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Learning and teaching the practices of democratic participation

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The essential feature of a democratic polity is its concern for the participation of the member in the process by which the community is governed.

(Tussman, 1960, p. 105)

TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION

It is frequently claimed that many United States citizens are politically ill informed and fail to participate in the political process. More people can name the Three Stooges than can name the three branches of government (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Only 8 percent of college graduates from 1982 to 1992 who were surveyed in the National Election Studies had ever written a letter to a public official and only 7 percent had worked for a party or candidate (Nie & Hillygus, 2001). Not all the news is bad. American youth are increasingly engaged in community service: Eighty-two percent of 2004 first year college students surveyed reported engaging in volunteer work as high school seniors (Williams, 2005). Yet volunteer work, unlike the war protests and civil rights movements of earlier generations, involves students in serving the public good but not necessarily in distinctively democratic political action.

In the wake of the last presidential election, the quality of public political discourse has been under attack. In a New York Times Op-Ed piece, “Is Persuasion Dead?” Matt Miller (2005) asked: “Is it possible in America today to convince anyone of anything he doesn’t already believe? If so, are there enough places where this mingling of minds occurs to sustain a democracy?” (p. A15). Miller’s question was echoed by Paul Krugman’s (2005) complaint that neither politicians nor the electorate are willing to change their views when confronted with decisive contrary evidence. Ideological polarization, the “red” states versus the “blue” states, is evident not only in the electorate but also in the House, whose members are often elected from districts created by partisan gerrymandering. Both a gerrymandered House and the niche market media create situations in which people have no need to speak to any but the like-minded (Rosen, 2005; Posner, 2005). Richard Posner (2005) holds that people read newspapers, not to become well informed, but to find “information that will support rather than undermine their existing beliefs” (p. 9).

Education has been identified as both part of the cause of the current state of democratic political participation and as part of the potential solution, although where the solution lies is contested. Diane Ravitch and Joseph P. Viteritti (2001a) say that, while Americans have traditionally relied on public schooling to transmit “deeply cherished democratic values,” there is currently concern that schools are no longer playing this role. In their
view, today’s students fail to acquire core civic knowledge, such as an understanding of how our government works, but rather encounter in public schools a multiculturalist curriculum that does not aim at “the overarching civic ideals of the American community” (p. 5). Ravitch and Viteritti’s critique shares common ground with Steiner and Rozen’s claim that teachers are trained in education schools that are lacking in “balance” and are dominated by “progressivist” and “constructivist” visions where they encounter a “countercultural” curriculum, “instilling mistrust of the system that teachers work in” (as cited in Hartocollis, 2005, p. 25). In general, those who take this perspective favor greater teacher and school accountability through the standards and assessment movements and legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Their view of civic education focuses on the acquisition of knowledge about American history and government and on sharing common civic ideals.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that education for democracy in the United States must involve a commitment to social justice, which requires attention to diversity in an increasingly multicultural society. Walter C. Parker (2003), for example, holds that democratic citizens require a conception of justice that includes a “capacity for recognizing patterns of domination and unfairness that may be lodged comfortably in everyday life and for working toward alternative ways of living together” (p. 73). The implications of this view for principles of teacher education as drawn by Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) include making “inequity, power, and activism explicit parts of the curriculum” (p. 77).

Advocates of the social justice perspective are by no means convinced that theirs is the dominant view in teacher education, unlike the critics cited above. Jacqueline Jordan Irvine’s (2004) assessment is that the “field of teacher education has not taken seriously its role to prepare teachers as activists and advocates of social justice” (p. xii). She holds that the leadership of schools of education must create an environment that exemplifies and values diversity and that faculty committed to social justice must make their political stances clear. Although in agreement with NCLB’s goal of eliminating the gaps in group achievement levels, the supporters of democratic education for social justice generally believe that NCLB’s implementation has resulted in methods of teaching and a narrow curriculum that do not serve the goal of democratic education. High stakes testing and the standards movement have similar effects, it is said (Michelli & Keiser, 2005).

Thus the debates about educating democratic citizens, and the knowledge and commitments their teachers should have, seem as polarized as the rest of the political landscape. The differences in perspective can be exaggerated: likely everyone thinks it would be good if students knew more about the workings of government and likely everyone believes that achieving greater social justice is an important democratic goal, even if there is disagreement about what these objectives mean. Nevertheless, democratic education of students and its implications for teacher education are contested terrains—what democracy is; what constitutes appropriate participation; how to educate for democracy; the contributions of higher education generally and teacher education in particular are all disputed. For example, Derek Heater (2004) provides the following list of contemporary controversies concerning American civic education: “multicultural vs. national cohesion objectives, national vs. world citizenship, structure of the disciplines vs. problems of democracy approaches, learning about institutions vs. learning civic behavior, academic study vs. community service” (p. 124).

The contentiousness of civic education is not simply a contemporary phenomenon. While historically Americans have expected schools to prepare future citizens, what that participation entailed—and who counted as a “citizen”—depended on the dominant
political values and prejudices of the period. Areas of focus have included moral virtue, American history, the principles of the Constitution and of American government, patriotism and nationalism, world citizenship and tolerance, social issues, and civic participation (Reuben, 2005; Heater, 2004). Injustices related to race, ethnicity, gender, and religion have represented repeated challenges to the democratic rhetoric of political equality. Current attempts at civic education at the elementary level include celebrating national holidays, learning about community helpers, and a focus on the rule of law, American history, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution. At the secondary level, students typically have at least a year of American history and one semester of government (Heater, 2004).

Given this background of polarization and controversy, any discussion of democratic education must occupy a non-neutral terrain. Accordingly, my treatment of teacher education and its relation to democracy takes place within a particular context that gives salience to some issues rather than others. (And that’s a good thing, given that searches for key terms in my university’s library consistently turned up more than 10,000 entries for each term, the system’s maximum reporting capacity.) The social and political context for this essay includes the perceived state of democratic participation in the United States, the polarized political climate, the educational assessment and accountability movements, challenges to schools of education as the best location for teacher education, and the growing interest in civic education on the part of higher education institutions. Also, I have chosen to focus on civic education in the United States, although I am well aware that democracy is a global phenomenon and that many who live in the United States and participate in democratic life are not citizens. The specific focus of this chapter is on modes of democratic participation and their implications for pre-service teacher education.

The virtues we imagine citizens should possess depend in part on our conception of political life. What is the political domain, the sphere of civic action? And what actions are called for in that domain? My conception of the domain of political action in this chapter is an expansive one. My main focus is, in Dewey’s (1966/1916) terms, on democracy as “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 87). No doubt United States citizens should study American history and government. But the fundamental commitments of citizens of a liberal democratic society to the political equality of all citizens and to all citizens’ rights to basic liberties and opportunities that are protected even against the majority are formed through participation with others in democratic modes of communication and action. What are the “habits of the heart” that sustain a democratic mode of life and what roles can education, including teacher education, play in cultivating them (Bellah et al., 1985)?

I will argue that the role of citizen in a liberal democracy requires the ability to engage in multiple practices through which citizens co-determine the goods they will pursue together as citizens and negotiate the differences that divide them. The fact that citizens hold different and conflicting views about how individual and public life should be led, as well about what justice demands, makes these negotiations necessary. The freedom a liberal democratic society provides for voicing differences of opinion and acting on them, within the limits of the law, makes continuous conversation about public matters a requirement of democratic life. The political polarization described earlier represents a failure of engagement in this fundamental democratic task: if there is no “mingling of minds,” no willingness to change one’s views in the give and take of conversation, no openness to engaging with any but the likeminded, can democracy worthy of the name be sustained?

Further, I will argue that the knowledge, skills, and virtues required to participate in
democratic practices of engagement set goals for the education of democratic citizens, as well as supplying goals for the education of the teachers who will help develop these capacities in each new generation. Finally, I suggest that the ability of schools of education, and higher education institutions generally, to contribute to civic education depends on creating and maintaining their autonomy from centers of power in the society that might corrupt this mission.

THE CIVIC SPHERE AND THE PRACTICES OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENS

The contexts that come readily to mind when democratic political action is invoked are places such as legislatures, town councils, and school boards where participants are making decisions that are binding for a particular polity. Recently, however, theorists have explored the potential of civil society for democratic action. “Civil society” refers to the social sphere of voluntary associations formed by citizens to express their interests and commitments, associations that are largely outside the spheres of the economy and the state. As Iris Marion Young (2000) says: “In the associations of civil society people co-ordinate their actions by discussing and working things out, rather than by checking prices or looking up the rules” (p. 159). Civil society, in this sense, includes churches, neighborhood associations, workers’ organizations, political action groups, clubs, cultural organizations, non-profit service providers, civic associations, and many others. Such groups may provide services for their members, can expose injustice in the political and economic spheres, and sometimes succeed in placing limits on state and economic power. Young suggests categorizing these associations as private, civic, and political. Although not all associations in civil society are positive (e.g. the Ku Klux Klan), in their civic and political forms, these associations have the potential for strengthening democratic life. The inclusion of civil society in the political domain extends the possibilities for political action beyond the sphere of the state and opens up wider possibilities for democratic participation. The expansion of the political sphere to include civil society mirrors Dewey’s expansive and inclusive conception of democratic life previously invoked.

Further, Jane Mansbridge (1999) argues for including what she calls “everyday talk” as a potential site for political action. Mansbridge defines as political “ ‘that which the public ought to discuss’ when that discussion forms part of some, perhaps highly informal, version of a collective ‘decision’ ” (p. 214). While legislatures aim at decisions that will be binding on the participants, everyday talk creates the climate of opinion within which binding decisions can be made (or through which such decisions are realized). From this perspective, Mansbridge suggests, “The snort of derision one might give at a sexist television character while watching with friends” is a political act (p. 214).

What types of actions do we engage in as citizens, not only in contexts where authoritative decisions are being made, but also in associational life and through everyday talk? And what knowledge, skills, and virtues do these forms of action require? Michael Walzer (2004) has emphasized the variety of forms of political participation, including (among others) political education, voting, campaigning, fund raising, demonstrating, and “scut work,” such as stuffing envelopes. Yet these particular activities are embedded in more general types of practices that orient our engagement with other citizens around the issues that divide us.

With these political contexts in mind, I will consider three categories of interpersonal relationships among democratic citizens: (1) deliberation; (2) negotiation and bargaining; and (3) activism. These practices represent different visions of the work of citizens and
their proper orientation to each other. Moreover, these forms of interaction are often in tension with each other, as we shall see. Yet my thesis is that democratic political life requires them all. While some citizens may specialize in one category or another as life stances, most of us are called upon to engage in all three categories of action, at least within the sphere of civil society and everyday talk. The role of formal education in developing them is what I want to explore, along with what these practices imply for the purposes of teacher education in a democratic society.

Deliberation

Many of the recent discussions of civic virtue assume that the prime thing citizens ought to do together is deliberate. I have in mind here theories of what is called “deliberative democracy” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Macedo, 1999). From this perspective, when confronted with a public problem, citizens should try to figure out the best solution to the problem through joint consideration of the reasons for and against proposed courses of action. Alan Wertheimer (1999) says that: “In general, we deliberate with each other when we think that (1) there is a right answer to an issue and (2) discussion will move us closer to that answer” (p. 171). Walzer (2004) characterizes deliberation as “a rational process of discussion among equals, who listen respectfully to each other’s views, weigh the available data, consider alternative possibilities, argue about relevance and worthiness, and then choose the best policy for the country or the best person for the office” (p. 91). When citizens deliberate, then, they seek the best policy or the best course of action through analysis of the available evidence in a process of rational discussion with fellow participants. Deliberation is not just a sharing of perspectives but rather “discussion with an eye toward decision making” even when the participants are not themselves the primary decision makers (Parker, 2003, p. 81).

Juries are examples of citizen deliberation. We assume that there is a truth of the matter—the person charged is either guilty or innocent. The jury’s task is to assess the evidence and decide on a verdict. We do not think that jurors should compromise or “split the difference” when there is disagreement. If the charge is murder in the first degree and some jurors believe that the defendant is guilty while others think he is totally innocent, it would be wrong of them to compromise by convicting him of a lesser charge, say manslaughter. Their task is to agree on the direction the available evidence points or to acknowledge that they cannot reach a verdict. Negotiations may take place behind the scenes among lawyers, defendants, and prosecutors; but juries should not negotiate. On the other hand, friends debating which movie to see normally do not think there is an objectively right answer. They seek to accommodate each other, to find a movie each wants to see. They do not, in the sense described above, “deliberate” (Walzer, 2004; Wertheimer, 1999).

All theories of deliberative democracy attempt to specify the conditions under which public deliberations can be regarded as legitimate (e.g. that all citizens should have an equal and effective right to participate) and they attempt to specify the citizen virtues that are required for successful public deliberation (e.g. willingness to listen to and seriously entertain other citizens’ points of view). The point of the deliberation is to convert disagreement into agreement about what to do by determining which proposals are supported by the best reasons. Deliberative democrats recognize that disagreement may be persistent. Nevertheless, they believe that the mutual respect involved in the process of deliberation will enhance the legitimacy of whatever decision is ultimately made even in the eyes of those who lose out.

While deliberation is a familiar activity, it is perhaps not often realized quite how
Deliberation is not merely talking nor is it a debate. As Deborah Tannen ([1998] 1999) puts the point in *The Argument Culture*: “Public discourse requires making an argument for a point of view, not having an argument—as in having a fight” (p. 4). In a debate, the opponents are trying to win, not to discover the truth. They may present the evidence that favors their case and suppress the contrary evidence, for example. Debaters are not trying to find the best solution by keeping an open mind about the opponent’s point of view. Unlike deliberators, debaters are typically not open to the possibility of being shown wrong (Walzer, 2004). Neither is deliberation simply a matter of the airing of opinions in which each participant is regarded as having a right to his or her own point of view. Deliberation involves joint inquiry in which evidence is collected and brought to bear on a problem and multiple theories and interpretations are examined. Thus that participants change their views as the deliberations unfold is one indication that real deliberation is taking place (Simon, 2005).

Preparing future citizens to deliberate, then, requires a focus on a particular set of skills and dispositions. Effective deliberators should be able to construct sound arguments for their positions but should also be open to changing their views when confronted with better arguments. Like Dewey, deliberative democrats see communal political discourse as joint inquiry that is self-correcting given the right conditions (Michelli, 2005). Deliberation is, as previously noted, not a debate but rather a collaborative inquiry into questions affecting the public good: seeing what is at stake, bringing evidence and alternative perspectives to bear on the question, developing an opinion, assessing the fairness of the decision-making process (Simon, 2005).

Since diversity of perspective is a deliberative asset, willingness to listen to others who disagree with you is a deliberative virtue. So also is support for the principles that constitute the grounds for free and fair exchange of ideas: respect for the rights of others; nondiscrimination; the freedom and equality of all citizens; civility; mutual respect; tolerance of dissent; openness to different points of view. As deliberative democrat Amy Gutmann (2005) puts the point, the goal of civic education is to prepare citizens with “the ability to argue and appreciate, understand and criticize, persuade and collectively decide in a way that is mutually respectable even if not universally acceptable” (p. 358). Since, as Gutmann suggests, consensus may not be reached on contentious issues, citizens must be willing to respect decisions reached through fair procedures even if they disagree and intend to continue trying to persuade their fellow citizens to change their judgments.

There is a considerable consensus in the literature that one of the best ways to develop deliberative capacities in students is to engage them in discussion of controversial issues (Gutmann, 2005; Johnson et al., 2000; Parker, 2003; Simon, 2005). If the issues were not controversial, deliberation would not be required. Sometimes the preferred issues are those close to home, such as classroom and school policies, where students may be able to influence the outcome. But often students are engaged in deliberating public policy questions such as free trade or environmental treaties. Parker (2003) offers a curriculum for a high school course in deliberation that teaches students a framework for policy analysis. The National Issues Forum (NIF) network promotes a deliberative focus on policy issues, using material provided through the Public Agenda Foundation. In Project 540, students define their own topics for deliberation. This program has involved 250 high schools and over 140,000 students since 2002 (Johanek & Puckett, 2005).

In her study of 50 secondary schools in five countries (England, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States), Hahn (1998) found that students who had opportunities to discuss controversial issues in classrooms where they felt free to express their views developed more positive political attitudes than students lacking such
experiences. Such discussions were most effective when the classroom was open to multiple points of view and students felt able to express views that differed from those of their peers or their teacher. Students having such experiences expressed “higher levels of political efficacy, interest, trust, and confidence” (p. 245).

The implication of a focus on developing students’ deliberative capacities for teacher education is that teachers should learn how to conduct deliberative discussions and create supportive classroom environments. If we are to encourage deliberation in students “we would have to incorporate facilitation skills in significant ways into teacher education programs and ongoing professional development efforts,” notes Simon (2005, p. 112). Simon contrasts classroom deliberation with the simple acquisition and recall of information that she believes dominates classrooms. Of course, deliberative discussions need to be informed, but Simon argues that such discussions take longer than straightforward knowledge acquisition and hence there will be some tradeoff between deliberative discussion and content coverage. Standardized tests and high stakes testing are often barriers to classroom deliberation, she says, because deliberative capacities are not tested for and teachers are reluctant to spend time on things that are not tested. They may also be afraid of getting into trouble through discussion of controversial issues. Parker (2003) offers an account, based on his own experience, of how pre-service teachers can learn to lead deliberative discussions (Chapter 7). Drawing on the work of Morton Deutsch on conflict resolution, Johnson, Johnson, and Tjosveld (2000) have trained teachers and administrators in techniques of “constructive controversy,” which engage students in deliberative discussion of controversial issues.

Is deliberation a frequent component of public political life? Admittedly, it does not seem to capture the real world very well. If we think about the quality of conversation in the last Presidential election, reasonableness, open-mindedness, willingness to be shown wrong, are not the first adjectives that come to mind. Even advocates of the deliberative view acknowledge that the actual political process does not often exemplify deliberation, so students may have rarely seen examples (Simon, 2005). But the model offers an ideal to be aspired to, not a description of reality. To what extent should political discussion depend on mutual persuasion about the rightness of particular policies and courses of action? Can democratic interpersonal political communication rightly take other forms? Are these alternatives morally second best to deliberation even if they may be more efficient or expedient? Advocates of deliberation do not generally argue that deliberation is the only acceptable political activity, but they do tend to think that it has moral advantages over other activities and should be preferred when possible. Is this true?

Dewey (1966/1916) modeled public political discourse as joint inquiry. But others have held that in a democratic society, deliberation plays a more limited role. Some believe that the deliberative stance pays too little attention to “the degree to which moral disagreements in politics are shaped by differences of interest and power” (Shapiro, 1999, p. 29). Daniel Bell (1999) argues that if a country is deeply divided between rich and poor and lacks a sense of community and mutual trust, “the solution might be expropriation rather than deliberation” (p. 73). The political philosopher Will Kymlicka (2003) has recently suggested that cooperation among diverse groups may be “more a matter of bargaining and negotiation than of genuinely shared deliberation or mutual understanding” (p. 165). Are advocates of deliberation attempting to transcend politics—are they trying to create “a world where political conflict, class struggle, and cultural difference are all replaced by pure deliberation?” asks Walzer (2004, p. 105).

Deliberation can enhance disagreement rather than bringing about convergence. Religious differences may prove irreconcilable, for example, or citizens may become
more aware of their class interests through discussion and hence more aware of how their interests diverge from those of other citizens. In a liberal democratic society such as the United States where there are diverse groups with different perspectives as well as conflicting interests, reaching agreement on what is true or best as a way of deciding what to do may be less likely to produce a solution acceptable to all than accommodation of conflicting interests. A political order based on agreement about what is true (a theocracy, for example) is different from a liberal democratic political order that attempts to encompass citizens with different conceptions of the good.

**Negotiation and bargaining**

Bargains represent the balance of power not the force of the arguments. The parties trying to reach agreement are seeking to secure their own interests, not necessarily to transcend them through appeal to a common conception of justice or concern for the common good, as the deliberative democrat might want. However, since agreements are more likely to be stable if they give each party a decent measure of satisfaction of their interests, accommodating each other will generally be in the interest of each of the negotiating parties. Wertheimer (1999) says that “We may seek to accommodate each other when we believe that there is no right answer to an issue or that continued deliberation will not likely resolve the dispute (even if there is a right answer)” (p. 171). An accommodation attempts to reach an agreement all can accept. Nevertheless, a mutually agreed to bargain or accommodation may not represent anyone’s idea of the best solution. It may not coincide with either party’s conception of the just outcome or the one best supported by the available reasons.

Advocates of deliberative democracy are wary of negotiation even as they sometimes acknowledge the need for it. Parker (2003), for example, distinguishes negotiation from deliberation by noting that bargaining assumes competing interests and involves “at least two groups present in the same forum engaged in an adversarial contest” (p. 81). Gutmann (2005) says that bargaining is “self-interested or group-interested”—a “politics of manipulation and coercion” rather than “a politics of reasoning and persuasion” (p. 354). And she notes: “Without the capacity to deliberate, there would be no escaping from power politics—which give power priority over both justice and deliberation—which all moral conceptions of democracy are intent on avoiding” (p. 353). Gutmann does acknowledge, however, that bargaining and negotiation might be called for in situations where no moral issue is at stake or at least one party to the dispute is unwilling to take a moral point of view and so those who did so would be disadvantaged.

Gutmann and Thompson (1999) contrast “the positive case of finding grounds of moral accommodation with similarly motivated political adversaries and the negative case of reaching compromises that undermine one’s fundamental principles” (p. 266). New York Senator Hilary Clinton’s suggestion that both pro-life and pro-choice advocates can support a program for preventing unwanted pregnancies is an example of positive moral accommodation. A hypothetical case in which a pro-life person proposes giving up the effort to make abortion illegal in exchange for a pro-choice advocate’s support of the Hyde amendment (which denies federal funds for abortions for poor women) would be an example of the latter, of compromising one’s principles.

Skepticism about the morality of bargaining in politics may be part of what gives politics a bad name. Hahn (1998) found low levels of political trust among all adolescents in her multi-country study of secondary school students. Only about 20 percent of adolescents said that they respect those who hold public office. She notes that few students reported ever meeting a politician. They gained their views from media reports
of scandals, especially in the tabloid press, and from their parents. Hahn asks what these attitudes mean for the survival of the ideal of representative democracy.

But is negotiation or bargaining necessarily morally suspect? Strategies for forging agreements among opposing parties obviously vary. A winner take all power politics leaves a few crumbs at best for the loser. Competitive struggles are determined by the balance of power or by force. Yet bargains are required when each side needs the other. If one side can force its will on others, there is no need to negotiate. Generally, parties in a bargaining or negotiating situation have interdependent interests; they need each other’s cooperation to some extent in order to serve their own interests. Each has some power either to promote or to frustrate the other’s satisfaction of their needs.

Morton Deutsch’s theory of negotiation emphasizes this interdependence rather than competitive struggle (2000a). From this perspective, constructive conflict resolution requires shifting perspective from conflicts in world-views or moral principles (which usually are non-negotiable) toward the primary interests of the conflicting parties. What is required is to enlist the parties in a collaborative investigation of how to satisfy the primary interests of each in the specific context. In a sense, this strategy transforms negotiations into deliberation about how to reach an agreement all can accept. Yet the agreement sought is not the objectively right outcome but an arrangement that accommodates each of the parties.

Some of the most difficult conflicts are those where moral principles cannot be set aside because the conflict concerns different interpretations of principles of justice. Deutsch (2000b) offers an example of a mediated conflict resolution where the conflict involved how teacher representatives to a site-based management team should be selected. The issue was whether seats should be designated for teachers from minority groups that were heavily represented among the students but not among the teachers. The school’s Black Teacher Caucus held that the management team needed their input, given the diversity of the student body and the importance of the school’s dealing with increases in bias related incidents and developing a curriculum more relevant to the current student population. The majority of council members held that all members should be elected through democratic procedures and that setting aside a seat for an African American teacher would open the door to still other seats dedicated to other minority groups. With the help of a mediator, they were ultimately able to agree on a solution that involved the principal’s appointing a seven person multicultural task force each year from which two members of the council would be selected, one at large by vote of the task force and one from the ethnic group most prevalent in the student population (pp. 3–4). The challenge in such cases is to find a creative solution that allows the claims of each side to be represented and the principles that each invokes to be included (Deutsch, 2000a).

Despite the disdain sometimes expressed by deliberative democrats of negotiation as a moral enterprise, democratic citizens arguably need the virtues and skills of conflict resolution that are useful in finding peaceful accommodation of others’ interests or creative solutions to conflicts of moral principles. Aside from skills in conflict resolution, citizens prepared to engage in constructive negotiation require problem-solving skills, self-control, ability to take the perspectives of others, ability to communicate well, cooperativeness, and awareness of bias (Sandy & Cochran, 2000).

There are numerous programs for teaching conflict resolution skills to children and adolescents in schools, as well as to their teachers through in-service workshops. Since the 1980s, Educators for Social Responsibility (2005) has advocated teaching students ways of peaceably and creatively resolving conflicts as a way of producing safe and supportive learning environments. In 2003, their Resolving Conflict Creatively Program for grades K-8, originally developed with the New York City Schools, was in 400 schools in the
United States. Sandy and Cochran (2000) provide examples of programs serving youth from early childhood to adolescence, including the Peaceful Kids Early Childhood Social-Emotional Learning Program developed in 1998 at the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Teachers College (Columbia University, New York City).

The most frequently mentioned aims of these programs include: reducing school violence; generating positive inter-group relations; reducing prejudice; creating good learning environments; helping students develop pro-social skills that will aid their personal growth and their success in school and in the workplace; and fostering responsible citizenship. That conflict resolution skills might make a contribution to the practices of democratic citizenship can certainly be inferred from these aims, but the connections are not fully developed in the materials surveyed for this chapter. However, given the persistence of disagreement among citizens about which policies and practices are best, the attitudes and strategies fostered by training in creative conflict resolution offers a positive alternative to the polarization we currently confront. If teachers were to help students develop such capacities, they would need training, not only in conflict resolution strategies, but also in how to teach such strategies to others. The experiences of numerous practitioners who have conducted workshops in conflict resolutions in various settings could be a resource for such training (Raider et al., 2000).

There are, however, limitations to the scope of constructive conflict resolution. When conflict is generated by injustice, especially injustice that is difficult to recognize by those who perpetrate it because it is embedded within major social institutions, a reorientation of thinking is required, not simply creative solutions. Some citizens must learn to enlarge the scope of their moral communities and recognize their complicity in the persistence of unjust treatment of other citizens. Those who have been unjustly treated are often more likely to recognize their situation and organize to become forces for social change. This work exemplifies the final practice of democratic citizenship surveyed here, activism oriented toward social justice.

Activism

Activism can be engaged in from any point in the political spectrum and for different purposes. Here I will focus on activism that is oriented toward achieving greater social justice, a form of activism especially relevant to democratic citizenship.

While deliberating and bargaining tend to take place within given social structures, activists work to change structures they view as unjust. They attend to differences of power, to the way the context of discussion has been framed by actions outside its scope. The activist believes that deliberation typically occurs in contexts that have been structured in ways that serve the interests of those in power. Thus deliberation is not likely to be effective in securing greater social justice or advancing the interests of the oppressed. Activists employ other strategies of mobilization, protest, and disruption that call attention to their causes. Unlike bargainers, activists are not usually motivated solely by their own or their group’s interests. Rather, they see themselves as acting in the interest of principles of justice (Young, 2002). Some citizens make activism their life’s work, their profession in effect. They identify with a social movement and devote themselves to realizing its goals. The civil rights movement, feminist movements, disability rights, gay pride, PETA, ACT UP are but part of a long list of causes.

Citizens may have moments of activism within everyday talk even if it is not a major part of their identities. The following example is taken from Jane Mansbridge’s (1999) research. An African American woman went with her husband to his family’s home in the South. At dinner, the men gathered at the table while the women went into the kitchen.
and came back with plates filled with food for the men. The visiting woman had remained seated at the table. Her husband asked her to fill his plate. She said, “I don’t fill your plate at home. Why would I do it here?” And the other women sat down as well and stopped waiting on the men. The woman said, “Well, what I did was I ended up like liberating the other women in the family.” Mansbridge comments: “With this small act—a combination of speech, and, in this case, nonperformance of an expected action—[she] . . . intervened in her own and others’ lives to promote a relatively new ideal of gender justice, exemplified by her verb ‘liberating’ ” (pp. 217–218).

The contradiction between democratic commitment to political equality and fair opportunity and disparities in schooling help fuel a commitment to teaching for social justice and a conception of teachers as change agents (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Hytten, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Villegas and Lucas (2002) assert: “The consistent gap between racial/ethnic minority and poor students and their white, middle-class peers in scores on standardized tests is indicative of the inability of the educational system to effectively teach students of color as schools have traditionally been structured” (p. 9).

Advocates of teaching for social justice argue that the gap cannot be closed simply by training prospective teachers in research-based pedagogical practices, but rather requires challenging the “structural inequalities embedded in the United States’ system of schooling [that] perpetuate hierarchies of domination closely linked to race and class . . . Activism, and analysis of power and social inequalities [must be made] part of the curriculum” (Rubin & Justice, 2005, p. 80).

Educating teachers for activism, then, requires fostering a strong commitment to social justice, but that commitment alone is not enough. Teacher educators committed to teaching for social justice help pre-service teachers to see injustice related to race and class in tracking or in lowered expectations and in differences in school facilities, for example, and to understand the dynamics of power and privilege as they are manifest in the “systematic production of inequality” (Parker, 2003, p. 154). They help pre-service teachers develop teaching stances and styles that engage, and are sensitive to, their students’ experiences and perspectives. They challenge pre-service teachers to examine their own perspectives for the ways they have been shaped by their social and cultural locations and hence may harbor biases and stereotypes (Applebaum, 2004). They encourage pre-service teachers in developing ways to engage effectively with others from different backgrounds (Rubin & Justice, 2005; Lucas, 2005). They help pre-service teachers to see the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of their students as assets rather than deficits, and they encourage teaching techniques and assessment practices that promote learning for all students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). But beyond acquiring and transmitting to their own students the perspectives, knowledge, and skills described above, activist teachers require the courage to challenge injustice in the educational system.

As noted above, activism is not the sole province of any one political perspective. Students can be taught to critically examine existing practices and to advocate for the social and political changes they believe are justified whatever their particular viewpoints. Teaching for social justice, however, does involve substantive political commitments, as we have seen. Some critics are concerned that such teaching is partisan. Ruth Grant (1996) argues that classrooms should engage students in “conversation aimed at genuine inquiry” rather than conversation “aimed at producing a consensus on a predetermined position or point of view” (pp. 476–477). While commitment to social justice is a constitutive feature of liberal democracy, citizens have different conceptions of what justice is and what it requires. The danger of activism from the perspective of deliberative democracy is that the activists will be so persuaded of the rightness of their own positions that they will be unwilling to engage in genuine deliberation with those
who hold opposing views. And once the issues have been framed as matters of justice, the prospects for negotiation and compromise will be limited.

DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES: MUST WE CHOOSE?

A democratic citizen should have the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for the various practices required by a democratic life that likely will always be full of contention. Deliberation, negotiation, and activism are core practices in which citizens engage with each other over the issues that divide them. The democratic culture sets the ground rules for engagement: a commitment to the freedom and equality of all citizens (Rawls, 1993). A robust civic education, fueled in part through democratic-minded teacher education, fosters the democratic culture through preparing future citizens for participation in the basic practices of democratic life.

There are both commonalities and tensions among these practices. For example, both deliberation and activism, as I have portrayed them, aim at the common good. In deliberative fora, citizens speak from their own perspectives, of course, but they are expected to be open to rational persuasion about which solution to their common problem is best. Activism that aims at social justice seeks to educate, and appeal to, a conception of the appropriate treatment of persons and the equality of citizens. While redistribution of social goods may advantage some more than others, for example, the reason for the redistribution activists seek is remedying injustice, not responding to special interests.

By contrast, negotiation aims at mutual accommodation of interests and thus has appeared to some to be inferior to the moral stances of deliberation and the demand for social justice. Bargaining is not oriented toward the common good and it is extremely doubtful that a “hidden hand” will see to it that the common good is served by the pursuit of individual and group interests. Yet deliberative democrats acknowledge that agreement is not always forthcoming. Disagreement is a ubiquitous fact of democratic political life. John Rawls (1993) has argued that such disagreement can persist without anyone’s being ill-informed or mistaken about the facts, because, for example, different groups may assign different weightings to competing values. Joseph M. Schwartz (1995) argues for the “permanence of the political.” By that phrase, he means that even in “a relatively egalitarian political community” there will still be “spirited political disagreement and contestation” (p. 19). He suggests that radical democratic theorists have underestimated the persistence of conflict and have supposed that politics as the mediation of conflicting interests could be eliminated in a truly just and egalitarian society. Deliberation and activism share a hope that conflict can be eliminated by seeking truth, whether it is the truth about which policy is best or how justice can be achieved. Negotiation (or “politics” in Schwartz’s formulation) acknowledges the radical pluralism of interests and cultural commitments that makes overcoming conflict unlikely except through repression.

While the deliberative forum strives to be a power free zone, negotiation and activism recognize, in their own ways, the reality of differential distribution of power. Each is willing to use power in pursuit of its goals, unlike the deliberator’s focus on rational persuasion. While activism aimed at social justice seeks a redistribution of power, negotiation acknowledges the existing power relationships. Yet constructive negotiation relies on the interdependence of even those with unequal power and the capacity of each party to thwart the interests of the others.

How, then, shall we live together as democratic citizens in the face of continuing disagreement? Should we choose among these practices? Deliberation has much to
recommend it even if agreement is not always reached. In public political contexts, voting or the courts may decide the matter for the time being, while deliberation continues. But in civil society or everyday life, beyond the reach of voting and courts, trying to achieve mutual accommodation with others through agreements that satisfy the primary interests of each group seems equally a staple of democratic life. And legislative proposals themselves typically embody bargains based on accommodation of different interests. Lack of willingness to accommodate others, insisting on one’s own claim to truth, thwarts legislative action and polarizes the electorate. But when conflict is generated by injustice, especially injustice that is difficult to recognize by those who perpetrate it because it is embedded within major social institutions, a reorientation of thinking is required, not simply creative accommodations of interests. Thus activism oriented to social justice has its distinct claim on democratic life.

Thus it is no surprise that, while I have described each of these political practices independently, in reality, they often appear in combination. For example, a New York Times’ reporter was struck by the oddity of two Act-Up (the Aids Coalition to Unleash Power) protesters engaged in a “die-in” while wearing sports jackets and ties. When she followed up, she learned that, after the protest, they were attending a meeting at the office of the United States trade representative (as cited in Levinson, 2002). Activism aimed at changing citizens’ awareness of issues is not incompatible with employing deliberative strategies when they are available.

In Democracy and Disagreement, deliberative democrats Gutmann and Thompson (1996) consider the example of the strategies used by Senator Carol Moseley Braun to defeat efforts to renew the Daughters of the Confederacy’s patent on the Confederate flag insignia. After the amendment passed a test vote, Moseley Braun took to the Senate floor. She argued that putting the Senate’s “imprimatur” on a racist symbol was an “outrage” and “insult” that was “absolutely unacceptable” to her and millions of Americans both black and white. Her speech was described as an “oratory of impassioned tears and shouts” and she threatened a filibuster. At the end of a three-hour debate, the amendment failed. Commenting on this example, Gutmann and Thompson write: “even extreme non-deliberative methods may be justified as necessary steps to deliberation” (p. 135). Yet they also point out that her appeal might not have succeeded if it had been “purely strategic, asserting only a claim of interest and making no appeal to moral principle” (p. 258). That is, if she had made the issue a matter of bargaining or accommodation to ensure the interests of African Americans as a group, rather than making a moral appeal, based on justice, she would have been less effective. Yet Moseley Braun cannot have been unaware that the interests in re-election of the Senators who initially opposed her were part of what made them yield. In this case, deliberation, negotiation, and activism combined to generate a resolution. Choosing among these practices, then, is not only not required, but also not a good idea. Each has its place in the repertoire of a democratic citizen.

The goal of democratic education for both teachers and teacher educators might be to educate citizens who would realize the following ideals, as represented by Walzer’s (2004) thought experiments:

We can imagine the party platform drawn up by a group of people who are not only good negotiators but reflective men and women aiming at proposals that are morally justified and economically realistic as well as politically appealing. We can imagine a negotiating process in which people try to understand and accommodate the interests of the other side (while still defending their own) rather than just driving the hardest possible bargain. We can imagine parliamentary debates where the rival
speakers listen to one another and are prepared to modify their positions. And finally, we can imagine citizens who actually think about the common good when they evaluate candidates, or party programs, or the deals their representatives strike, or the arguments they made.

(p. 107–108)

SCHOOLING AND THE FOSTERING OF DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

Even if my argument is persuasive that democratic citizens need the dispositions, knowledge, and skills required to participate in the practices of deliberation, negotiation, and activism, that fact does not settle the question of what the roles of public schooling and higher education are in developing these capacities. Closest to the heart of the current curriculum of education at all levels are aspects of the practice of deliberation. Fostering capacities for rational persuasion is simply part of what a good liberal education involves. Even without aiming at civic education, universities will enhance the civic virtue of their students, including prospective teachers, simply by developing the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required for serious inquiry. By teaching students how to engage in the search for truth, they will enhance the quality of public reason. As Dewey often argued, inquiry is not the sole provenance of a special class of persons called “researchers,” but is both the right and the duty of democratic citizens.

Thus liberal education has significance for democratic life. And the inequality of our current system that denies a strong liberal education to some citizens is not only unjust but also undermines democratic participation. Yet acquiring knowledge of the liberal arts does not in itself foster willingness to listen to others’ points of view, openness to being shown wrong, or willingness to modify one’s understanding in light of new evidence—the virtues required for genuine deliberation. Thus democratic education requires more explicit attention to virtues often thought to be embedded in the curriculum of liberal education, but surely not always realized.

The place of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills associated with negotiation in the curriculum of schooling at all levels is less secure than those associated with deliberation. While there are programs for teaching students and their teachers conflict resolution techniques, as noted earlier in this chapter, these practices are not as deeply embedded in the educational curriculum of either public schooling or higher education as the practices of deliberation. I have suggested that it may be that suspicions about the morality of bargaining as opposed to deliberation may be part of the explanation. But it may also simply be that these techniques are thought of as “add-ons” that are less central to the educational missions of schools at all levels. But the enduring reality of disagreement in democratic political life makes the willingness to accommodate others’ legitimate interests and the ability to devise creative solutions to conflicts important democratic virtues. If the educational system does not foster these capacities, what other institutions will?

Fostering a commitment to social justice and social activism within schooling has been controversial, as noted earlier in this chapter. Some question whether schools of education, or universities more generally, should make commitment to social justice and activism a part of the curriculum. Stanley Fish (2004) has argued that urging students to engage in political acts, even fostering “the practices of responsible citizenship,” is not the business of the university. “Universities,” he writes, “could engage in moral and civic education only by deciding in advance which of the competing views of morality and citizenship is the right one, and then devoting academic resources and energy to the task of realizing it.
But that task would deform (by replacing) the true task of academic work: the search for truth and the dissemination of it through teaching” (n.p.). Further, some worry about the prospects of indoctrination. While classifying himself as within the radical democratic tradition, Schwartz (1995) nevertheless claims:

A pluralist democrat would argue that schools should impart a minimalist democratic ideology to students involving a capacity for critical reasoning (even about democracy itself) and a commitment to the equal rights of democratic citizens. To inculcate a thicker, more comprehensive political ideology would cross the line between democratic schooling and ideological indoctrination.

(pp. 10–11)

So there is contestation about the role of schools in promoting activism.

Yet social criticism has long been an established part of the university’s function in American society. And while there are legitimate disagreements about what justice requires, that teachers in a democratic society should be committed to a just distribution of educational resources does not seem an inappropriate expectation. More challenging, but also clearly necessary for democratic life, is creating awareness of systematic injustice and the role citizens play in perpetuating it, even without being aware of their complicity. Of course, the line between education and political indoctrination can be crossed. But teachers who have acquired the deliberative capacities described above will be better able to draw that line.

Deliberation, negotiation, and activism are all possible stances for democratic citizens to take. A case can be made that these practices are rightly fostered through the educational system. The commitment to developing citizens who can participate in these practices sets a complex agenda for teacher education. As I have suggested in this essay, teachers in a democratic society should be able to: lead deliberative discussions where students learn to formulate their own arguments, engage others’ points of view, and be open to changing their minds when given good reasons to do so; teach the skills and attitudes of negotiation that include the willingness to accommodate others’ interests in ways that do not deny fundamental democratic principles, as well as the ability to generate creative solutions to conflicts; and encourage students to be alive to injustice in social practices as well as in themselves and others and to be willing to challenge injustice when they see it.

It should be plain from the discussion thus far that the democratic practices considered in this chapter are more than mere sets of skills. They have ethical dimensions that involve qualities of character and attitudes toward other participants that are required to make them constitutive of democratic practices (Grant, 1996). Mere training in skills of conflict resolution, for example, will not necessarily foster willingness to accommodate others’ interests. Thus democratic practices cannot be communicated in a few training workshops. Rather, the whole educational process in teacher education programs as well as in K-12 education must provide forums for the reflective appropriation of these practices.

The limited success of effects to “export democracy” shows that learning and teaching the practices of democratic participation are not simple matters. Children need to experience these practices as part of a democratic political culture if they are to fully develop the complex “habits of the heart” that sustain democracy. As Dewey (1966/1916) noted, “the main texture of disposition is formed, independently of schooling” through the “unconscious influence of the environment” (p. 17). On the other hand, schooling is not inert: it provides “a special social environment which shall especially look after nurturing
the capacities of the immature” (Dewey, 1966/1916, p. 22). Schooling that consciously fosters democratic practices makes its contribution to revitalizing and improving democratic life.

A CONCLUDING POSTSCRIPT: HIGHER EDUCATION, TEACHER EDUCATION, AND CIVIC EDUCATION

Teacher education is located within colleges and universities that have increasingly embraced a role in civic education. A few years ago 500 university presidents called upon colleges and universities to help students “realize the values and skills of our democratic society” (as cited in Fish, 2004). Many colleges and universities include a commitment to civic education within their mission statements. Indeed Fullinwider and Lichtenberg (2004) claim that higher education’s understanding of the benefits of liberal education has shifted from acquiring liberal culture to preparation for social and civic engagement (Chapter 3).

Yet the university’s capacity to play a role in civic education depends on its protecting its institutional autonomy. To maintain its social roles as truth seeker and social critic, the university needs the capacity to speak truth to power whatever the dominant sources of power are at a given historical moment. While contemporary university scholars attack the injustices embedded in our social and political life, universities as institutions are increasingly connected to the agendas of state governments and corporations.

The Martin Luther King Day dinner at my university is held in the campus’ main athletic facility. It is a large event and some people have distant views of the stage and the speaker, so the instant replay screen normally used for athletic events is pressed into service. At a recent dinner, during the opening moments, old television footage of the civil rights movement was projected onto the screen, which is surrounded by advertisements for several corporations. I found it a disquieting moment to view images of nonviolent protesters being beaten by the police in juxtaposition with the advertisements. Later the image of our speaker, President Ruth Simmons of Brown University, was on the same screen. As she challenged our students to be less concerned with Hummers and bling-bling and more concerned with social justice, the advertisements surrounded her face.

That image stayed with me as a metaphor of the moral and political challenges facing contemporary universities. Examining the curriculum and the education provided to students is only one part of the civic mission of higher education. Universities—and that includes colleges and schools of education—need to examine their own actions as corporate agents for consistency with maintaining the ability to speak truth to power and their role as civic educators.

I am not saying that it is necessarily wrong for universities to have corporate sponsors for their enterprises. Nor am I saying that business is necessarily a morally contaminated activity from which universities should keep their distance in order to maintain purity. But universities do need to think hard about structuring government and corporate partnerships in ways that do not compromise their essential roles as truth seeker and social critic. Without returning to the idea of the university as an ivory tower, unengaged in the affairs of the community, it is important to maintain institutional autonomy if universities are to fulfill their civic role. That role includes the preparation of the nation’s teachers who can help our children and youth develop the arts of deliberation, negotiation, and activism.
REFERENCES


