Creative Democracy and Teacher Education:  
The Task Before Us

Mark LaCelle-Peterson & Phillip J. VanFossen

The present state of the world is more than a reminder that we have now to put forth every energy of our own to prove worthy of our heritage...[T]he task can be accomplished only by inventive effort and creative activity...because the depth of the present crisis is due in considerable part to the fact that for a long period we acted as if our democracy were something that perpetuated itself automatically.

[...]The heart and final guarantee of democracy is in the free gathering of neighbors on the street corner to discuss...uncensored news of the day, and in gatherings of friends...to converse freely with one another...[E]verything which bars freedom and fullness of communication sets up barriers that divide human beings into...antagonistic...factions, and thereby undermines the democratic way of life.

(John Dewey, 1940, pp. 221-222 & 225)

Introduction

Democracy is hard work—no getting around it. John Dewey argued that democrats could not avoid the hard, collaborative work of creating new, or at the very least creatively adapting existing, political and social structures and practices to the needs of their day. In the waning days of World War II, in an essay entitled 'The Democratic Faith and Education,' Dewey (1944) argued that the crises endured by the US and the warring world resulted from the avoidance of such effort, from trusting too blithely in what he called drift or what others, with unwarranted optimism, called progress. Contrary to expectations, laissez-faire policies pursued in the progressive era had yielded war in place of peace, totalitarianism in place of increasing personal freedom, increased government intervention in place of the withering away of the state, and severe economic hardship in place of the elimination of poverty.

Concerted collective effort, not mere faith in progress, he argued, was needed to re-create and extend democratic society. And in Dewey's view, such concerted efforts would always need to be forward looking; there was, he held, no golden past to evoke as model or guide (see, for example, 'American Education and Culture' written fifteen years earlier). Creation of a truly democratic culture—one that could meet the criteria, posed in Democracy and Education (Dewey, 1916), of maximizing the variety and extent of consciously shared interests within the society and the fullness and interplay with other societies—would require that a uniquely democratic set of personal beliefs be widely held. On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, Dewey delivered a condensed synthesis of his 'democratic faith' in which he enumerated those personal beliefs and commitments. Embedded in that essay, 'Creative Democracy— the Task Before Us' (Dewey, 1940), are three core beliefs that can guide teachers and teacher educators as we face the creative democratic task before us: 1) belief in the right of each individual to develop his or her capacities; 2) confidence that people, working together, can make intelligent judgments and take worthy action; and 3) a personal commitment to co-operative action rooted in the conviction that consideration of conflicting claims and views is both right and enriching.

This essay is organized around three issues. First, through a comparison of the current social situation with that of the 1930's and early 1940's, we show why we believe that, current apparent economic prosperity notwithstanding, the 'creative imperative' of democracy must be re-asserted to counter clear and evident threats to democracy. Second, drawing on 'Creative Democracy,' we outline a vision of democratic individualism that focuses on personal beliefs and characteristics that are, we argue, 'teachable' in the sense that teachers and teacher educators can—and should—view them as requisite outcomes of their educational endeavors. Finally, we draw out implications for teacher education, suggesting criteria by which we might evaluate current teacher education practices and creatively adapt them for the task before us.

Democracy in Troubled Times

Democracy is under siege in the U.S. from an increasing isolation of racial, ethnic, and economic communities and the increasing tendency to deny the existence of extensive common interests across internal and international social boundaries. The view of democracy we put forward is consistent with Dewey's: democratic society is not defined by the political machinery of vote casting and counting (though that electoral process is part of the picture), but rather by day-to-day social actions and interactions in which each member shares in the good of the group and contributes to its direction and development and by openness to communication and cooperation with other societies. Dewey developed these criteria for thinking about democratic society during a period of great economic instability, pressing urban problems,
and unprecedented cultural and linguistic diversity—in a context not unlike our own at the eve of the 21st century. With others (Anyon, 1997; Berliner and Biddle, 1996; and Fraser, 1997), we view the following issues as significant threats to democracy in the U.S. and, by extension, the true sources of the current crisis in the U.S. educational system.

Economic disparity is growing. Families in the lower three quintiles lost ground in terms of real income (adjusted for inflation) between 1979 and 1993, while those in the upper two quintiles gained ground. The losses were most acute in the lowest quintile (down 17%), while the gains were greatest in the upper quintile (up 18%). The poor are getting poorer while the rich get richer, and education is a factor in the split. Between 1979 and 1993, only those who had completed at least four years of college experienced growth in annual earnings (Dimond 1995). Conspicuous consumption is "in," stock market booms are generating record corporate and investor profits, executive compensation practices are creating record personal fortunes, and consumer debt is creating a specter of quick economic ruin for many barely-prosperous families. In this sense, the parallels to the late 1920s are self-evident.

Poverty is increasingly concentrated among children. Even more alarming than the general maldistribution of wealth is the high proportion of children living in poverty. The quality of life and the future prospects for many children remain dim. Though we have, arguably, made progress since the early days of this century in that we now have laws to protect children from being forced to work at young ages, we have yet to provide adequate housing or nutrition for many children and their families, nor have we addressed the issue with no energy, little purpose and no prospect for future success. Again, there is more than a passing similarity to the situation in the decades in which Dewey wrote the works cited above.

Social isolation of communities and individuals is growing. Civil-rights-era litigation and legislation notwithstanding, discrimination, isolation and social fragmentation persist. Policies such as affirmative action and desegregation have not changed the deeper social beliefs and structures that created the isolation in the first place. These realities are painfully evident in education; white flight and the expansion of private schools have left schools with the highest rates of racial segregation since the late 1960's and have left poverty more concentrated than before (Webb, et al., 1996).

Racial, cultural, linguistic isolation is growing. At the same time that cultural and linguistic diversity is once again increasing, separation of groups is limiting interaction with and knowledge of fellow members of the greater society. Pressure to restrict immigration, vindictive legislation curtailing social services to legal, let alone undocumented, immigrants, and renewed efforts to establish English as the "official" national language all suggest that we are heading into another socio-political backlash in which the rights and values of many will be stigmatized by those members of the shrinking "old majority" who still hold considerable power. Technological changes compound this isolation, though some have argued that technology can (or must) be part of the solution (e.g., Cummins and Sayers, 1995). Resurgent xenophobia exhibited at the ballot box and steady residential resegregation isolate individuals and groups of supposedly opposing perspectives and restrict the open flow of communication that characterizes democratic modes of associated living; Dewey characterized such separation and isolation as "treason" to the democratic ideal (1940, p. 225).

Urban centers suffer consequences of long-term neglect. Urban centers are increasingly seen as a world apart from the perspective of suburban-based power holders and power brokers in state and federal governments. Even in Dewey's day, cities were messy places in the midst of growing pains. Today, many urban centers continue to reap the dismal harvest of decades of policies that ensured that not all members and groups in the society would share in the common good. Anyon's haunting account of the unfolding predication of Newark, NJ, is repeated in local variations across the country (Anyon, 1997). Regional cooperation in the provision of services, particularly educational services, remains the exception rather than the rule; underfunding of urban schools is the focus of continuous and ineffective hand-wringing (Rethinking Schools, 1997; Kozol, 1991).

Each of these 'isolations' militates against broadly-based interchange of news and ideas, and against ongoing and meaningful consideration of common purposes and mutual learning. In place of the neighbors-on-the-street-corner, friends-in-the-living-room discussion of current social issues that Dewey called democracy's "heart and final guarantee" (Dewey, 1940, p. 222), the decades of conservative restoration and nation-at-risk school reform have been characterized by 'not in my back yard' localism, 'business first' boosterism and corporate welfare. Naive notions that democracy will be preserved if general prosperity is maintained, and thus that schools do justice by their democratic duty if they prepare all students for good jobs, cannot be sustained; Fraser (1997) makes this argument eloquently.

Dewey's Time (and Our Own)

The early part of this century also presented an uncertain and shifting economic milieu, and Dewey acknowledged that many people would have to earn their bread at jobs that did not provide immediate outlets for creativity or expression, let alone with intrinsic satisfaction or pleasure. Yet in
resigning himself to the existence of an industrial present, he conceded nothing in terms of hope for a creative, vital, expressive, democratic life on the part of all members of society. Given the inevitable vicissitudes of the work sector, Dewey knew that education could not be conducted by chasing after temporarily relevant skill sets. Democracy demanded something more. Clearly, analogs to the issues threatening democracy (as we, following Dewey, have defined it) existed in Dewey's context. Consideration of the social issues that were central concerns for Dewey likewise shows/reveals clear analogs in our own day. Indeed, a number of striking economic and societal similarities between the decades of 1930's and 1940's—the tumultuous era during which Dewey wrote many significant works (e.g., How We Think, Freedom and Culture, etc.)—and the closing decades of the century are apparent. In this section, we consider these similarities in greater detail.

**Growing disparity in social and economic conditions with widespread social dislocation.** Unemployment, social unrest, economic insecurity, and anti-'foreign' agitation were prevalent, if not pervasive. Political movements (fascism, nationalism, etc.) were springing up in direct response to similar conditions in other nations, just as various fundamentalist, nationalist, and neo-fascists movements are today. In addition to the social and economic discord seen in the United States and around the world, Dewey described a moral *malaise* among Americans (perhaps similar to what Robert Merton called *anomie* several decades later, and the same 'resignation' that Anyon [1997] noted among educators in troubled urban schools), a despair that grew out of the distressed social and economic conditions of the times and that forced many in society to question the nature of “democracy” as manifest in the American case.

**Technology displacing people.** Dewey (1933) described the impact of ‘modern’ technology (ca. 1930's) as having “helped form a society in which chronic insecurity is such a factor in the lives of the majority...that the fear (insecurity) engenders has come to be counted upon as the chief motive that drives men to work, achievement and thrift” (p. 54). This insecurity also led to creation of a “popular mentality which regards acquisitive motives as normal ones” (p.54). These acquisitive motives, Dewey posited, led to a decline in organized religion and in the moral growth of society and created a “state of ethical confusion and conflict” (p. 55).

Dewey (1933) concluded that this focus on the material and away from the moral and social led to a “defeatist psychology” about the “possibility of securing and maintaining social values” (p. 57) and that this defeatist psychology led to a “growing pessimism about democracy not only as form of government, but as a principle of social relations and organization” as well (p. 58). Though the general sense of insecurity that accompanied the late-1980's recession has abated, continuing rounds of corporate lay-offs and downsizing and questions regarding the broad-based participation in a ballooning stock market leave many Americans struggling and others financially insecure.

**Lack of faith in the ability of political institutions to ameliorate distress.** Dewey was quite clear about the presence of social and economic factors as threats to democratic society. He described these problems as, at least in part, stemming from “the waste of grown men and women without a chance to work, and in young men and women who find doors closed where there once was opportunity” (Dewey, 1940, p. 221). Dewey was clearly concerned about the ability of American political institutions to deal with these threats to democracy. “The impotency of existing political forms to direct the working and social effects of modern industry has operated to generate a distrust of all forms...popular government. It explains why democracy is now under attack from both the left and the right” (Dewey, 1937, p. 52).

Dewey (1937) also related the nature of these turbulent times (especially the economic uncertainty of Depression-era America) to the ‘culture’ of society and to democracy. He noted that “[If you wish to secure a certain political result, you must see that economic conditions are such to produce that result” and “whether (this) effect of economic factors is taken in its extreme or moderate form, the facts involved tremendously complicate the problem of democratic freedom...” (p. 47). The question of whether economic policy is a tool government wields on behalf of the common weal, or whether ‘The Economy’ is regarded as the *deity du jure* that dictates policy is certainly still with us.

Certainly one can make a strong case that similar (if not the same) problems are manifest—to varying degrees—in society today and that these should be taken as just as much a threat to democracy as Dewey thought the problems of his times to be. Dewey (1937), however, concluded that, in spite of the rise of Fascism and Nazism around the world, the “serious threat to our democracy is not the existence of some foreign totalitarian states” (p. 44). Rather, the threat to democracy was (and, we argue, still is) to be found in the conditions that existed in American society: the social and economic discord, alienation from social values, the lack of unity felt by groups and individuals and a pre-occupation with material culture.

### Democratic Beliefs and Commitments: The ‘Faiths’ of Creative Democracy

Dewey devoted much attention to the task of defining democracy and its relationship to education (cf. Democracy and Education; Freedom and Culture, etc.). This discussion draws on the succinct explanation of democracy in relation to personal character and commitments presented in
'Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us' (Dewey, 1940), an essay rooted in reflections on the economic catastrophe of the 1930s and the growth of totalitarian political movements that had pushed Europe over the brink into a war that soon engulfed the world. In this essay, Dewey recognized that the events of the decade just past—the social and economic upheaval caused by the great depression and the rise of totalitarianism and militarism across Europe and in Japan—clearly threatened democracy; however, he focused on the fact that democracy, by its very nature, was threatened internally, and that in order to survive, any democratic society must be constantly about the business of re-creation. Indeed, Dewey (1940) warned against the belief that democracy was "something that perpetuated itself automatically" (p. 222), and asserted unequivocally that democratic institutions need to be reformed by each generation to address the problems of their time.

To that end, Dewey (1940) stressed that "democracy is a way of life" or, more accurately, "a personal way of individual life; that signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes" and the "forming (of) personal character" that facilitates democratic interaction (p. 222). In further defining this democratic way of life, Dewey stated three core beliefs—Dewey actually described two of these as "faiths," a term which we will borrow to describe all three beliefs—that, if democracy is to re-create itself, individuals must continue to hold and practice. Dewey's focus on individual attitudes, personal character, and habits of action—phenomena which are amenable to educational goal-setting and promotion—is, we will argue, particularly helpful both to teachers and to teacher educators who seek to promote democratic citizenship. At one level, Dewey's views on democracy in the classroom are well-known: inasmuch as there cannot be inconsistency or incompatibility between means and ends, education that pretends to promote democracy must be conducted in a democratic fashion in the classroom. Lacking from this widely-known aspect of Dewey's thought is the means of discussing the sought-after traits in the individual citizen. 'Creative Democracy' offers a valuable set of criteria at that individual level. In this section, we briefly discuss these tenets of democratic faith before turning to their implications for teacher preparation and teacher educators.

The first of these faiths is "a working faith in the possibilities of human nature" (p. 223). Dewey (1940) noted that belief in the 'Common Man' is an oft-quoted tenet of democracy, but this tenet must be exhibited "in the attitudes which human beings display to one another in the incidents and relations of daily life" (p. 223). He challenged us to 'walk the walk' of democracy as well as we 'talk the talk'. For Dewey this challenge was manifest in the rise of Nazism and Fascism of his era and the efforts to combat such movements. Dewey (1940) saw clearly the contradiction inherent in denouncing such movements as anti-democratic when "in our daily walk and conversation, we are moved by racial, color or other class prejudice" (p. 223). Belief in the possibilities of human nature implied, for Dewey, that each individual in a democratic society must be provided the opportunity for full development of their capacities. In his words, "democratic faith in human equality" is a "belief that every human being, independent of the quantity or range of human endowment has the right to equal opportunity, with every other person, for development of whatever gifts he has" (Dewey, 1940, p. 223-224). Thus, Dewey (1940) asks us to believe that every person must be allowed to lead his or her own life to its natural end, free from the "coercion and imposition" of others (p. 224).

The second core democratic commitment presented in 'Creative Democracy' is the "faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished" (Dewey, 1940, p. 224). Dewey described this notion of reflective thought (cf. How We Think) at great length, and he saw the ability to engage in reflective thought as central to the functioning of a democratic society. This faith in "the capacity and intelligence of the common man to respond with common sense to the free play of facts and ideas which are secured by effective guarantees of free inquiry, free assembly and free communication" is "so deeply embedded in the methods which are intrinsic to democracy" (Dewey, 1940, p. 224) that it is the sine qua non of democratic profession. This second tenet affirms commonality among the diverse individuals who are developing their diverse capacities. Not only must democrats acknowledge that each of their fellows has potentialities that can and must be developed freely; they must also recognize that intelligent judgment and justified action are part of each fellow's repertoire. Neither Plato's elite guardians nor the 'myth of metals' ideology that would sustain their rule, nor the equivalent modern assumption of the 'normal distribution' of unitary intelligence—one of these has any place in guiding the development of democracy.

The final faith commended by Dewey to democrats is personal commitment to co-operative action rooted in the conviction that consideration of conflicting claims and views is not only right but also personally and collectively enriching. Democratic societies must celebrate and cultivate differences, disagreements and debate because they constitute the proper conditions that yield intelligent judgment and action. The preferred mode of work and social interaction must, Dewey argued, be "to cooperate by giving differences a chance to show themselves" (Dewey, 1940, p. 226). Democracy, for Dewey, was a way of life "controlled by personal faith in personal day-by-day working together with others" (p. 225). This illustrates a basic paradox of
democratic societies: despite the centrality of individual freedom in democratic societies, no democratic society can function or perpetuate itself without cooperation, and often cooperative conflict, among its diverse members. Dewey wrote that "democracy is the belief that even when needs and ends or consequences are different for each individual, the habit of amicable cooperation...is itself a priceless addition to life" (p. 226). Cooperation leverages differences (cultural, social, etc.) into a greater good for the whole and for each individual. "To cooperate by giving differences a chance to show...is not only the right of the other persons, but is a means of enriching one's own life experience..." (Dewey, 1940, p. 226).

Dewey summarized his democratic kerygma by linking it to his central categories of experience and education and to his belief in the ability of the human experience to "generate aims and methods by which further experience will grow..." (p. 227). By this Dewey meant that reflected-upon human experience was the most educative, and therefore the best, process for enriching and enlightening future growth in democratic societies. "[T]he free interaction of individual human beings with surrounding conditions" increases "knowledge of things as they are" (p. 227). Because we learn by experience—by doing—and then by reflecting upon that experience, the best way to learn about a democracy is to actively participate in one. And given Dewey's understanding of human nature, democratic associated living with all its hard work and incessant learning is the best option open to us.

Dewey provided a concrete 'litmus test' for judging the state of a democratic society, a litmus test—based on these three 'faiths'—that revolves around the simple act of friends meeting for conversation in public or private gatherings. Such mundane events, Dewey suggested, contain the essence of democracy:

I am inclined to believe that the heart and final guarantee of democracy is in the free gatherings of neighbors on the street corner to discuss back and forth what is read in uncensored news of the day, and in gatherings of friends in the living rooms of house and apartments to converse freely with one another. Intolerance, abuse, calling of names because of differences of opinions about religion or politics or business as well as difference of race, color, wealth or degree of culture, are treason to the democratic way of life. For everything which bars freedom and fullness of communication sets up barriers that divide human beings in to cliques and sets, into antagonistic sects and factions and thereby undermines a democratic way of life. (p. 225)

Teaching and Democracy

Given Dewey's concept of democracy, then, what might 'democratic education' consist of, and how might teachers be prepared to foster it? We can begin by reflecting on how Dewey addressed the question of educating citizens capable of continuously re-creating democracy. Robert Westbrook (1991) provides insightful summary on the question, noting that, even as Dewey began to fully articulate his notion of democracy, he "sharpened his descriptions of the 'mental equipment' and moral character that schools should develop" in order to develop citizens capable of fostering democracy (p. 169). This 'mental equipment' involved teaching children how to think which, for Dewey, meant how to think scientifically. Scientific thinking and judgment were the extensions of everyday reflection defined by "the native and unspoiled attitude of childhood, marked by ardent curiosity, fertile imagination, and love of experimental inquiry" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 179). For Dewey, "learning to think scientifically was important not only for future scientists but for all members of a democratic society because scientific intelligence was essential to effective freedom. In a democratic society, every man had to be his own scientist" (Westbrook 1991, p. 170).

In addition, because Dewey believed that "scientific thinking was essentially social," it followed that "schools should organize themselves as, in part, little scientific communities—laboratories of knowledge-making" (Westbrook, p. 170). Dewey envisioned the classroom as a place where children should be engaged in "ongoing experimentation, communication, and self-criticism, constituting themselves as a youthful commonwealth of cooperative inquiry" (Westbrook, p. 171). In Westbrook's words, Dewey believed that "democratic societies sought to cultivate democratic dispositions in children, to make them good democrats" (Westbrook, p. 171). The best way to do this was to initiate school children from the beginning in the form of social life, the "mode of associated living" characteristic of a democracy: a community of full participation and "conjoint communicative experience" in which social sympathy and deliberative moral reason would develop (Dewey, 1916, p. 93). Indeed, in My Pedagogic Creed, Dewey (1898) was adamant that to educate for democracy, the school must become an institution "in which the child is, for the time, to live—to be a member of a community life in which he feels he participates and to which he contributes" (p. 88). Further, such a school "must be a community of spirit" in which "a cooperative spirit" must replace a competitive one among those seeking similar results (p. 88). Thus, classrooms in a democratic society must be "democratic communities of inquiry" (Westbrook, p. 172).

Democratic education, for Dewey, involved both education for scientific thought and the creation of democratic community in the classroom; such an education is clearly amenable to being conducted in a manner consistent with the three 'faiths' of democracy outlined above. How, then, should teachers be prepared to foster such democratic communities of inquiry in a manner consistent with the
tenets Dewey proposed? Or, to more clearly assign responsibility, how ought teacher educators to conduct themselves and their programs with these ends in view?

Before turning to the implications we see in Dewey’s three ‘faiths’ of democracy, two more general points bear consideration. First, in light of the need for democratic society to be constantly recreated and adapted to its time, the scope or vision of teacher education programs must be broad and social. Teacher preparation must be conducted with the democratic imperative as the central focus. As Fraser points out, the educational reform discussions of the 1980s and 1990s have consistently focused on the economic rather than the democratic state of society as if prosperity (for corporations) were the greatest good. His central premise, that “the primary purpose of education in a democratic society is democracy” (Fraser 1997, p. xi), should be the starting point and the polar star of teacher education. Given Dewey’s notion that means contain ends within them, this will require engaging pre-service students in consideration and debate over the larger direction and fate of our society and their own place in it. The need for such a focus was brought home to one of the authors when virtually all of the students in a ‘school and society’ graduate course—all of them recently-certified, practicing teachers—reacted with surprise to the notion that their work included promoting democracy. Happily, by the end of course, all of the students, whose teaching assignments ranged from K-12, included all academic secondary subject areas, and a variety of special education assignments, had found ways in which they would make democratic concerns central to their teaching.

Second, in light of the need to promote personal attitudes and commitments—the three democratic ‘faiths’ outlined earlier—the academy’s ambivalence over value commitments will need to be overcome. Dewey’s use of the term “faith” to refer to the three essential democratic tenets highlights the tension that arises when the promotion or inculcation of specific beliefs or attitudes is considered in the free ‘market place of ideas.’ At the most general level, teacher education programs must advocate for and exemplify the observance of these “faiths.” Specific implications of the three faiths are considered separately below; the discussion of each that follows is intended to open consideration of each, and is not intended to be exhaustive, definitive, or final.

Faith in human possibility and belief in the right of each person to develop his or her capacities

Two implications of embracing a deep-seated openness to the possibility of human growth and development can be considered, one personal, the other programmatic. At the personal level, we must consider that prospective teachers are generally individuals who have “won” at the schooling game as it exists. If there are inequalities in the system, if schools promote the development of some individuals’ capacities more than others’, we can be confident that prospective teachers were largely beneficiaries of the system. Promoting the ideas that each individual has the right to develop his or her gifts in the fullest, and that the limits of any individual’s capacities cannot be foretold or predicted will require engaging each prospective teacher in introspective reflection on her or his own beliefs about the distribution of human capabilities and in retrospective reflection on how school systems structured those beliefs.

In practice this might mean giving works such as Stephen J. Gould’s (1981) Mismeasure of Man, Jeanie Oake’s (1985) Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequalities, and Jonathon Kozol’s (1991) Savage Inequalities a central place in course readings (along with a revitalization of Dewey studies in teacher education, of course). It will certainly mean arguing against the ‘bell curve’ mentality, both in terms of the enduring “gaussian assumptions” of much of the mental measurement movement and in the more recently lamented form of Hernstein and Murray’s book. It will mean seeking to predispose teachers to analyze policies and practices for the implications for all students’ development. In terms of the current standards-based reform movement, Fraser (1997) has rightly pointed out a concealed but deep split between a democratic movement to provide all students with better educational experiences and an anti-democratic movement to raise the bar and let the chips (in reality, the students) fall where they may. The democratic variant will only be pursued if educators are committed to the first tenet and are committed to resisting any reassertion of the ‘sorting function’ for schools.

At the level of teacher preparation programs themselves, fostering commitment to the development of each individual’s unknowable capacities to the fullest will require an emphasis on cross-training and teaming rather than on classification and the division of labor. Traditional divisions between ‘regular’ or ‘general’ education on the one hand and ‘special’ education on the other, for example, will need to be reconsidered and minimized through increased collaboration among faculty members and integration in curriculum. Teachers committed to this tenet would, we would argue, be interested in assessing their students in order to better teach them, perhaps through teaming with educational specialists who could support student learning, but not interested ‘classification’ as a means of getting students ‘out of the classroom’ so that ‘real teaching’ could take place. In order to accomplish the programmatic re-orientation suggested above, faculty members engaged in teacher preparation will need to exemplify commitment to the remaining two democratic tenets.

Confidence that people, working together, can make intelligent judgments and take worthy action.

Teacher preparation programs that promote and embody
commitment to this principle would prepare teachers to shape the classrooms in their charge into the ‘democratic communities of inquiry’ that Dewey advocated, and would do so by giving prospective teachers experience in such communities. The general history of didactic practices and classroom isolation in higher education, the particular legacy of ‘training orientation’ (Dewey’s _Relation of Theory to Practice_ (1906) notwithstanding) in teacher preparation, and the current extension of the accountability craze to colleges and universities present hurdles to the creation of such communities. The closely coordinated, intensive, inquiry-oriented program in urban teacher education described by Anyon (1997) certainly moves in the direction of meeting this criteria.

The implications of this tenet would seem to include providing many opportunities for prospective teachers to see their teacher education faculty members working together and to work together themselves. It bears noting, however, that Dewey’s faith was not merely that people could work together, but rather that working together would yield intelligent judgments and worthwhile actions. By implication, teacher preparation programs ought to provide opportunities for intellectually engaging collaborative efforts and for real service that is accomplished through collaboration. They also ought to foster inquiry into the social and political consequences of the various educational theories and teaching methods that are considered.

**Commitment to co-operative action because consideration of conflicting views is right and enriching.**

Acting on this commitment probably includes continuing to do what ‘best practice’ already does, namely ensure that conflicting theories and perspectives are included in students’ educational courses. The academic environment is more comfortable with the idea that fostering the expression of divergent viewpoints is right than it is with the idea that participants in the debates will be a) enriched, and b) better prepared to take action together as a result. Teacher educators need to wrestle with ways of modeling the positive, action-oriented interchanges suggested by this tenet in which the operant term is ‘co-operative action’. Following through on commitment to this principle, then, suggests the forum for the collaboration and cross-training called for above.

It further suggests that models in which action and reflection—theory and practice—are brought together have more to recommend them than older models in which these are separated. In _The Relation of Theory to Practice_ (1904) Dewey noted that “isolation (of practice from theory) is both unnecessary and harmful” (p. 322). Dewey argued that this isolation tends to detract from the two very elements that education for democracy must focus upon: teaching for scientific thought and the immersion of learners in democratic communities of inquiry. Put another way, the separation of practice from theory served—both in Dewey’s time as well as our own—to discourage reflective thought on the part of pre-service students and to keep pre-service students in isolation from the ‘community of learners’ most appropriate to their own education: real students in real classrooms.

**Final Thoughts**

If democracy’s “heart and guarantee” is ongoing conversation and debate in the public spaces of the streets and in the intimacy of our homes, then schools need to be about the business of promoting the ideas that human capacities can and ought to be developed, that people can work ‘smarter’ and more effectively together, and that divergent, conflicting perspectives must be treasured both because they edify us as individuals and because they promote the good of our common weal. It is at once heartening and discouraging to consider Dewey’s presentation of these tenets. In them, we find clarity of purpose and presentation and a consistency with a coherent vision of democracy that make them fitting criteria by which to evaluate our practices. Considering their vintage, we find reason to ask again why the democratic imperative is so easily set aside and ignored. In the end, however, we recognize that the final implication of reading works such as _Creative Democracy_ and _The Challenge of Democracy to Education_ is that we must roll up our sleeves and get on with the task before us. Democracy is hard work—there is no getting around it.

**References**


Notes


2. Exploitation of child labor remains a major global issue, however, and U.S. markets traffic in goods produced under conditions that are illegal in the U.S. For a more detailed treatment of this issue, see Milton Meltzer’s Cheap Raw Material, New York: Viking Press, 1994.