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## **THE DIALOGIC CLASSROOM AS PEDAGOGY: TEACHING THE CIVIC MISSION OF SCHOOLS**

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*It has been recognized since the founding of the nation that education has a civic mission: to prepare informed, rational, humane, and participating citizens committed to the values and principles of American constitutional democracy<sup>1</sup>.*

### **The Civic Mission of Schools**

From the beginning, the main purpose for establishing public schools in the United States was to prepare future generations for democratic citizenship particular to a new and experimental republic. Citizenship under non-democratic rule would not require education beyond what parents and community could instruct children about their place in society and their relationship to the ruling authority. But citizens of a democracy require formal schooling as they are, in

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<sup>1</sup> NCSS, *The Civic Mission of Schools*. Social Education, 2005. 69(7): p. 414 (2).

theory, the ruling authorities and must therefore receive the knowledge (reading and writing and some classical history) and attitudes (vigilance against those who would seek political office for corrupt purposes) of leadership. This was Thomas Jefferson's dream for the creation of a "natural aristocracy". These most talented sons [sic] from all social classes, having proved their worth through success in formal schooling, would govern on the basis of virtue and merit rather than birth and wealth<sup>2</sup>. Influenced by Plato's utopian proposal for education, as well as other ideas central to classical liberalism<sup>3</sup>, Jefferson recognized that to prevent the political ascendancy of a hereditary aristocracy, more than just the wealthy had to be educated. At the same time, all citizens should be able to exercise their responsibilities for electing leaders and approving legislation through access to the free marketplace of ideas where men [sic] could discuss and rationally consider the best course of action. He proposed a meritocratic form of promotion into higher education and preparation for political office. However, as Joel Spring observes, "the details of Jefferson's plan are not as important as the idea, which has become ingrained in American social thought, that [public] schooling is the best means of identifying democratic leadership"<sup>4</sup>.

Horace Mann, father of the "common school," had a vision of public education as a unifier of moral differences and a palliative to the social upheaval brought into sharp awareness by the rapid increase of immigration, urbanization and industrialization during the mid to late - 19th century in the United States. The religious struggles between the Calvinists and more liberal sects, the economic strife between the rich and the poor, and the riots pitting Irish immigrants against native workers all were evidence to Mann of a dangerous social disharmony which threatened the stability of society. The common school was to become the central institution to ameliorate this situation. It was necessary for all children to develop a commitment to a common core of values<sup>5</sup>. Mann's ideas were based, in part, on the Prussian model of the mid 19th century, a compulsory school system established to develop patriotic citizens and unite the German states for world leadership. Although philosophically democratic rather than totalitarian-minded, the common school movement was, according to historians Wayne Urban and Jennings Wagoner, "essentially a movement that reflected the values of republicanism, Protestantism and capitalism" which created "what many consider to be the indispensable institution for American democracy"<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jefferson and Henry A. Washington, *The writings of Thomas Jefferson: being his autobiography, correspondence, reports, messages, addresses, and other writings, official and private: published by the order of the Joint Committee of Congress on the Library, from the original manuscripts, deposited in the Department of State.* 1853, Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Maury. 9 v.

<sup>3</sup> Steven E. Tozer, et al., *School and society: historical and contemporary perspectives.* 5th ed. ed. 2006, Boston: McGraw-Hill. xiii, 545.

<sup>4</sup> Joel Spring, *American Education.* 12th ed. 2005, New York: McGraw-Hill.

<sup>5</sup> Steven E. Tozer, et al., *School and society: historical and contemporary perspectives.* 5th ed. ed. 2006, Boston: McGraw-Hill. xiii, 545.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, *American education: a history.* 3rd ed. ed. 2004, Boston: McGraw-Hill. xxi, 393, I-15.

Perhaps no one expressed the civic mission of schools better than educator, psychologist and philosopher, John Dewey. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey stated his view of schooling as a microcosm of a democratic community.

[T]he realization of a form of social life in which interests are mutually interpenetrating, and where progress, or readjustment, is an important consideration, makes a democratic community more interested than other communities have cause to be in deliberate and systematic education. The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education<sup>7</sup>.

Dewey's contribution to the "democratic imagination" in education is considerable and varies in importance according to one's individual philosophical or pedagogical affiliation. Though he rejected the dichotomy, those who favor a child-centered curriculum can more easily trace their philosophical lineage to Dewey than those who adhere to a traditional, teacher-centered (or more accurately today, a standards-driven) curriculum. By democratic imagination, I refer to the capacity to see a connection between school-based educational activity and citizenship participation in a democratic society. Images of the "democratic classroom" range from a single elementary level classroom through whole-school structural and curricular arrangements to national movements for school organization and leadership. This imagination can also extend to teacher education courses: content, activities, philosophies and pedagogies<sup>8</sup>. The democratic nature of the classroom, activity, movement or pedagogy is reflected in the recognized purpose of organized educational activity in reproducing participatory democratic citizenship outside of the classroom. For advocates of democratic education, the collective imagination is set into action through democratic participation which begins with deliberative discourse in the classroom<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. 1966/1916, New York: Macmillan.

<sup>8</sup> Andrea Hyde, *Images of "the democratic classroom" in the United States*, American Educational Studies Association Annual Conference. Charlottesville, VA: unpublished, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Michael W. Apple and James A. Beane, eds, *Democratic Schools*. 1995, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA.

Landon E. Beyer, *Introduction: The meanings of critical teacher preparation*, in *Creating Democratic Classrooms: The struggle to integrate theory and practice*, L.E. Beyer, Editor. 1996, Teachers College Press: New York.

Mary Cunat, *Vision, Vitality and Values: Advocating the Democratic Classroom*, in *Creating Democratic Classrooms: The Struggle to Integrate Theory and Practice*, L.E. Beyer, Editor. 1996, Teachers College Press: New York. p. 127-149.

Noreen Garman, *The closed and open contract: Two irreconcilable structures in the curriculum*. WCCI Forum: Journal of the world council for curriculum and instruction, 1989. 4(2): p. 176-82.

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## A Pedagogical Model

I am an assistant professor of education, but I am not from, nor do work in, the field of curriculum and instruction; I am part of the highly interdisciplinary and typically ancillary (to teacher certification programs) field of educational foundations or education studies. Like many of my field colleagues, I teach a *social foundations of education* (SFE) course to pre-service, teacher education students. I have taught this course at three different universities in three distinct regions of the United States: the Mid-Atlantic, Midwest and West Coast. These courses have had different names but the intersecting content, both the history and sociology of public schooling and some version of multicultural education, remains the same. I often think about how to talk to my students about the history and politics of SFE and how social foundations courses typically differ from the bulk of the teacher education program courses<sup>10</sup>. Though elsewhere I have been specific in my theorizing about my philosophy of education<sup>11</sup>, for the purposes of representing my personal beliefs to undergraduate teacher education students, I convey a general position that educational experiences are intrinsically valuable for their potential for personal development. That is, while intellectual development and academic achievement are educational “goods”, schools, teachers and instructional programs should not be evaluated by their demonstrated ability to raise test scores but on their ability to educate – to identify and expand individual instances and possibilities for cognitive and emotional growth and

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Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education*. 1987, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Peter Mayo, *Liberating Praxis: Paulo Freire's Legacy for Radical Education and Politics*. Critical Studies in Education and Culture, ed. H.A. Giroux. 2004, Westport, CT: Praeger.

Noel F. McGinn, *Education, Democratization and Globalization: A Challenge for Comparative Education*. *Comparative Education Review*, 1996. 40(4): p. 341-357.

Deborah Meier, *In Schools We Trust*. 2002, Boston: Beacon Press.

Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*. 1992, New York: Teachers College Press.

Edmund O'Sullivan, *Transformative Learning: Educational Vision for the 21st Century*. 2001, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Rosemary C. Salamone, *Education for Democratic Citizenship*. *Education Week*, 2000. Mar 22, 2000: p. 48-52.

Thomas J. Sergiovanni, *Building Community in Schools*. 1994, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Patrick Slattery and Dana Rapp, *Ethics and the Foundations of Education: Teaching Convictions in a Postmodern World*. 2003, Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

George W. Wood, *Schools That Work*. 1992, New York: Dutton.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, at two of the three of the universities, the department which offered the course was not the department which housed the students who took it. Often, where this is the relationship, the “foundations department” is seen as supportive of, or ancillary to, the “teacher education department”. This is a significant relationship that I will not explore in this paper, but see, for example, Dan Butin (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Andrea Hyde, *Self-constitution as resistance to normalization: Agency and resistance in the era of accountability*. Unpublished Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA. 2007.

overall wellbeing<sup>12</sup>. This is not separate from the historic and non-instrumental purpose of public schooling that is tied to the continuing United States experiment in democracy.

Besides SFE being positioned as foundational to the teacher education program rather than a methods course, my pedagogical style is different from those of most, if not all, of my students' other classroom experiences. Although I do give a few mini-lectures on terminology and theory, the students have increasingly more responsibility for creating the content of the class as the semester develops. This is consistent with the practices of learner centered teaching<sup>13</sup> but more directly informed by what Parker Palmer calls subject centered teaching<sup>14</sup>. There are no tests and all assignments require students to create unique products based on their interaction with the texts, discussions and experiences of the course. I say that our goal is awareness not mastery. In the end, there is no particular set of discrete skills to acquire nor any predetermined knowledge to demonstrate. Students are encouraged to question current operations of schools and contrast them with historical and contemporary ideals. We actively try to uncover and confront our own prejudices and admit and examine our beliefs about ourselves and "others". I used the term we, because I participate as one of the class members, though I acknowledge the power and influence that I have over students through my position and degrees and accept the responsibilities of the grade book, and the significant contribution I make to their learning based on my own education and experiences. The Deweyan-democratic tradition<sup>15</sup> underpins my working term: *the dialogic classroom*, yet this is also appropriately called critical pedagogy<sup>16</sup>. This exposure to different ways of being in the classroom is significant for teacher education students since they are learning, one hopes, not just the curriculum and instructional methods associated with teaching in the k-12 arena, but also developing general pedagogies based on their emerging philosophies of education.

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<sup>12</sup> This must somehow be locally defined by a collective of parents, teachers, education scholars and development professionals. I am inspired by Nel Noddings' universal understanding of subjective well-being in *Happiness and Education*.

<sup>13</sup> Maryellen Weimer, *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. 1st ed. ed. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey Bass, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Michael W. Apple and James A. Beane, eds. *Democratic Schools*. 1995, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA; Landon E. Beyer, *Introduction: The meanings of critical teacher preparation*, in *Creating Democratic Classrooms: The struggle to integrate theory and practice*, L.E. Beyer, Editor. 1996, Teachers College Press: New York; Peter Mayo, *Liberating Praxis: Paulo Freire's Legacy for Radical Education and Politics*. Critical Studies in Education and Culture, ed. H.A. Giroux. 2004, Westport, CT: Praeger; Noel F. McGinn, *Education, Democratization and Globalization: A Challenge for Comparative Education*. *Comparative Education Review*, 1996. 40(4): p. 341-357; Deborah Meier, *In Schools We Trust*. 2002, Boston: Beacon Press; Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*. 1992, New York: Teachers College Press; Edmund O'Sullivan, *Transformative Learning: Educational Vision for the 21st Century*. 2001, Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Rosemary C. Salamone, *Education for Democratic Citizenship*. *Education Week*, 2000. Mar 22, 2000: p. 48-52; Patrick Slattery and Dana Rapp, *Ethics and the Foundations of Education: Teaching Convictions in a Postmodern World*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> This all pulls from scholarship on social criticism, critical social theory, critical pedagogy and the philosophy of education (Foucault, Noddings, Freire, and Giroux).

## *Considerations*

Reliably, students assume that I mean for them to use this democratic classroom model with their intended students. In fact, I would not attempt a dialogic classroom in most public school settings where teachers have little flexibility in setting timelines and curricular goals. Dialogic classrooms also require a level of maturity and self-awareness not usually present until mid-late adolescence, making it largely inappropriate for most k-8 students. Yet, other forms of democratic classrooms have been attempted and do succeed in some public, private and charter schools<sup>17</sup>. I do, however, encourage students to think about how they can use discussions in their classrooms to practice more democratic ways of being. Parker notes that “whereas teacher authority has been diminished by centralized planning and student learning is fixed to a fervent testing regime, purposeful discussions offer occasions for something more like education.”<sup>18</sup> Parker refers to two types of discourse structure which support purposeful discussion: seminar and deliberation. The purpose of seminar is to “reach an enlarged understanding of a powerful text” (such as the Pledge of Allegiance), while the purpose of deliberation is “to reach a decision on what ‘we’ should do about a shared problem” (such as whether and under what circumstances the Pledge should be required of every public school student). Although discussions, as Parker defines them, are a rarity in most United States schools, they can play an important role in the formation of citizens, as they allow students to listen and learn about rich content along with considering the perspectives of others.

I also fear that colleagues may assume that I am proselytizing when I talk about using this model in my SFE course. But this is certainly not for every class! I find this to be best suited for undergraduate professional preparation programs (with junior/senior level students); intrinsically motivated students with a budding sense of ethical responsibility; an arrangement of no more than 20 students, who meet more than once a week, during the daytime hours. Nor can this style of classroom facilitation be recommended for every instructor. There is always a risk to the instructor in attempting this democratic project as it is never guaranteed to “work” and will likely never work the way that an instructor might imagine that it will. Hope and patience is essential. Trust between students and instructor must accompany any sharing of pedagogical power. Most disheartening, perhaps, is that the end result or educational change (learning) in this kind of classroom may seem so small as to be a waste of time. This requires faith in an imperfect process, as instructors cannot claim credit for what are largely internal changes. For other views on the nuances of dialogic classrooms, I recommend reading the work of José Alfonso Feito<sup>19</sup> and Angela Minnici<sup>20</sup>. For connections to critical traditions, see Rick Bowers<sup>21</sup> and Joshua

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<sup>17</sup> AER0. *List of Early Childhood, Primary, & Secondary Democratic Schools*. 2009 [cited 2009 December 31]; Available from: <http://www.educationrevolution.org/lisofdemscho.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Walter C. Parker, *Public Discourse in Schools: Purposes, Problems, Possibilities*. Educational Researcher, 2006. 35(8): p. 11-18.

<sup>19</sup> Jose A. Feito, "Allowing Not-Knowing in a Dialogic Discussion." Review of Reviewed Item. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, no 1. (2007).

<sup>20</sup> Angela Minnici, *Reflexive Thinking in Pedagogy*. Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Rick Bowers, “Freire (with bakhtin) and the dialogic classroom seminar”. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 51(8): p. 368-378, 2005.

Guilar<sup>22</sup>. And for a historical review of the place of dialogue in classical liberal education, see Ronald Arnett<sup>23</sup>.

### *Strategies*

The dialogic classroom is a particular kind of democratic classroom, where the development of the whole class is a semester-long group project<sup>24</sup>. A *dialogic* classroom is one in which participants have the opportunity to engage actively in dialogue, the kind of dialogue that concerned citizens are expected to enact in a cultural democracy<sup>25</sup>, a form of democratic deliberation which necessarily embraces contested issues. Though this type of model requires a great deal of flexibility, spontaneity and responsiveness rather than some kind of deliberate, linear planning, for each group of students I generally proceed by the following steps: *present, introduce, explain, model* and *reflect/revise*<sup>26</sup>.

Whenever I begin such a course, I *present* my students with a statement of pedagogy, which serves as one of the first course “texts” that students and I explore together. It begins with this statement:

Since I seek to provide an educational structure that maximizes learning through dialogue, I support a pedagogy known as the dialogic classroom, a concept directly associated with principles of learning in and for a cultural democracy. I acknowledge the challenges inherent in representing conceptions of democratic ways of being, yet I believe that democracy needs to have a sound educational platform in classroom experience. Thus, I adhere to the goals of living where the multiplicity of cultures not only exists and thrives in a global society, but also in the college classroom.<sup>27</sup>

In order to help students understand my hopes for the dialogic classroom experience, I *introduce* some excerpts from a think piece written by my mentor, Dr. Noreen Garman at the University of Pittsburgh. *On Becoming a Dialogic Classroom* suggests that members of a democratic classroom might make a covenant-like agreement about how they might “be”

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<sup>22</sup> Joshua Guilar, "Intersubjectivity and Dialogic Instruction." In *Radical Pedagogy*, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald C. Arnett, *Dialogic Education: Conversation About Ideas and between Persons*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Hogg, et al., in *Using Groups in the Classroom: A professional development workshop*. 2009, Sponsored by the Center for Instructional Technology and Research: Western Illinois University-Quad Cities.

<sup>25</sup> This differs from a political democracy, since I acknowledge that no such democracy can exist in such classroom situations where one person (the instructor) enjoys power and prestige, real or perceived, over the others (the students).

<sup>26</sup> This last phase of reflection loops continuously until the end of the course, for students, and until the end of my practice. If things are going the way we hoped they would, we proceed. If not, we revise.

<sup>27</sup> Andrea Hyde, *The Democratic-Dialogic Classroom as Pedagogy*. 2009, Western Illinois University.

together in the course<sup>28</sup>. This document lists categories of “willingnesses” to develop personal commitments to the class, such as “the willingness to struggle for balanced participation” and “the willingness to value multiple perspectives.” I then *explain* any part of this idea that is immediately unclear or that I think will provide particular challenges. Throughout the daily discussions, but especially during the first two weeks of the course, I *model* leadership and participation in democratic deliberation. I plan and conduct our discussions for the first two or three weeks. I also provide each student with a printed list and description of discussion techniques and then demonstrate each of them, using the course content. Later each class member has an opportunity to try out the role of discussion leader, responsible for opening, guiding and closing our discussion. These discussions are based on assigned daily readings and students choose which day they will lead. Topics include the history of United States public schooling, historical and contemporary purposes of schooling, funding schemes and targeted funding for federal programs, the control of curriculum and issues of educational access, experience and outcomes based on class, race, language, sex, sexual orientation, religion and ability. Throughout the semester, we *practice* being together democratically, hearing each other as we represent positions that are similar and different from our own and continually trying to uncover our own biases. At times, I will adjust the flow of the discussions to mute some dominant voices or positions and amplify others, accordingly<sup>29</sup>. Finally, we *reflect* (at least twice, at midterm and toward the end of the semester) on our progress toward a democratic classroom, identifying weaknesses in ourselves individually and as a group and attend to them. (Perhaps we must *revise* our plan.) Evaluation of the progress of such a class is admittedly subjective but collectively so, as the entire group contributes to a consideration of our growth. I have also used more objective means of assessment during three points of encounter - at the beginning, midpoint and end of the semester - by asking students to anonymously report on which of the “willingnesses” (from the introductory trope) were the least and most difficult for them/the group.

### **Interrogating Beliefs Through Dialogic Journals**

In keeping with the aims of the scholarship of teaching<sup>30</sup>, I have tried to explore more deeply how teacher education students in my SFE course come to develop their beliefs about the civic responsibilities of schools toward students and communities. As part of the coursework of SFE, I require students to keep dialogic journals of their readings and all classroom discussions. During each class meeting, we take time to write a journal response from at least one student-

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<sup>28</sup> Noreen Garman, *On Becoming a Dialogic Classroom: Walking the Path of Social Justice and Democracy*. 2007, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>29</sup> Megan Boler, *All Speech is Not Free: The Ethics of "Affirmative Action Pedagogy"*, in *Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech. Disturbing Silence*, M. Boler, Editor. 2004, Peter Lang: New York. p. 3-14.

<sup>30</sup> AERO. *List of Early Childhood, Primary, & Secondary Democratic Schools*. 2009 [cited 2009 December 31]; Available from: <http://www.educationrevolution.org/lisofdemscho.html>.

generated journal prompt, in addition to the questions that I pose to students to get them to stretch their thinking and to challenge their assumptions about the content at hand. By *dialogic*, I mean that each student and I will communicate via this journal. Students write entries into one document; and I comment on those entries within the same document. As we exchange this document, we get to know each other better and the students get to know their own thoughts and find how their written words convey less or different meanings than what they intended. Also called a two-way journal<sup>31</sup>, this practice allows students to engage in second and third order reflection, as some writers do in using double entry journals<sup>32</sup>. I examine their journals on three occasions and provide feedback on the first and second occasions.

Through a purposeful second reading of the journal entries of more than 100 previous students, across three universities, I searched for significant themes, words and phrases related to the civic (or more broadly, the non-academic) purpose, mission or aims of schools and teachers. Throughout continuous engagement with students and informal discussions with my department colleagues, I wrote memos about what I was learning. This method of analysis is based upon the work of Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw<sup>33</sup> and Coffey and Atkinson<sup>34</sup>, anthropologists and sociologists influenced by grounded theory, but who advocate conducting qualitative analysis without the assumptions from traditional grounded theory about underlying order and causality. Journal reading provides varied and sometimes contradictory elements that are interesting to a study of pre-service teachers' emerging conceptions. For this reason, I portray my analysis and discussion as a series of speculative essays<sup>35</sup>. I understand essay as both an initial attempt to understand something and the result of that attempt<sup>36</sup>. And speculative essay "blends qualities of personal essay and theoretical writing to show the process of an author thinking on a subject" and "displays the reflexive and the recursive nature of writing"<sup>37</sup>. The essay that I share below is meant to illustrate the work that I am doing and to provide specific examples of my analysis of particular struggles through dialogue over contentious issues. This essay also illustrates how a comparative study of student responses can inform and improve practice.

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<sup>31</sup> Toby Fulwiler, *Teaching with Writing*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1987.

<sup>32</sup> Jennifer A. Moon, *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Robert M. Emerson, et al., *Writing ethnographic field notes*. 1995, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>34</sup> Amanda J. Coffey and Paul A. Atkinson, *Making sense of qualitative data*. 1996, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>35</sup> William H. Schubert, *Philosophical inquiry: The speculative essay*, in *Forms of curriculum inquiry*, E.C. Short, Editor. 1991, State University of New York Press: Albany, N.Y. p. 61-76.

<sup>36</sup> OED. *Oxford English Dictionary*. 1989 [cited 1989; 2nd:[Available from: <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/oed/>].

<sup>37</sup> Marjorie Barrett Logsdon, *A Pedagogy of Authority: Speculative Essays by an English Teacher*, 2000.

I do not intend readers to make generalizations about students from specific regions based on the observations that I make here. This reflective inquiry is for the improvement of my own practice, currently in the Midwest. Nor am I suggesting a direction that instructors should follow in planning their own courses, even in the same region. I do, however, invite others to engage in such inquiry for the benefit of their own practice.

Concurrent with this inquiry into my own teaching, my colleagues and I have been working on a list of common goals and outcomes for the SFE course that can be expressed as part of our College's teacher education framework. We find this task to be complicated, to say the least. Many of us believe that we are not likely to see the outcomes that we hope for our students by the end of one course. Those who can articulate outcomes do not take the position that these should be or could be the same for all students, every semester, in all sections. We generally believe that students come to our classes with different degrees of preparation and with various levels of receptivity for the material that we present. Yet we all agree that one particular belief – that parents/students are uniquely responsible for school success – requires our directed attention, as it tends to prevent students from accessing more complex awareness and understanding of socio-cultural factors and political and ethical dimensions of achievement and failure. Part of the value of reflection on practice, as I have attempted, is that by doing so teachers may come to know their civic values, their civic purposes. Making use of students' journal writing requires a commitment to read, reflect and respond to each student individually while standing back periodically to assess where the content knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of groups of students may intersect. There are many other themes to consider. For example, the Southern Poverty Law Center's project, Teaching Diverse Students Initiative (TDSi) includes thirteen *Commonly Held Beliefs that Influence Teachers' Work with Diverse Students*<sup>38</sup>. I encourage my colleagues to take on the task of considering how any one of these beliefs (such as "colorblindness" as an approach to diversity) emerge in teacher education courses; to interrogate such beliefs and to get students to trace the sources of such belief from their own experiences and from the messages that we all receive from social institutions, including schools.

### **Individual Responsibility and Academic Failure: A Speculative Essay**

In studying citizenship education programs, Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne<sup>39</sup> have arrived at three conceptions of the "good citizen": the *personally responsible citizen*; the *participatory citizen*; and the *justice oriented citizen*. The personally responsible citizen is aware of her responsibility toward others in her community. She is a law-abiding citizen; she is aware of civic rules and follows them. Citizenship programs aimed at creating the personally responsible citizen involve didactically teaching the rules and responsibilities of civil society and

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<sup>38</sup> See <http://www.tolerance.org/tdsi/commonly-held-beliefs-influence-teachers/commonly-held-beliefs-influence-teachers>.

<sup>39</sup> Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, *What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating For Democracy*. American Educational Research Journal, 2004. 41(2): p. 237-269.

reinforcement of desired behaviors. This kind of program may be called character education in the sense that it aims to instill predetermined personality traits<sup>40</sup>. From my initial inquiry into this area<sup>41</sup>, I have found that when teachers accept the charge to prepare citizens, and enact a pedagogy that might prepare personally responsible citizens, they seem to find little conflict with the current federal policy environment. Many of my students think that parents should be held accountable for their child's success in school. They also often say that students are not sufficiently "motivated" or self-disciplined "to do their best". When asked about which values they will try to pass along to their students, they say that they will teach their students responsibility and honesty. This is consistent with the uncritically internalized belief "that all children can learn", which is closely associated with a policy standpoint of "no excuses"<sup>42</sup>, which relieves politicians of the duty to provide reasons for abandoning the reforms of the most deeply entrenched policies of inequality<sup>43</sup>. This is one of the dispositions that my Midwestern students are told that they *must have* in order to do well in their programs. And I am required to evaluate how well they have demonstrated this disposition in my class.

Similarly, when teachers interpret this charge as pertaining only to social studies educators or service learning/community service programs, they may enact or espouse a pedagogy that might likely prepare what Westheimer and Kahne call the participatory citizen. The participatory citizen is aware of the structure and function of civic society and is politically "active" especially at the local level. Educating the participatory citizen involves teaching bureaucratic organizational theory and the techniques for engaging in local civic action. But there may be an absence of critical thinking or problem-posing involved in this type of citizenship education. Although time, faculty support and school funds may in some cases and to varying degrees be diverted away from such supplementary programs in favor of test preparation efforts and remediation; it is still possible for teachers to facilitate participatory citizenship education programs in the current policy environment. My students are fond of telling stories of service-learning programs that they have experienced or heard about and seem generally supportive of this idea of citizenship as something that can be done to teach citizenship "in the real world".

The justice-oriented citizen, the third prong of Westheimer and Kahne's typology, may act in unpredictable ways and say disturbing things or ask prying questions, because this type of citizen is concerned with uncovering the reasons for social problems, injustices and inequalities.

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<sup>40</sup> Tom Lickona, Eric Schaps and Catherine Lewis, *CEP's 11 Principles for Effective Character Education*. 2003, The Character Education Partnership: Washington, DC.

<sup>41</sup> Andrea Hyde, *Self-constitution as resistance to normalization: Agency and resistance in the era of accountability*. Unpublished Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA. 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Casey Carter. *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*. Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> Richard R. Valencia, et al. "Let's Treat the Cause, Not the Symptoms: Equity and Accountability in Texas Revisited." *Phi Delta Kappan* 83, no. 4 (2001): 318-26.

Education for justice-oriented citizenship involves questioning the structural organization of local and more far-reaching communities. This type of education asks students to investigate relationships of power and may involve student protests. When teachers interpret citizenship education as a responsibility of each teacher to prepare students who will critically examine status quo arrangements or to investigate historical developments of injustices and inequalities, or to pose challenging questions to public policies, there are fewer possibilities of enacting such a (critical or problem-posing) pedagogy in the current “era of accountability”. I am deeply troubled by the evidence that state accountability requirements and a general policy atmosphere of standardization and compliance<sup>44</sup> seem to be problematic for justice-oriented citizenship education programs, and, more generally, that such requirements limit teachers’ imagination and capacity for enacting more critical civic pedagogies.

Each citizen type embodies significantly differing beliefs about the requirements for and definitions of a flourishing democracy. Each has implications for pedagogy, curriculum, evaluation and policy. Because citizenship education programs may privilege some perspectives on the way that problems are framed over others, these conceptual distinctions underscore the political implications of education for democracy. Yet, in actual practice, teachers and to some degree administrators have less “choice” in which programs their schools can use, and subtle and overt relationships of power factor into the official versus the enacted curriculum. Further, there are multiple pedagogies and enactments embedded in the practice of each of the three particular program types. Nevertheless, the prevailing model of the “good citizen” has been cast in terms of an individual economic relationship with the state, which requires only passive obedience and provides “choice” in buying and selling as the “meaning and substance of individual and social agency”<sup>45</sup>. The narrow and often ideologically conservative conception of citizenship as an individualized and internalized set of behaviors regards civic participation as a financial obligation (paying taxes and donating to local charities) and reduces civic action to voting.

The personally responsible citizen represents well the dominant interpretation, held by my students, of the charge for United States public schools to prepare future citizens. Since SFE is the first, or one of the first, courses that students take in their program sequence, I estimate that my students have absorbed this message prior to entering their teacher education programs.

When I ask my students about the responsibility that the public school system has for preparing future citizens, the most common response could be represented by the following dictum: Public schools should ensure that students are successful after graduation. Students overwhelmingly described success as being “self-sufficient” and “productive”. When asked what “success” means to them, some students saw their own definitions of success perfectly aligned

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<sup>44</sup> Kenneth A. Sirotnik,  *Holding accountability accountable: what ought to matter in public education*. Series on school reform. 2004, New York; London: Teachers College Press. ix, 182.

<sup>45</sup> Henry Giroux.  *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life: Democracy's Promise and Education's Challenge*. Updated Edition ed. 2005, Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

with those of “society” but most add additional components such as happiness or personal development.

Where the strength of the image of the personally responsible citizen is most evident is in student reflection on academic achievement and failure. They tend to respond first and foremost from the position of individual responsibility before considering the structural facilitators and constraints which may contribute to either achievement or failure. This is not to say that students are not receptive to the argument that out of school factors (OSFs)<sup>46</sup> play a large role in academic achievement and failure; they seem relieved and affirmed when we have the conversation about the location for change being in society, rather than in school, which is just one institution of society, but many miss the structural arguments against OSFs, and look for the next logical agent of individual responsibility, parents. Somewhere the divide is between home and school, with teachers or would-be teachers taking a hard line against one and in defense of the other. Like some kind of mantra, students write that “some parents just don’t care about their children/their children’s education.” When I ask for evidence of this, when I ask why they believe this, they will tell me that in their brief experiences working in school (many are also parents of school aged children), that some parents will not show up for events, will not make sure that their children complete their homework, will not reinforce the disciplinary plans of the teacher or some other instance of resistance to/refusal of formal involvement. I have come to expect this response from my students and I usually address the whole class, in addition to individual students via journals, on the multiple stakeholders in public education and the complicated notion of blame and responsibility. The tendency to shift responsibility from teachers to parents and students themselves is much more prevalent at the Midwestern campus than it was at either the Mid-Atlantic or the West Coast environments, both of which were located in large urban areas. While I do not find them to be significantly more conservative or less open-minded than students elsewhere, the Midwest students are far less likely to be exposed to people who are different from themselves. This socio-cultural homogeneity and insulation makes structural critique all the less likely.

One thing that changed about my course when I brought it to the Midwest is that I removed the bulk of the history and sociology of public schooling to include more multicultural content and greater emphasis on racial/ethnic inequality. I realize, now, that this was a mistake for two reasons. First, these students do not have enough basic knowledge of American history to be able to place significant educational events or policies into any meaningful background. Nor do they have a grasp of the principles of sociology, anthropology, philosophy or economics to be able to critically reflect on contemporary educational issues. But also and perhaps just as important is that all of us are at our most authentic in the classroom when “we teach who we

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<sup>46</sup> David C. Berliner, *Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success*. 2009 [cited December, 2009]; Available from: <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/poverty-and-potential>.

Richard Rothstein, *Equalizing Opportunity: Dramatic Differences in Children’s Home Life and Health Mean That Schools Can’t Do It Alone*. *American Educator*, 2009. 33(2): p. 4-7; 45-46.

are”<sup>47</sup>. I should never minimize or sterilize my identity as a sociologist and postcritical scholar of educational theory, though I am obliged to find an accessible language with which to communicate with my non-scholar (or pre-scholar) students. For these reasons, I have revised the syllabus for the next term so students will encounter enough history of education so that we can make thoughtful commentary on the progression of policy and a refresher in introduction to sociology so that we may apply a sociological lens to schools and their stakeholders.

I have been hesitant to discuss the complications of the “culture of poverty” thesis<sup>48</sup> with undergraduate students, but this will likely be a part of my course as it returns to a more solidly historical and sociological analysis. Only those who have already adopted a sociological lens (one of my goals for SFE students) seem able or willing to hold in tension both culturally expected behavior and individual choice. Complicating this are stories of exceptionality, especially of families members or friends who, though poor, found a way to be “successful” in school or elsewhere. Ruby Payne offers an enticingly simple way for SFE students to understand and teach children of poverty<sup>49</sup>. Some of my students have discovered her work via connections with the local schools. I know that some approaches to multicultural teacher education include training in the “how-to” variety of culturally responsive pedagogy, but this is not what Gloria Ladson-Billings had in mind when she defined the term<sup>50</sup>. Where multicultural education is figured as a methods course, this is certainly the case. But I actively resist presenting multicultural education as a method, as it is too often associated with “best practice” in instruction and a monolithic view of culture. In graduate level classes, I have explored the history and development of the field of multicultural education and this may have to be included in SFE, so that students have a background from which to understand and to criticize culturally responsive pedagogy that assigns concrete expectation to groups and ignores multiple identities and individual variation within groups.

### **Conclusion/Educational Implications**

What I draw from the above essay is that all of my students express a limited notion of the civic mission of schools that is shaped by a conditioned norm of *individual responsibility*. What’s more is that this norm sometimes interferes with students’ receptivity to hearing or understanding sociological, political and ethical arguments regarding the influence of out-of-school factors on student achievement. Readers should not infer that I find my Midwestern students to be less open-minded than others. Actually, I experience these students as curious and

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<sup>47</sup> Parker J. Palmer. *The courage to teach: exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. 1st ed. ed. 1998, San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass. xvii, 199.

<sup>48</sup> Oscar Lewis. "The Culture of Poverty." *Society* 35, no. 2 (1998): 7-9.

<sup>49</sup> Ruby .K. Payne, *A framework for understanding poverty*. 2001, Aha! Process Edition: New rev. ed.: Highlands, Tex.

<sup>50</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The dreamkeepers: successful teachers of African American children*. 1994: San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, Edition: 1st ed. p. xvi, 187.

willing to change their minds to accommodate new information over time. From the above analyses, I now recognize a place where our work together might focus and how I could change my planning for this course, with the help of this added reflection on regional differences, to help students develop more justice-oriented civic pedagogies.

So how does my pedagogy, in general, assist in my teaching to pre-service teachers' common beliefs that, if unquestioned, may negatively influence their work with diverse students? This classroom model allows for the development of democratic dispositions appropriate for reflective practice and intercultural communication; the most important of which is the disposition to uncover and reexamine beliefs and hidden biases. This allows students a means for getting to know themselves, for getting to know their own positions, and for changing the positions that are inconsistent with their ideal teacher selves. The dialogic classroom provides a relatively safe space for the uncovering of hidden biases and unexamined beliefs that are uncomfortable, embarrassing or naive. This is particularly suited for discussions of (intellectually, emotionally and psychologically) challenging course content such as white privilege, economic injustice and heterosexism. The iterative nature of a semester long dialogic project allows for gradual deepening of awareness and meaning. Finally, the sharing of pedagogical power in a democratic classroom - as students cross boundaries from student to teacher and back again - allows for the development of a sense of personal empowerment and responsibility for action and allows a gradual shift from passive receptivity to active engagement.

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