens is interpreted in vastly different ways. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) have advanced our understanding by classifying the multiple approaches to civic/democratic education in "three vi-

sions of citizenship" being realized in education programs. The first vision aims to develop the *personally responsible citizen* who acts responsibly in the community. Students give blood, recycle, and obey laws. The focus is on developing a responsible character. The second vision aims to develop the *participatory citizen*. The focus is on developing active engagement in civic and community affairs. The third vision aims to develop the *justice oriented citizen*. As Westheimer and Kahne describe it, "Justice oriented educators argue that effective democratic citizens need opportunities to analyze and understand the interplay of social, economic, and political forces… advocates of these priorities…call explicit attention to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice" (p. 242). We believe this framework is a useful tool since it introduces alternative conceptions of democracy education and the role of schools, incites debates about the public purposes of schooling, enlists and engages multiple perspectives around competing aims, and considers curricular possibilities related to democracy, public education, and teacher education. While we pursue aims associated with all three visions of citizenship discussed above, it is the justice oriented citizenship model that best aligns with our goals for education in a democracy. In the remainder of this section, we present other theoretical perspectives specific to democracy that have guided our initial research and course level efforts.

Democracy and Diversity

Many others forward the centrality of democratic aims for schools (see e.g., Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley & Goodlad, 2004; Parker, 2003). We agree that principles of democracy are foundational to all aspects of schooling. As Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) explain: "The broad social purposes of public education, the preparation of a citizenry for life in a democracy, must be considered as a foundation for decision making about what is taught and how it is taught" (p. 171). Schools play such a pivotal role since citizens of a democracy, writes Parker (2003), are created, not born.

As faculty and instructors in an educational foundations department we have a major role in preparing candidates for the diversity they will face in public schools. A major dimension of the democratic education project we initiate seeks to support the link between democracy and multicultural education. That is, we see the interdependence of democracy with diversity (our democracy thrives *as a result* of our diversity) and thus, like Parker (2003), contend that our efforts to prepare candidates for multicultural education and democracy are intertwined. As Parker describes it:

> Democratic citizenship education seeks to teach, among other things, that diversity *is* a social fact, that it *is* a social good, *why* this is so, and *how* diversity and democracy require one another. It seeks to do this by educating young and old alike in the arts of democratic living, which include, centrally, an understanding of both *pluribus* (the many) and unum (the one), and an understanding that the two are, in fact, interdependent. (p. 1, italics in original)

Political and Social Democracy

For many, in what Parker (1996) asserts is a "shallow" understanding, democracy is a political process associated primarily with having rights: rights associated with voting, free speech, and religion. That is, this understanding advances democracy purely as a political, procedural process. But an ideal of democracy is clearly much more than that. Goodlad (2008) agrees that it includes participating in these political processes (i.e., voting) but it includes voting wisely. That is, it includes the kind of critical thinking that justice oriented citizens develop, citizens who cultivate wisdom, free and open inquiry, and thoughtfulness (Goodlad, et al., 2004). These theorists illustrate both the political and social facets of democracy. To us, understanding and participating in the more formal, political democratic processes are important, but we also contend these are only a part of the democratic understandings we seek for our

students and ourselves. We additionally strive for understandings specific to contemporary interpretations of social democracy that include support for a democratic welfare state that works to build community and counteract social injustices.

Capitalism, Democracy, and Equity

We seem to have lost sight of our public democratic education mission. We also "seem to have lost the commitment to equality—a fundamental basis for any common standard for equity and justice—that for so long was one of the defining characteristics of American society" (Wood, 2008, p. 30). The recent public policy emphasis on education as an *individual right*, as opposed to education as a *public good*, has had negative ramifications (Weiner, 2000). So, too, has the parallel move to view education as only for the purpose of economic gain. Perhaps then, our lost "obligation to pursue equity" is an indication that the delicate equilibrium between capitalism and democracy is out of balance.

There is general agreement that capitalism and democracy are interdependent to the extent to which capitalism is linked with democracy, shares its values and culture, and facilitates its development. Almond (1991) explains:

> The economy and the polity are the main problem solving mechanisms of human society. They each have their distinctive means, and they each have their "goods" or ends. They necessarily interact with each other, and transform each other in the process. Democracy in particular generates goals and programs. (1991, p. 243)

Inherent in this capitalism/democracy dialectic is tension within and between the two. For example, enlightenment views of capitalism stressed its "gentling, civilizing effect on behavior and interpersonal relationships," but more recent political scientists describe "the culture of capitalism as crassly materialistic, destructively competitive, corrosive of morality, and hence self-destructive" (Al-

mond, 1991, p. 244). These tensions result from the ongoing interface and evolution of democratic and economic systems. "The government has to protect the market from itself. Left to their own devices…businessmen were prone to corner the market in order to exact the highest possible price" (Almond, 1991, p. 246). To avoid this, Smith (cited in Almond, 1991, pp. 246, 247) calls for "good capitalism," and this requires "good government" that provides "just those goods and services which the market needed to flourish, could not itself provide, or would not provide." The relationship will always be complex: "democracy and capitalism are both positively and negatively related, they both support and subvert each other" (Almond, 1991, p. 249).

In sum, our broader conception of democracy includes a robust understanding of our responsibilities to act in ways that "right the injustices that inevitably exist, eliminating poverty and homelessness, insuring equal opportunity, and providing for all the education required to forge a democratic public" (Goodlad, 2008, p. 11). This includes attending to the sensitive relationship between democracy and capitalism described above.

We believe that students educated for democratic participation will not only develop the higher order thinking skills which will prompt them to ask the tough questions (e.g., Why do social injustices occur? Who benefits most from capitalistic polices and structures and why? Who suffers?), but that they will also engage in productive behaviors to help resolve pressing social dilemmas, dialoging and acting alongside those in communities ravaged by poverty, violence, family disruption, hopelessness, and drugs to foster alternative ways of living—not out of altruism but out of civic attitude and social responsibility (Parker, 1996). This requires that we (as teacher educators) and our candidates (as future teachers) learn to "teach well," defined by Ladson-Billings (2001) as "… making sure that students achieve … a positive sense of themselves, and develop a commitment to larger social and community concerns" (p. 16).

Setting and Course Sequence

The research setting where this curricular initiative occurred, and where data were collected, is a mid-sized, land grant, western research I university with predominately white students and faculty situated in a relatively rural state. About 75% of the teacher education candidates are female in keeping with the national trend.

The Educational Studies (EDST)/foundations department provides the first two years of coursework in the teacher education program to all candidates. The required courses offered by the department include the following: a developmental psychology course (EDST 2450: Human Lifespan Development, 3 credits); an educational foundations/multicultural education course (EDST 2480: Diversity and the Politics of Schooling, 4 credits); a curriculum and instruction course (EDST 3000: Teacher as Practitioner, 6 credits); and an educational assessment course (EDST 3550: Educational Assessment, 2 credits). In our curricular discussions, we included discussion of the introduction to education course (EDST 1500: Education for Social Justice, 3 credits) Though it is not a required class in the program and only a small handful of candidates take this course, we included it in our curriculum planning, recognizing it as another place to infuse democracy and schooling concepts. Upon their successful completion of the coursework in this department, candidates move to either the elementary or secondary education departments, depending upon their professional ambition and successful completion of academic requirements for the specific content areas.

Integrating Democracy: Key Concepts and Readings for Collaboration

Many EDST department faculty members have attempted to incorporate democratic education curricular topics in their courses for years. However, these efforts have been uneven across various instructors and sections of courses. In the meantime, two related research projects conducted by scholars affiliated with our department informed our project. First, specific to pre-service teachers' understanding of democracy/democratic education, Castaneda

(2005) found that pre-service teachers had a limited/unidimensional view of democracy and had difficulty in connecting democracy with diversity/multiculturalism. And second, findings from a study by Trent (2005, unpublished) of students about their school's approach to democratic education also informed our departmental project: while students spoke very highly of the school's democratic processes, they presented much more skeptical attitudes about democracy generally and the political officials and processes of the US Government.

Our aim in this ongoing inquiry then is to present democracy and democratic teaching in more coherent, critical, and contextualized ways. Our work is informed by multiple data sources, and this allows us to share with and learn from teacher educators in and outside our program. We developed a matrix that identifies the key concepts we want to emphasize in each of our department courses. These four foci include: 1) Constructing and connecting definitions of democracy, citizenship, and multiculturalism; 2) understanding developmental learning theories specific to diverse students' cognitive and moral development; 3) familiarity with historical perspectives of democracy and multiculturalism in the US; and 4) acquiring a repertoire of instructional and assessment practices appropriate for democratic and multicultural classrooms.

Additionally, this matrix identifies readings for candidates, readings for faculty, and suggested class activities/projects/assignments. These resources have been assembled and disseminated to all department faculty members. Student readings from Parker, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Goodlad, Dewey, Counts, Freire, Campbell, and Sleeter (and others) were selected to promote conversations and connect to activities that help us achieve our democratically focused aims for our teacher education candidates. Faculty readings from Becker, Lawrence, Detlefson, Campbell, Hayes and Chaltain (and others) are used to promote conversations and collaborative planning of course curricula and activities.

We recognized from the beginning that this infusion of the teacher education curriculum with principles related to democracy

will evolve as we glean data related to candidates' understandings and faculty professional (collaborative) reflection that will inform subsequent adaptation and revision. We are interested in what this curricular initiative—systematic, explicit, and purposeful—means to candidates' understandings about the role of democracy and schooling. We recognize that candidates come to the teacher education program with some background knowledge about democracy and education given their years of schooling. We also recognize that other courses at the university may have provided some background information about democracy and education that candidates bring into the program. And so, our aims are to build on these prior experiences and understandings and to focus the conversation on what it means to be a democratic teacher in a democratic society.

Research methods employed in this study follow. As noted earlier, this is an ongoing process. Here we present our account of findings specific to this phase of implementation, and at the same time, planning is underway to systematically collect additional data including elicitation of faculty perspectives and direct analysis of candidates' responses to the curricular integrations. Ultimately, it's not the curriculum we teach, but the learning candidates take away that matters.

Research Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized to collect data for this inquiry/documentary account. The aims were to hear and understand the perspectives of the involved candidates, to utilize these understandings to inform our teacher education curricula, and to share our experiences with others that may benefit from this contribution to the conversation specific to educating teachers for democracy.

Surveys and Sample

The current documentary account utilized data from a large-scale survey focused on candidates' attitudes, values, and understandings of democracy and democratic education. The survey started with

adapted Likert scale questions that asked candidates to agree, mostly agree, disagree, or mostly disagree with a series of statements. The surveys then offered respondents opportunities to explain the rationales for their quantitative responses. The Likert items were loaded into SPSS and analyzed using a variety of descriptive statistics. Next, students were asked to respond to a series of related open-ended questions. The narrative responses to these questions were analyzed using qualitative coding and thematic identification processes (Corbin & Strauss 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006). The survey instrument is included in Appendix A.

One hundred forty three surveys (N=143) were collected and analyzed both quantitatively and quantitatively. Students from all EDST classes (EDST 2450; 2480; 3000; 3550) participated to provide a cross section and allow for comparison of student responses in earlier and later phases of the teacher education sequence. Our survey sample, in line with national and college demographics for teacher candidates, is largely female (75%).

Findings

Looking at both the quantitative (See Appendix B) and qualitative data holistically, we assert the following seven themes emerged regarding our candidates' understandings of democracy and schooling. Each theme will be explored in greater detail below with quantitative and/or qualitative data from the study to support and elaborate our interpretations of each.

1. Democracy is an enduring value and candidates have an implicit understanding of what it is in the ideal;
2. Candidates' understandings of democracy are generally shallow and are connected more closely to political democracy than they are to social democracy;
3. Candidates' shallow understandings are reasonable given (lack of) prior school and other related experiences;
4. Diversity is generally understood as a challenge to democracy;

5. Candidates claim that developing critical thinking is the most important role schools can play in promoting democracy;
6. Candidates feel competent to prepare students for life in a democratic society; and,
7. Candidates believe schools must play a central role in promoting democracy.

Theme One – Democracy Is An Enduring Value and Candidates Have An Implicit Understanding of What It Is In the Ideal

The overall high rating for each of the democracy elements on the quantitative section of the survey demonstrates that candidates have a largely positive view of democracy. More specifically, nearly 80% of the candidates look forward to teaching about democracy and modeling democratic values (Question # 1). This is a positive finding and indicates that a convincing majority of our candidates are motivated to teach for democratic citizenship. Learning theory tells us that when students are motivated, they will learn and retain at higher levels.

Candidates also have an implicit assumption about what democracy ought to look like. For example, 79.4% of the candidates agree there is a difference between democratic ideals and democratic reality (Question # 3), thereby implying some unstated assumptions about how democracy in the ideal might be realized. Equally important, the fact that almost 80% of our candidates understand there is a difference between democratic ideals and democratic realities is a positive finding in our eyes. We, too, agree this gap exists, mostly for specific social groups, and find it problematic. A next step for us is to motivate our candidates in ways that prompt them to act in important ways to decrease this gap.

Theme Two – Candidates' Understandings of Democracy Are Generally Shallow and Are Connected More Closely to Political Democracy Than They Are To Social Democracy

While we are glad that our candidates have a positive view of democracy, our candidates have limited knowledge of key concepts

and ideas about democracy. In the open-ended questions for the survey, most had trouble recalling and articulating their knowledge of more than one key idea about democracy even though the survey question asked them to list three key ideas. That said, candidate responses indicated that they are exploring and embracing connections between equity/equality, inclusion, and democracy. For example, a candidate explained that all students "should be given the tools they need to succeed, and they might not be the same for everyone." Additionally, some candidates emphasized the importance of participation as a key democratic idea. One of these candidates noted the "importance of active and full participation for democracy to be the most beneficial, reaching out to as many students and groups of people as much as possible, primarily educating people about democracy, how it works, and ways it is beneficial."

A strong majority (78.1%) of EDST candidates believe capitalism is an essential component of democracy (Question # 4). Both capitalism (as an economic system) and democracy (as both a social and political system) are abstract social constructions and intentionally were not defined or described for candidates responding to the survey. We see the discussion of these concepts, their interrelationships, their points of departure (including questions such as whether a country can have a democracy under an alternative economic system or whether neo-liberal capitalism can undermine democracy), and connections to education and schooling as great opportunities to engage our classes in deliberation around authentic political, societal, and economic issues that impact all democracies.

Our candidates' understandings of democracy are mostly focused on political democratic processes. For example, 69.5% of candidates believe voting is the most important democratic value students can learn (Question # 2). Our candidates, it seems, fail to differentiate between social and political democracy, and they appear to be more comfortable/familiar with the formal political acts. Also, majority rule, according to 63.6% of EDST candidates surveyed, is a defining democratic practice that should be unwavering

(Question # 9). Here again, we see candidates affirming their commitment to procedural aspects of democracy.

Theme Three – Candidates' Shallow Understandings Are Reasonable Given (Lack Of) Prior School Experiences

Overwhelmingly, our candidates claimed limited exposure to experiences that help them understand democracy on the open-ended section of the survey. Candidates noted that their experiences with democracy have come primarily through educational institutions, college and high school coursework, and to a lesser degree, how their families have introduced them to democratic knowledge. For example, one candidate claimed, "the EDST 2480 class I took at UW addressed the issue of democracy in schools, other than that I've had no other experiences." Many others shared similar responses, citing single instances of democratic learning. Another candidate concluded, "education in America from coast to coast varies greatly in how it chooses to educate its youth regarding democracy. When I was raised it wasn't a focus but the program was good." A number of candidates also noted the importance they placed on participation in democratic processes associated with schools such as student government and mock elections. Finally, a number of students emphasized the role family played in influencing understanding of democracy and democratic schooling. One candidate explained, "my family is very politically active so I grew up hearing about the democratic ideals of America."

For us, it is difficult to blame students for not having learned important concepts related to democracy when they have not been explicitly taught or when they have not experienced them in their schools, homes, and communities. Indeed, much of current school policy is at odds with democracy and schooling (as we described at the beginning of this paper). Additionally much of recent school reform has been justified by the need to advance economic purposes rather than democratic purposes. It is hard to expect someone to know what they have not been taught.

Theme Four – Diversity Is Generally Understood as a Challenge to Democracy

The majority of candidates disagree that diversity makes it more difficult for us to reach our democratic ideals (60.6 % on Question # 7), but this leaves nearly 40% that do believe diversity impedes the attainment of democratic ideals. This question was the lowest rated (when reversed for wording) of all the questions asked about democracy. We are disturbed that 40% of our candidates believe that diversity is a hindrance to democratic practice. This is troubling on several fronts. First, consider the ever increasing diversity of schools, communities, and the nation. Second, our department has a pedagogical commitment to infuse an affirming diversity perspective into all of its coursework. It is disturbing to know that a substantial percentage of our candidates continue to hold deficit views, as opposed to viewing diversity as an asset (as described by Parker earlier in this article). Finally, we believe that democracy is enhanced as a result of and because of the diversity in the nation. This serves as a wake-up call for us to make this claim more explicit in our coursework.

Theme Five – Candidates Claim That Developing Critical Thinking Is the Most Important Role Schools Can Play In Promoting Democracy

Our candidates are trying to make sense of how democracy might be advanced within school contexts. 87.7% of candidates feel critical thinking is the most important democratic value students can learn (Question # 6), and this was the highest rated item of all items on the quantitative portion of the survey. We, too, agree that critical thinking is an important democratic value. We believe this high rating for critical thinking is explainable by the fact that it supports the "individualism" value orientation of most Euro-Americans. It is also explained, in part, by the fact that critical thinking is often understood as a central purpose of schooling. Further, it coincides with candidates' beliefs in the procedural elements of democracy (i.e., voting).

Alternately, only 69.8% (nearly 1/5 less, in comparison with the above question # 6 that has an 87.7% positive response rate) of the same candidates surveyed agreed that civic engagement is the most important democratic value our students can learn (Question # 8). Given candidates' understandings of the gap between democracy in reality and in the ideal, we might have expected a greater value for civic engagement to begin to close that gap. This speaks to candidates' lack of understanding of the elements of democracy as understood socially. Once again, this finding illuminates course level possibilities for activities that allow candidates to examine, deconstruct, and prioritize democratic values and practices.

Theme Six – Candidates Feel Competent To Prepare Students For Life In a Democratic Society

Despite candidates' lack of a depth of experiences with democracy, their generally superficial understandings around democracy, and the significant number of those who feel diversity is at odds with democracy (as described in earlier findings), almost three-fourths (73.2%) of the candidates feel competent they will be able to prepare their students for citizenship (Question # 5). This finding concerns us. We understand the importance of teacher efficacy. However, in the context of the other findings of this research, we wonder if candidates truly have the understandings and skills to support this confidence. Importantly, this finding complements the finding that candidates are motivated to teach in democratic ways.

More hopefully, candidates in the open-ended portion of the survey acknowledged a lack of critical knowledge, but they are interested in learning and knowing more about teaching democracy. These candidates identify modeling (both for and by them) as an important way to learn about democratic practices. One candidate explained the importance of example: "as a teacher you are a role model to students. I believe if you demonstrate democracy appropriately, it will reflect upon teachers." Candidates also recognized the benefits associated with having models to learn from in authentic field experiences. One candidate explained the benefits of "more

time in the classroom where future teachers are taught about using the democratic process to achieve their goals in teaching." Other candidates urged us, as teacher educators, to:

* "model democratic principles in your teaching. We want to see it in practice,"
* "try different approaches/methods to demonstrate how to teach democracy,"
* "make it clear as to what it is. What concepts to teach and how to incorporate it in the classroom,"
* show examples of lessons or good modeling of teaching in classes where democracy in our future classroom is discussed," and
* "encourage critical thinking/role play strategies of teaching [democratically]".

As is true with most teacher education coursework, candidates want to know how they can integrate democratic principles and practices in the context of NCLB, in their specific content areas, and with students from diverse community and familial contexts. Candidates, for example, want to know "how to implement it," and "what it is and how it is played out in schools." We understand this desire for strategies, but we also realize strategies without theoretical and dispositional foundations are not likely to accomplish the democratic aims articulated for schools. For example, one candidate wrote, "I'm tired of learning about diversity. We all know it's out there. Teach us what to do about it and show us how to teach democracy."

Theme Seven – Candidates Believe Schools Must Play a Central Role in Promoting Democracy
All teachers, as expressed by most candidates in the open-ended part of the survey, have a responsibility to teach democracy. Teaching for democracy, they assert, should include the modeling noted above, and should include appropriate curricula and opportunities

for students' voices to be heard as they participate in classrooms. "As a citizen teaching other citizens it is our duty," remarked one candidate. Many others responded similarly, "the people involved [students] will not know what it is unless we teach it to them, and our responsibility is to teach." Other data exemplars include, "we need to make sure these children have hope for the future by knowing their rights and freedoms," and "students should know their rights as citizens and students in the classroom," and "it is our responsibility to give students a basic knowledge so that they learn facts and not just the opinions of those around them. It is also important for us to encourage students to form their own opinions not just those of others." Another candidate added that we should "teach them [students] that they do have a voice in terms of voting, taking ideas or concerns to a higher level etc. Also, it's important that they understand their rights and how these were achieved."

We are glad to see that our candidates believe that schools play a central role in the development of our nation's democracy. We note that this theme ties back to the first theme identified: democracy is an enduring value. This finding serves as motivation for us to continue the curricular work we are engaged in which seeks to deepen candidates' understandings about democracy and schooling. We do so with the knowledge that our candidates see this as an important purpose of schooling and an important role for them as teachers.

Findings Summary

There is clearly a degree of social agreement on most queried topics; however, we are curious about how different candidates are interpreting the various conceptual terms in the questions. We find it positive that our candidates are eager, motivated, and confident when asked about teaching for democratic citizenship, but we are also concerned that some understandings may be shallow/narrow, and that a substantial percentage of candidates view diversity as a potential impediment.

Our positive findings are also tempered by a lack of differentiation across the data set. Candidates in the higher level classes are not

showing a pattern of marked improvement or deeper understanding of processes of social and political democracy as we might expect. We are therefore interested in collecting additional data, both quantitative and qualitative, to better understand and nurture candidate growth from the beginning to the end of each of the courses in the department. As this effort now spans all our courses, future inquiry will be designed to evaluate the success of our efforts at democratic curricula for each course specifically, and across multiple courses generally.

Conclusion/Next Steps

Teacher education curricula must evolve to accommodate changing educational landscapes. This paper documents explicit attempts to understand our students' current levels of comprehension and perceptions in ways that inform our integrations of democracy/democracy education into department level teacher education courses. Resultant findings/understandings from initial data collection and analysis have yielded both positive findings and findings of concern. Importantly, though, these and future findings will have an impact our curricula, pedagogy, and assessment practices.

We understand we'll need to build on our candidates' visions of democracy in the ideal. This is a view of democracy as it should work, as it is outlined in our country's foundational documents. We also plan to capitalize on candidates' realization that this ideal vision does not always align with current reality. We are encouraged by candidates' belief in schooling as an institution that plays a central role in the development of democratic citizens, and are further pleased that they feel competent to play their roles as teachers who promote critical thinking as a valued outcome of democratic education.

The findings of this inquiry also give us a clear directive to better work with students to understand democracy broadly, in both social and political realms, and to connect these broadened conceptions to professional practice. A part of this will be to prioritize curricula and activities that deepen candidates' understanding of, and

commitment to, diversity as an asset in democracy generally and schools specifically.

Not surprisingly, candidates call on us to make the abstract conceptual notions of democracy and democratic teaching more concrete. Recall a couple of their requests: "Tell us what we should do," or "Show us what this looks like in practice." These requests to illustrate and demystify theory/practice connections are common in teacher education, as we are all searching for "right ways" to serve students. Teaching in a democracy is a complex, political endeavor that requires the critical thinking our students value. Abstract, socially constructed concepts are rarely effectively translated into a prescriptive, recipe-like guide, but this does not mean we cannot, and/or should not, do anything. While we all as teacher educators, believe we model democratic practices, we also know we can do better.

It is easy to analyze a data set and then forward critiques of our candidates' perspectives (only focused on democracy procedurally and critical thinking, with less attention to acting to address social inequalities…), but it is more difficult to look inward and realize that candidates may have learned these things from us and our education colleagues. Many of us, individually and in groups, are involved in civic engagement and social justice advocacy work as a part of our personal and professional lives, but how many of us, with our candidates, are actively engaged in the kinds of civic engagement that we want our candidates to value? What would teacher education look like if it developed democratically engaged citizens focused on social justice? And, what would this look like in our own idiosyncratic teacher education context and community? When pointing fingers, we acknowledge some point right back to us. We, as democratically concerned educators, take responding to the questions above as the next part of this challenging journey.

Like the commonly presented cyclical teaching model in which practice is continually informed by data/assessments, our ultimate aims in this project are to utilize the findings from this phase of the inquiry, coupled with additional data to include candidate and fac-

ulty focus groups, peer observation and critique of course sessions designed to pursue our democratic education goals, and candidate work samples to guide ongoing course and program level changes. Additional "next steps" in this project could include the following:

* Continue to revise and enrich our curricular frameworks for teaching democracy.
* Gather and share classroom and community level examples.
* Solicit additional candidate perspectives through qualitative focus group interviewing.
* Work toward program articulation in and outside our college. Continue to teach about diversity, and seek to do so in ways that prompt all of our students to view diversity as a social asset and democratic teaching as a moral imperative.
* Bolster and extend the positive progression we are beginning to see, and seek evidence of the developmental progress specific to democracy/democratic teaching.
* Reflect on our own responsibilities for student misconceptions and shallow understandings.
* Acknowledge the importance of providing candidates opportunities to engage in and observe schooling contexts that embrace democratic practices and that serve diverse populations.

The research process has provided us with much to reflect on and with findings that are influencing the curricula and instructional practices in our departmental courses. We are humbled and motivated by the essential roles teachers, schools, and teacher educators should play in evolving the field of education in ways that better serve our pursuit of democratic ideals. In this article, we've shared our learning, our successes, our shortcomings, and challenges as a contribution to the democratic education conversation that has

spanned centuries. In doing so, we hope readers find some degree of transferability to their contexts.

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[1]Teacher Education Candidates or "candidates" will be used through-out to distinguish preservice teachers or students from the PreK-12 "students" they are preparing to teach and those who are currently "teachers."

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Appendix A *Survey (as anticipatory guide) – Democracy*

Read the statements and decide whether you agree-disagree using the following scale. Explain why you hold that view. On the second page, complete the prompts regarding democracy in schooling.

Statement	Explanation 4 = Agree; 3 = Mostly Agree; 2 = Mostly Disagree; 1 = Disagree
DEM Q1: I look forward to teaching about democracy and modeling democratic values in the classroom	I rate this a _____ because..... and because.....
DEM Q2: Voting is the most important democratic value that our students can learn	I rate this a _____ because..... and because.....
DEM Q3: There is a difference between the ideal of democracy and democracy as it's actually practiced	I rate this a _____ because..... and because.....
DEM Q4: Capitalism as an economic system is an essential component of democracy	I rate this a _____ because..... and because.....
DEM Q5: I feel competent I will be able to prepare students for democratic citizenship	I rate this a _____ because..... and because.....
DEM Q7: Diversity within our society makes it more difficult for us to reach our democratic ideal	I rate this a _____ because..... and because.....
DEM Q8: Civic engagement (such as volunteering) is the most important democratic value that our studnets can learn	I rate this a _____ because..... and because.....
DEM Q9: "Majority rule" is a defining democratic practice that should be unwavering	I rate this a _____ because..... and because.....

<u>Self Information:</u>

Last 4 #'s of Student ID:

Course number at point you completed this survey:

Education Major (check)

     _____Elementary

     _____Secondary

       Specific Content Area:_____

Gender (circle)   Female   Male

<u>Open Ended Questions:</u>

What prior experiences have you had that have influenced your knowledge and attitudes about democracy in schooling?

What are three key ideas/concepts you have learned thus far in the program related to democracy and schooling?

What questions do you have about teaching about democracy and modeling democracy in the classroom?

In what way, if at all, is it our responsibility as teachers in schools to teach students about democracy and the democratic promise?

What recommendations do you have for the UW teacher education program to improve future teachers' ability to integrate "democracy" within their classrooms?

Appendix B *Candidates' Conceptions of Democratic Education by Question*
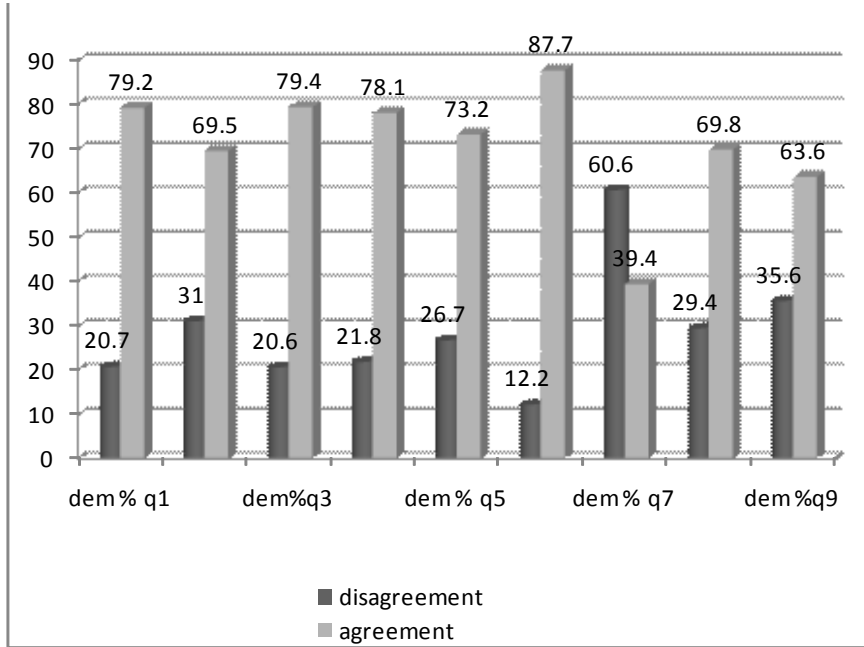
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