What Does Democracy Mean to Prospective Elementary Teachers?

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Dewey (1916, 1927) argued that the school should be a democracy in microcosm in which pupils learn particular processes, values, and attitudes to live effectively as citizens in a democratic society. By democracy, Dewey meant a form of active community life, a way of being and living with others. He emphasized that democracy entails habits of the mind that citizens must cultivate throughout their lives as they participate in institutions and groups in which they have a voice in setting goals, sharing knowledge, communicating, and taking direct action. Most important, Dewey envisioned democracy as a creative and constructive process for which citizens needed practical judgment, a shared fund of civic knowledge, and deliberative skills and dispositions, much of which must be learned in schools. Pupils should not simply learn about democracy as a form of government.

Parker (1996a, 1996b) raises important questions about educating children *for the demands of an increasingly diverse society that is struggling to realize the democratic ideal* (1996b, p. 2). He argues that the view of citizenship in the United States must be pluralistic and allow for a wide range of cultural and ethnic identities. The nation must strive for *democratic political community within cultural pluralism* (1996b, p. 20). Parker asserts that the school's first moral obligation is to give children an education equipping them to take advantage of their citizenship (1996b, p. 2). Like Dewey, he emphasizes the potential of public schools to provide children with a civic apprenticeship where democratic minds are cultivated. According to Parker, schools already possess the *bedrocks of democratic living—diversity and mutuality* (1996b, pp. 2, 10). When problems arise in schools, discussion is necessary; students gradually can be initiated into the democratic community and into *increasingly critical levels of civic competence*—that is, *wondering and worrying together about how we ought to live* (1996b, pp. 10-11).

We believe public schools are laboratories for children to learn the meaning of democracy. To help students construct sophisticated conceptions of democracy, teachers must hold sophisticated conceptions. Our research focuses on teachers' understandings of democracy. An elaboration of the particular conceptions of democracy that inform our study follows.

Meanings of Political Democracy That Inform Our Study

Diamond (1996) and Fishkin (1991) outline key features of liberal democracy that establish a knowledge base for understanding political democracy. According to Diamond, key features include regular, free, and fair elections and universal suffrage; protection of the rule of law; constitutionalism; accountability of elected officials; extensive provisions for political and civic pluralism and for individual and group freedoms; constitutional checks and balances in the branches of government; and political equality under the law and through an independent judiciary. Diamond (1996) argues that *"true democracy" allows all groups to express their interests in the political process and permits citizens to have ongoing, multiple means for expression of their interests. Citizens also must have unfettered access to*

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alternative sources of information (pp. 23-24). Diamond, like Dewey, asserts that *true democracy* is developmental and has a continued capacity for reform. Good governance must be consolidated over time.

Fishkin (1991) outlines three conditions that must be satisfied to constitute a *fully realized democratic system* (p. 29): political equality in which the system *grants equal consideration to everyone's preferences and grants everyone appropriately equal opportunities to formulate preferences* (pp. 30-31); non-tyranny, the choosing of policies that impose no severe deprivations on anyone; and deliberation, in which the system assures informed and negotiated democratic choices.

Broader Meanings of Democracy: Pluralist Citizenship Education and Critical Democracy

Meanings of democracy beyond the political stem partly from Dewey's notion of democracy as a way of living. Parker (1996a) argues that conceptions of democracy that *skirt social and cultural diversity* are *feeble* (p. 104). He believes that modern conceptions of citizenship have been helpful in their emphasis on individual rights and the limitation of government power, but this conception is too narrow (p. 106). He criticizes this dominant conception for its failure to take into account two key issues: pluralism (the social and cultural dimensions of citizenship) and the central tension between unity and diversity (p. 104). This dominant conception views *difference as dissolution* (p. 109), fears the collapse of unity in the face of diversity, tries to narrow the range of allowable difference, and, most important, *sanctions and controls some political diversity* while *sidelining* or constraining social and cultural diversity in the name of *an official policy of color blindness or neutrality* (p. 110). This narrow conception tolerates difference but *does not allow political oneness to exist with social and cultural diversity* (p. 111)—a key advanced idea of democracy in Parker's framework.

For Parker (1996a), the central citizenship question is *How can we live together justly, in ways that are mutually satisfying, and that leave our differences, both individual and group, intact and our multiple identities recognized* (p. 113)? An advanced conception of democratic citizenship must include *social and cultural difference* (p. 113). In Deweyan fashion, Parker views democracy not as an accomplishment to protect, but as a journey that citizens make together. He notes it is this *political path* that unites us, not language, culture, or religion (p. 114). Children can learn that they are *heirs to this tradition, that democracy must be continually deepened, and that they have responsibility even to people with whom they have no obvious ties* (pp. 114-115).

Parker's conception of democratic citizenship and citizenship education values direct involvement in public life, pluralism, and democracy as a way of life involving *deliberation, action, and reflection* (p. 121). He argues for a discourse of *responsibility, negotiation, and obligation* aimed at creating a *broad political comradeship* creating the political *one* out of the cultural *many* (p. 117).

A second conception of democratic citizenship that informs our framework is that of *critical democracy*, which implies a moral commitment to place the public good over individual power and privilege (Barber, 1984; Dahl, 1982; Gran, 1983). It further implies citizen efforts to address meanings of deliberation, civic responsibility, social equity, group conflict and cooperation, community, individual rights, institutional organization, public interest, and the distribution of power (Barber, 1984; Ventriss, 1985).

Goodman (1992) views critical democracy as part of a broader notion of care; justice; common concern for the social good; and a restructuring of economic, social, and political power. Democracy, he states, is *incompatible with racism, sexism, and poverty and must enfranchise more people for democratic participation* (p. xv). Democracy must not be a set of cultural rituals, but a dynamic process with a broad range of possible collective actions. Critical democracy is not conflict-free; social discord must be expected as citizens resolve problems through democratic participation.

An essential aspect of critical democracy for Goodman (1992) is the *tension between the values of individuality and of community* (pp. 8-9). In a democracy, he asserts, it is important to lead a self-determined life to promote freedom, diversity, and self-expression; but there must also be an ethos of connectedness to others and collective and public action on social problems. Citizens

must realize that *self-actualization can be realized only within a just and caring society* and must understand no opposition exists between *personal advancement* and *commitment to the public good* (pp. 9, 20-21).

In Goodman's (1992) view, democratic citizenship education prepares children for intellectual awareness of the world, encourages active participation in promoting democracy, develops their individuality, and fosters their concern for their own well-being as well as that of all living beings (p. 25). Critical democracy requires that children learn critical literacy and inquiry, meaningful dialogue skills, a sense of agency, the discourse of public association and social/civic responsibility, concepts of individual freedom and social justice, and participatory action grounded in a commitment to eliminating prejudice and oppression.

Teachers and Conceptions of Democracy

Parker (1996a, 1996b) and Goodman (1992) identify key obstacles to learning democracy in school. Parker (1996b) mentions segregation, tracking and ability grouping, sexism, and *discourses of avoidance* (e.g., teaching tolerance for diversity) that facilitate the avoidance of conflict (pp. 11-12). He criticizes traditional citizenship curriculum that teaches topics such as *procedures of republican government, assimilation, attainment, and spectatorship*; he laments the lack of attention to the history of democracy, its central ideas, problems it has solved, conditions that support and undermine its development, the deliberative arts, and discussion of cultural diversity and the tension between *oneness and manyness* (1996a, p. 122).

Teachers' understandings of democracy are a fundamental influence on how children learn democracy in school. Previous ethnographic research conducted with social studies teachers, for example, indicates their influence in socializing young people into the values of democratic citizenship, at least within their communities (Lortie, 1975; McNeil, 1986; McPherson, 1972; Peshkin, 1978; Stake & Easley, 1978). Although such values are developed in many contexts—family, religious institutions, the media, peer groups—the learning environment teachers create remains important. Many aspects of this environment have received attention, for example, the ability of teachers to possess and provide certain kinds of civic knowledge and the capacity of schools and teachers to socialize students into democracy and cultivate students' political attitudes (Ehman, 1980a, 1980b; Guyton, 1988; Hahn, 1988). However, we examine here an even more fundamental question: What does democracy as a concept mean to teachers, and what are the implications of their conceptions for teacher educators?

Our Interpretive Framework

Our interpretive framework of a robust understanding of democracy acknowledges Diamond's (1996) and Fishkin's (1991) lists of key features outlined above. We believe that citizens, including teachers, should be familiar with these features.

However, our framework more heavily emphasizes characteristics drawn from Dewey (1916, 1927), Parker (1996a, 1996b), and Goodman (1992) related to the associational, pluralistic, and equity/justice aspects of democracy. Table 1 provides a synthesized list of the criteria we believe reasonable to include in a robust understanding of democracy. Papers in our study that we judged to be *high in competence* in their understandings of democracy demonstrated a number of the criteria on this list. Papers we judged *medium in competence* evidenced some of these criteria; papers *low in competence* demonstrated few or none. Unique characteristics of the medium and low categories also emerged in our independent readings of the papers (Tables 2 and 3).

Research Methodology

Twenty-nine papers written by students enrolled in a graduate curriculum course at the University of Florida during fall 1996 are the data source for this study. Directions for the required *Personal Beliefs* paper specified that students should select the three or four aims they believed most important for elementary school students to develop in public schools in a democratic society. Students were to define each aim and provide a rationale for its importance to the individual and to a democratic society. Each student submitted a draft of the paper, which the instructor critiqued;

Table 1
Criteria for Evaluating Papers to Be High in Understanding

Criterion	Demonstrated	Slightly Demonstrated	Not Demonstrated
Sees democracy as an ongoing process	2	1	0
Sees democracy as a way of living with others	3	0	0
Demonstrates knowledge of political features of democracy	0	0	0
Suggests importance of sophisticated communication skills/deliberative discourse	2	1	0
Demonstrates appreciation/valuing of social and cultural diversity/pluralism	3	0	0
Demonstrates commitment to equity, social justice, and the common good	3	0	0
Stresses the importance of developing social competence and connectedness to others	3	0	0
Stresses importance of critical thinking/inquiry	3	0	0
Demonstrates commitment to direct involvement in public life	0	0	3
Recognizes that democracy requires balancing the values of individuality and community	1	1	1

the student then rewrote the paper for final submission.

In this article, we analyze the drafts of the 29 personal beliefs papers. Based upon an assumption that students had completed a bachelor's degree in education that included coursework in social and historical foundations of education, social studies methods, and United States history, the instructor expected students would have sufficient understanding of democracy to complete this assignment. However, in reviewing these drafts, the instructor concluded that the papers reflected narrow conceptions of democracy. Instructor concerns initiated our inquiry. We used drafts rather than final submissions as the data source because they reflected students' entering perspectives about democracy. This analysis taps their untutored perspectives, which reflected their learning from prior coursework about democracy during their university education.

We completed data analysis in two phases. In Phase I, we each read all 29 papers and categorized them as high, moderate, or low in conceptions of democracy and recorded a rationale for each ranking. We then met and shared our rankings. The researchers agreed on 24 of the 29 rankings. We reread and discussed rankings on the remaining five papers to reach consensus. Through discussion of the rankings and the relevant literature, we developed a set of criteria for each level of ranking (see Tables 1, 2, and 3).

For Phase II, each of us took half of the papers at each level (low, moderate, high) and evaluated each one in terms of the criteria for the level to confirm the ranking of each paper. For 27 papers, we confirmed the original ranking. In two cases, one of us wanted external corroboration of the rating from the other. After additional review, we also confirmed the original rankings of these two papers.

Table 2
Criteria for Evaluating Papers to Be Moderate in Understanding

Criterion	Demonstrated	Slightly Demonstrated	Not Demonstrated
Emphasis placed on skills for life success rather than those necessary to fulfill roles as citizens in a democracy	7	0	1
Outlines good educational goals but is not specific about how these are related to democracy (democratic rationale tends to be vague and underdeveloped or not explicit)	8	0	0
Characteristics for democratic citizenship undermined by emphasis on obedience	3	1	4
Demonstrates appreciation of social and cultural diversity/pluralism	5	0	3
Fails to emphasize social justice or equity	8	0	0
Stresses importance of developing thinking skills and empowering students	5	0	3
Sees democracy as a skill to be acquired (including acquiring knowledge of political democratic features)	4	1	3

In addition, we reviewed transcripts of 28 of the students (one student's paper was nameless); we examined course grades for U.S. history, political science, social/historical foundations of education, and social studies methods.

Results

We rated 3 papers high, 8 moderate, and 18 low in terms of demonstrated knowledge or understanding of democratic processes and principles. Tables 1, 2, and 3 show how many papers within each level demonstrated each criterion for that level. In the following sections, we describe the knowledge and understandings of democracy characterizing each level through the use of representative quotations demonstrating key criteria for each level.

Papers Demonstrating Sophisticated Understandings of Democracy (High)

Only three papers demonstrated a sophisticated view of democracy. Each clearly demonstrated at least 6 of the 10 criteria. When we included criteria that were *slightly demonstrated*, two papers demonstrated 8 criteria; one demonstrated 7 (Table 1). Several of these criteria were particularly salient in distinguishing students with sophisticated understandings from those with less sophisticated understandings. In the following section, we document four.

The criterion most clearly distinguishing these papers is a view of democracy as an ongoing process involving development of specific attitudes and values. No students referred to the political features Diamond (1996) discusses. This contrasted with students in the moderate category, half of whom made reference to these features. Students with more sophisticated views

Table 3
Criteria for Evaluating Papers to Be Low in Understanding

Criterion	Demonstrated	Slightly Demonstrated	Not Demonstrated
Stresses rule following, appropriate behavior, establishment of order	11	1	6
Provides a functional analysis (skills important for economic survival and independence); emphasis on skills that make one a good employee	14	0	4
Simplistic view of communication (listening, following directions, respecting others' ideas)	16	0	2
No sense of conflicting rights and perspectives	8	4	6
Simplistic definition of democracy (e.g., majority rule)	8	0	10 (no definition 10)
Views citizenship as legal status and/or democracy as a form of government	4	0	14 (no discussion 11)
Does not talk about democracy at all	9	2	7

described democracy as process, involving ongoing responsibilities necessary to maintain a democratic way of living. Both Dewey (1916, 1927) and Parker (1996a) have stated that these ideas represent sophisticated conceptions of democracy. One student presented this perspective as follows: *Children should learn basic democratic values, including respect for diversity, the pursuit of equity in all aspects of society and respecting the rights of the individual while balancing them with the needs of society. Along with these values is the ability of the child to act autonomously, in both the intellectual and oral realm. All these democratic values will be present in a true learning community where children are given responsibility for making good choices. . . . Unfortunately, these days it seems the emphasis of democracy in this country is on capitalism and individual rights. What seems to be forgotten is the responsibility the individual has to the society and the other people in the society. This obligation to society is what makes individual rights possible* (Paper 1-1).

In this excerpt, Student 1-1 acknowledged explicitly the conflict between emphasis on individual rights and freedoms and the ethos of community that must be developed for democracy to thrive (Barber, 1984; Dahl, 1982; Goodman, 1992; Gran, 1983). He was the only student to explicitly address this conflict.

Another student communicated the importance of citizen responsibility in maintaining democracy through her discussion of critical thinking skills: *One part of a teacher's role in developing good thinking . . . is to allow the students to challenge . . . and even rebel against authority. Students need to learn when it is appropriate and necessary to demand justification and reasons why they are learning things. . . . The minute we stop questioning authority and allow others to think for us is the minute we, as a society, give up our freedom* (Paper 1-3).

A second criterion distinguishing the papers of these three students is a sophisticated view of communication, which included the importance of learning skills of deliberative discourse. As Fishkin (1991), Parker (1996a), and others have stated, democracy requires deliberative action that can only occur through meaningful dialogue. When these students discussed the importance of communication skills, they moved beyond a list of basic skills to be acquired and specifically noted the importance of voice within a democratic society. Consider the following excepts:

- *Communication is the cornerstone on which a democratic society is built. Everyone has a voice. If that voice is silenced, if only because of our failure to train it, then our whole society suffers. . . . Democracy will fail if only a chosen few are given the skills necessary to effect change, to work in cooperation and collaboration toward common goals. Every voice is important in a democracy. The public school system was founded on this belief. Teaching children effective communication remains a public mandate of the utmost importance* (Paper 1-2).
- *Students must develop knowledgeable use of systems of communicating. Knowledgeable use implies that literacy entails the capacity to think, reason, and judge. Literate people do not passively receive information; instead, they have the tools which enable them to question, wonder, inquire, and evaluate* (Paper 1-3).

Another distinguishing criterion of these students' papers is their perspective on diversity. Whereas students at the moderate level of understanding about democracy mentioned the importance of helping students appreciate social and cultural diversity, students with more sophisticated understandings about democracy stressed the importance of equity or social justice (Goodman, 1992; Ventriss, 1985). Students at this level expressed the view that all members of a society must be valued and asserted that multicultural understandings enrich and empower all members of the society. For example, one student wrote, *Children must learn about the history of our country (and others). However, the students must learn more than the traditional, White, European, wealthy, male perspective of history. Children need to know that history depends on perspective. If they are exposed to multiple perspectives, they gain a clearer picture of our past and perhaps a deeper understanding of other cultures* (Paper 1-2).

Another student made this point within a discussion about the importance of *establishing and preserving equity* within our society: *Children should learn that all people are created equal, no matter what race, religion, nationality, physical disability, gender or sexual preference, and that in this country all citizens are responsible for developing and maintaining that equity. They should understand that when one fellow citizen is a victim of prejudice, no matter what the reason, and it is allowed to go on, all citizens have their rights in jeopardy, because they could be the next victims* (Paper 1-1).

A related criterion distinguishing students with sophisticated views is emphasis on the importance of developing social competence and connectedness to others. Although some students from all levels included the development of social competence as an aim, students at the highest level of understanding recognized that social competence is more than getting along with others and following school rules. These students acknowledged that conflict is inevitable and stressed that students must develop complex social competence, including the development of conflict resolution skills (Goodman, 1992).

Student 1-1 stressed the importance of conflict resolution skills and compromise and provided a rationale for the establishment of common laws within a society: *Children must learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully. The obscene level of violence in our country illustrates the incredible need for children to learn how to resolve conflict. . . . This leads to another seemingly forgotten aspect of democracy, compromise. In a learning community, as in our society, in order for an individual to have rights, certain compromises have to made for the good of the community. Many of these compromises [are recorded in the form of] rules and laws. An individual cannot do anything he/she wants because he/she shares the world with other people. An individual can't exercise his/her rights if it means infringing on the rights of others* (Paper 1-1).

Papers Demonstrating Moderate Understanding of Democracy

Eight students demonstrated a moderate understanding of democracy (Table 2). One

student demonstrated all seven of the criteria for a moderate understanding; one student demonstrated six criteria; five demonstrated five criteria; one demonstrated only four criteria. It is important to note that these papers demonstrated few of the criteria that characterized papers in the low level of understanding.

The two criteria most clearly distinguishing these papers are articulating aims perceived important for life success rather than those necessary to fulfill roles as citizens (7 of 8 students) and defining educational goals important within a democratic context but providing a vague or underdeveloped rationale for their importance within a democratic community (8 of 8 students). The following excerpt exemplifies the quality of the rationale statements that students at the moderate level provided. In this example, Student 2-2 argues that students must develop democratic values and ethics, including respect for diversity. Her rationale for the significance of these aims, however, is grounded in a practical argument rather than in a discussion of how democratic aims serve the democratic process: *Students are members of a larger democratic society which they have a responsibility to respect and uphold. To demonstrate this responsibility students must learn democratic values and ethics. Examples of this would be to feel a sense of belonging and having a responsibility to a larger group. Students will possess pride for their family, school and country and respect the authority of officials within them. Children will gain knowledge and develop tolerance of the diversity within which they live. . . . School communities will benefit [because] students will respect the teachers and other authority figures at the school. There will be less vandalism around the school and community because the children will feed a need to maintain the school and community partially because it is theirs* (Paper 2-2).

Student 2-3 argued for the importance of good thinking skills and student empowerment. The student clearly articulated benefits to children and society but did not ground the arguments in an explanation of democratic processes. *Children need to have these different types of thinking skills for many reasons. If [children] are good thinkers and can use these skills effectively, it empowers them. They are able to make decisions in their lives based upon what they already know. They are able to see the unreasonableness of certain beliefs and attitudes and they are able to avoid them. This can help them take responsibility for their own lives. These skills also benefit society. Having more good thinkers will help our society try to become better and more just. The children will see what kind of conditions are out there and try to prevent them from getting worse. They may be able to come up with a solution to help better the situation* (Paper 2-3).

A third criterion distinguishing many of these papers is a discussion of the importance of teaching students to appreciate social and cultural diversity (a characteristic absent from papers in the low level). Students at the moderate level noted that all members of society will benefit if they learn to respect one another. They stressed the importance of helping students respect all people but provided few, if any, specific examples of benefits that might accrue to individuals or to society through access to multiple perspectives. No students extended their arguments by demonstrating a commitment to equity or social justice. Consider the following example: *Children should become aware of diversity. They need to acknowledge differences in society and people. Children should learn to be accepting . . . [and] to understand that these differences are not negative. They should learn to look at the positive aspects of diversity and how being different makes us unique. Once children learn to accept diversity, they can learn to work cooperatively with [others]. Through this cooperation, children will have the opportunity to share ideas and acquire new ideas [and] to respect one another* (Paper 2-1).

This writer argued persuasively that students should be aware and accepting of diversity. She contended that by accepting diversity, students will learn to work cooperatively and gain new ideas. However, there is no sense that new ideas might be used to challenge one's perspectives and assumptions, or that diverse ideas might conflict, thus creating opportunities for inquiry, growth, and social change.

A final criterion demonstrated in five of the papers (only slightly demonstrated in one) was the tendency to describe democracy as a skill to be mastered. In these papers, students made specific references to political features characterizing democracy (Diamond, 1996). In the other three papers, this perspective was implicit. For

example, a student listed an array of knowledge and skills students must master in order to become good citizens: *Children should be able to express the importance of being a good citizen, and demonstrate community concern as a good citizen with service hours. They should know the responsibilities of each citizen that includes a working knowledge of elections, the three branches of government and their inner workings, as well as, recognize the positives and negatives in our system of government so they may become agents of change. They should then be able to make well-informed decisions regarding candidates during elections* (Paper 2-8).

Students also communicated this perspective through discussion of the importance of student government within schools: *Classrooms should be . . . mini-democracies. Students should know that their opinions matter. A good way to start this is by creating classroom rules together. Activities such as this [develop] empowerment, responsibility, organizational and social skills. At the same time they are learning they have rights. This creates a better individual by giving them motivation to think about issues and voice their opinions. The source of the motivation is that they know they will be heard. . . . A school should also be a* mini-democracy. . . . *Student government is a good program for schools to implement to begin this process* (Paper 2-6).

In the above example, the student notes the importance of running classrooms as mini-democracies in which children articulate their perspectives and discuss issues. She indicates skills children must learn (e.g., voicing their opinions), but she does not link these skills to more sophisticated democratic processes and values, such as deliberation or commitment to the good of the community.

Papers Demonstrating Narrow or Weak Conceptions of Democracy

Eighteen of the 29 papers demonstrated narrow understandings of democracy, either explicitly or implicitly (Table 3). Nine of the papers in this group included no explicit statements about democracy, although two implicitly communicated narrow conceptions through their emphasis on particular classroom procedures. Nine explicitly communicated narrow conceptions. In these papers, students communicated simplistic definitions of democracy or included statements suggesting that they viewed citizenship as a legal status and democracy as a form of government. Parker (1996b) indicates narrow conceptions of democracy stress the *values, knowledge and skills of citizenship, and knowledge of governmental and citizen responsibilities* (p. 2). Parker (1996a) and Goodman (1992) note that citizens with narrow conceptions view democracy as an accomplishment to preserve, rather than a process that must constantly be reconstructed through the active participation of the citizenry. Paper 3-6 is illustrative: *Students should learn their rights and responsibilities as United States citizens. This includes learning about democracy, how our government is set up, how it has changed, how our government works and the rights given to us by the constitution and ways we should preserve these rights. This also includes learning their responsibilities as [citizens] . . . such as their responsibility to vote and defend our country and their responsibility to follow the laws.*

Students communicated narrow conceptions by providing terse and simplistic statements when they defined democracy:

- *Democracy is simply understanding that everyone is equal and should have equal rights* (Paper 3-7).
- *America was founded on principles of democracy. Our students must understand that without democracy there would be no order in society. There are principles of democracy that should be followed in the school community as well as in society. In a democracy majority rules, but the minority has rights as well* (Paper 3-8).
- *Democracy is the rule of the majority. A democratic society is one in which people work together to control and direct the majority's goals* (Paper 3-2)

Twelve of the 18 students communicated narrow perspectives by emphasizing rule following and establishing order in classrooms. Students did not talk about establishing a collaborative community, teaching children an underlying moral code, or using collective decision making processes, characteristics Goodman (1992) cites as evidence of more sophisticated understandings. Often couching their remarks in terms of teaching children to be responsible, these students stressed obedience and respect for authority. From their perspectives, responsible action was a synonym for following the rules. No students talked about the importance of developing a

critical stance or of circumstances in which it might be appropriate to question authority. *Functioning in a classroom requires responsibility and self control. These are two attributes that children need to survive in life. Children need to learn that in the classroom, as well as in life, deviant behavior comes with consequences that may result in the loss of some personal freedom* (Paper 3-12).

Student 3-8 demonstrated another common pattern, stating that it is important for children to learn social skills if they are to become *contributing members in the classroom as well as in society*. The student's definition of social skills demonstrated that the underlying aim was the development of obedience: *Skills that are necessary for success in the school and home community are listening, following directions, and obeying rules. If students do not listen to teachers and peers, they will not have an understanding of what is expected of them. If they don't listen, then they cannot follow directions. When they don't follow directions . . . they may disturb someone else's opportunity to learn.*

Students demonstrating narrow conceptions of democracy also communicated simplistic views of communication (16 of 18 students). These students did not describe communication as a process of dialogue useful for collective deliberation (Parker, 1996b). Instead, their descriptions suggested they perceived it as a process involving listening, following directions, respecting the right of others to communicate, and clearly presenting one's ideas or feelings. Two examples illustrate:

- *A good listener is a person who listens to what someone has to say without putting words into someone's mouth. They also look at the person when they are talking and lean forward to show that they are interested. When expressing your feelings you tell how you feel* (Paper 3-11).
- *Students need to learn the correct ways to communicate with others. For example, yelling is not an effective means of communication. . . . Students need to learn how to agree or disagree with others* (Paper 3-14).

A final criterion demonstrated in almost all papers at this level was the specification of functional reasons for the skills and knowledge children must attain. Rather than arguing that children should acquire knowledge and skills that might empower them to take control of their lives or improve their communities, these students argued that children need knowledge and skills for economic survival and independence. Consequently, they emphasized what would make a person a good employee. They seldom included more than passing references to the development of questioning or inquiry skills that might help one become a critical member of a participatory democracy. This criterion is difficult to illustrate in a brief quotation because almost all students did, in fact, include brief references to inquiry or problem solving; however, the tone of the papers and the preponderance of their argument stressed functional skills rather than higher level thinking.

Discussion and Implications

The papers in the *high* category demonstrated many criteria of a sophisticated understanding of democracy. These three papers defined democracy as a value and a way of living with others and demonstrated sophisticated understandings of diversity, community, connectedness, and deliberative discourse. They also emphasized critical thinking and inquiry in the apparent assumption that these skills would facilitate problem solving for the good of society.

Several issues emerged from analysis of these papers. The first is the lack of explicit attention to direct involvement in public life. The writers acknowledged the importance of discourse, social competence, and commitment to equity, but none mentioned the importance of taking appropriate social action or becoming involved in public life. Direct action is significant because its existence refutes the notion of *political spectatorship* (Parker, 1996b, p. 121) and advances a more active role for citizens.

A second issue relates to the criterion of recognizing that democracy requires balancing the values of individuality and community. Only one paper clearly demonstrated this criterion. Goodman (1992) argues citizens must understand that there does not have to be opposition between individual well-being and a commitment to the public good. Indeed, none of the students evidenced this understanding.

A third issue relates to Parker's (1996a) emphasis on respect for social and cultural

pluralism, but with an eye toward political unity (p. 121). Authors of three *high* papers all acknowledged respect for diversity and pluralism and linked diversity issues to concerns about social justice. None discussed the importance of creating political unity out of the many diverse groups and viewpoints that characterize American society.

Finally, one particular aspect of the *high* papers must be clarified. Asked to write about important aims to prepare elementary children for life in a democratic society, these students wrote about core democratic values and attitudes. The medium and low papers, in contrast, focused on political democracy features and factual knowledge about government.

Vague or underdeveloped rationales for the importance of specific educational aims within a democratic community such as *success in life* as opposed to skills for democratic citizenship characterized the *medium* papers. Indeed, when this group explicitly mentioned democracy it appeared to be a skill rather than a value or a way of living. Students provided different emphases in talking about democracy in their essays, ranging from knowledge acquisition to multicultural appreciation to a somewhat shallow focus on political democracy features. The papers were not simplistic, nor were they rule oriented as were the papers in the low category, but they lacked attention to equity, political unity, sophisticated social competence and communication, and deliberative discourse. Most important, these students had difficulty articulating why their aims were important in a democracy.

The 18 papers determined *low* were characterized by a narrow conception of democracy that emphasized learning some of the basic knowledge and skills of citizenship and only a few features of political democracy. Many papers evidenced a passive, nonassociative view of democracy. Many demonstrated a reified conception of American democracy (Goodman, 1992), in which the emphasis is placed on a few key concepts that must be celebrated and preserved. In this view, the democratic system needs only minor modifications and calls for little effort, beyond voting, on the part of citizens. Many of these papers focused on rules, obedience, economic survival, or simplistic communication skills. A number did not define democracy at all. When they did, they emphasized the traditional citizenship curriculum (Parker, 1996b).

Two issues emerging from our analysis have implications for teacher educators. First, there appeared to be no relationship between students' social science coursework and their understandings of democracy. About half of our sample of students took history or political science courses on the college level (including a few with Advanced Placement credit). Our study does not suggest that taking these courses or doing well in them necessarily broadened their knowledge or led to more sophisticated understandings of democracy. For example, two students in the high category took no history courses beyond high school. Almost all of these students earned As and Bs in social/historical foundations of education and social studies methods. Again, there was no relationship between doing well in these courses and demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of democracy.

Certainly, inconsistencies in students' understandings and content knowledge background will continue to exist among teacher education students. The understandings about democracy that these students acquired or did not acquire in their K-12 schooling may have shaped them in powerful ways so that what they learned in college had little impact on their understandings. University courses may have perpetuated misconceptions. In either case, more study of this issue would be beneficial.

More coursework is not necessarily the answer. We suggest that teacher educators examine what is taught in social studies methods and foundations courses. Teacher educators interested in cultivating advanced ideas of democracy among their students appear to have the twofold challenge of finding ways to explore students' understandings of democracy and finding ways to integrate advanced ideas and concepts of democracy into their course curricula. Their challenge is to fill in gaps in the students' academic background and invite deliberation and further elaboration of these concepts.

Second, although we deem knowledge of democracy essential for prospective teachers, this knowledge is clearly only one attribute of excellent teachers. One student in the *high* category in

this study had difficulty bringing knowledge (of any type) to life for students during the internship. This student's teaching was characterized by a rambling lecture format and an inability to engage children. On the other hand, some of the *low* and *medium* students were very successful in engaging children and cultivating their intellectual abilities in other areas, although they lacked a certain amount of knowledge about democracy. The issue for teacher educators is how to work with students who are good thinkers but not necessarily good teachers. Clearly, this dichotomy is not new to teacher education researchers. Although we emphasize knowledge and understanding, we realize that both knowledge and instructional competence are necessary in order to teach content effectively to elementary children.

We presented the thinking/teaching dichotomy in the context of democracy because teachers with sophisticated understandings of democracy may actually undermine their ideas in the classroom by teaching in authoritarian, conformist, or utilitarian ways (Goodman, 1992). Instead, they can learn to teach in ways that promote the kind of *civic apprenticeship* that, according to Parker (1996b), cultivates *the democratic mind, its habits and competencies* (p. 13) and gradually initiates children into the democratic community and into increasingly critical levels of civic competence.

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