

Reifying the Ontology of Individualism at the Expense of Democracy: An Examination of University Supervisors' Written Feedback to Student Teachers

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Although he enjoyed a long and distinguished career as a philosopher and educator, John Dewey's (1916/2004) most enduring accomplishment may be that he articulated a vision of democratic education that remains compelling, if largely unfulfilled, today. His commitment to democratic values, and to the inherently fluid and progressive nature of democracy as both a political system and a way of life, ranks among the most revolutionary ideals of the Twentieth Century. Dewey offered what many of his forebears could not: a sense of philosophy as inextricably tied to the amelioration of social ills and to the construction

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of more viable and socio-culturally inclusive futures. While Dewey continues to provoke debate amongst philosophers on the meaning of his pragmatic dogma, his impact on educators has been no less profound. He has been followed by countless acolytes eager to spread the gospel of democracy to others, especially new generations of teachers and students.

Despite persistent questions about the nature and purpose of social studies education in the United States, there exists general agreement that social studies should be about democratic citizenship (Avery, 2004; Nelson, 2001; Saxe, 1991; Stanley, 2001). But much depends on how individuals view democracy, and the extent to which they think it has been, or could be, realized through education (Ross & Marker, 2005; Stanley, 2005; Vinson & Ross, 2001). This dimension of social studies education, and, indeed, of education in general, poses unique challenges to those involved in teacher preparation. This study considers some of these challenges as they relate to one relatively unexamined area of teacher education practice—the written feedback provided to student teachers by their university supervisors (in this case, the first three authors of this article).

While we recognized some of the limitations of the locus for our study, we also believed that using a Deweyan perspective to examine our feedback would not only shed useful light on social studies education for democratic citizenship but, in the words of Noddings (2005), could also “be extended profitably to every subject in the curriculum” (p. vii). In what follows, we first provide a brief overview of the conceptions of democratic citizenship education germane to social studies in the U.S. context. After this overview, we discuss the role of cultural values in influencing educational aims. The next section details the objectives of the study and the methods used to analyze the data. Finally, we conclude by presenting our findings and discussing their implications for current practice and future research endeavors in social studies education.

Conceptions of Democratic Citizenship Education

The lack of consensus regarding what it means to teach for democratic citizenship has led to widely variant ways of attempting to promote democracy in schools. Parker (1996, 2003) identified three distinct conceptions of citizenship education associated with social studies teaching and learning, which he labeled “traditional,” “progressive,” and “advanced.” These conceptions are discussed below, in order, according to their perceived ability to address the challenges, and facilitate the ideals, of democratic living in a pluralistic society.

The traditional conception is most common in classroom practice, and focuses on maintaining the status quo through the transmission of “core” values, knowledge, and skills (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977; Goodlad, 1984; Stanley & Nelson, 1994). This emphasis for instruction suggests a belief that democracy has been accomplished in this country, at least to the degree it is possible (Parker,

2003). Traditionalists aspire to protect that accomplishment by passing along the values, knowledge, and skills that contributed to the formation of society as it currently exists (Thornton, 1994). Their overarching goal is for students to become citizens capable of leading personally responsible lives (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Progressives tend to agree with this aim but place more emphasis on also getting students to practice civic participation (e.g., Engle, 1960/1996; Newmann, 1975; Oliver & Shaver, 1966). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) claimed the objective of this approach is to facilitate participatory citizens who are willing to become active in community organizations, and who can employ strategies for accomplishing tasks within existing social structures. However, to the extent progressives stress citizens working together within *existing* social structures, they also appear to view democracy as an accomplishment that needs only to be sustained through the inculcation of traditional values, knowledge, and skills, coupled with regular practice in civic participation.

Parker (2003) argues that both the traditional and progressive conceptions are detrimental for democracy because of the skewed way in which they attempt to negotiate the inevitable tensions that arise between unity and diversity in pluralistic societies. In his estimation both err on the side of unity by privileging commonalities and downplaying the interplay of social and cultural differences that are the lifeblood of democratic systems. Failing to address issues of diversity has negative consequences for education in a pluralistic democratic society; including facilitating in students a narrow outlook, an unwillingness to participate, and intolerance to difference. Consequently Parker argued how an “advanced” notion of democracy should be implicated in rethinking approaches to social studies education for democratic citizenship.

To this end, Parker (2008) conceptualized the aim of social studies education as enlightened political engagement. Enlightened political engagement consists of two closely connected dimensions of democratic citizenship:

The latter dimension, political engagement, refers to the action or participation dimension of democratic citizenship, from voting to campaigning, boycotting, and protesting. Democratic enlightenment refers to the knowledge and commitment that informs this engagement: for example, knowledge of the ideals of democratic living, the ability to discern just from unjust laws and actions, the commitment to fight civic inequality, and the ability and commitment to deliberate public policy in cooperation with disagreeable others. (p. 68)

Given the dynamic nature of these dimensions, enlightened political engagement is not something that is simply achieved: “one works at it continually (path), in concert with others (participation), and intentionally with others who are of different ideology, perspective, or culture (pluralism)” (p. 68). We took Parker’s ideas to mean that schools, as public places, should function as laboratories for democracy where students could actually experience what they were supposed to be learning.

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But here a critical problem presents itself. It is the responsibility of teachers to facilitate the necessary conditions for their students to work toward enlightened political engagement, and it is the responsibility of teacher educators and university supervisors to ensure teachers have the understandings and skills required for such an undertaking. These are difficult tasks, to be sure, made even more difficult by the fact that a majority of teachers and teacher educators share common backgrounds (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005) rooted in European American beliefs and values (Lee & Walsh, 2004, 2005). This stands in contrast to the varied cultural backgrounds of an increasing number of ethnic-minority students in public schools who may hold different sets of beliefs and values (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Irvine, 2003).

The incongruity between teacher and student perspectives is not inherently harmful to education for democratic citizenship. In fact, it could represent a powerful site of inquiry into the promise and problems of democracy. But there is a danger when teachers from the majority group implement practices based on their *unexamined* beliefs and values. These teachers may unintentionally impose their “ethnocentric” views and goals (Rogoff, 2003) on students and families from different belief systems. In the case of citizenship education in the U.S., rather than learning that democratic living is a process that thrives from diverse perspectives united in deliberative discourse around the common good, students may learn to simply assimilate to prevailing cultural notions of what it means to be democratic citizens. This issue is explored below using constructs of the independent self, favored in European American contexts, derived from recent work in cultural psychology.

The Independent Self as a Cultural Ideal

In so far as students’ experiences in schools influence their understandings of how to properly conduct themselves as adults, it is generally held that one important function of education is to support and contribute to the process of human development (Bruner, 1996). However, as Bruner (1986) noted, “the truths of theories of development are relative to the cultural contexts in which they are applied...relativity is not... a question of logical consistency alone...it is also a question of congruence with values that prevail in the culture” (p. 135). Understanding development in this way promotes the idea that different cultures can hold different developmental goals for their youth dependent on their values.

If development is a social construct that hinges on cultural values, then education must be examined in relation to the specific cultures in which it is embedded. Walsh (2002) argued:

Adults hold deeply embedded implicit cultural beliefs about children – how they learn and develop, what kids should and should not learn, how they should be viewed and treated, what is good for kids and what is not, what works with kids and what does not, and so on. (p. 217)

These implicit beliefs are known as folk theories, and they inform the pedagogies

enacted by educators (Bruner, 1996). Seeking to understand teaching in relation to folk theory is important in pluralistic societies because “school curricula and classroom ‘climates’ always reflect inarticulate cultural values as well as explicit plans; and these values are never far removed from considerations of social class, gender, and the prerogatives of power” (Bruner, 1996, p. 27).

Research shows that schooling in the U.S. encourages students to develop in ways that most readily align with European American values (Lee & Walsh, 2004, 2005). These values are rooted in “the ontology of individualism...the Latin word ‘individual’ means indivisible and whole, and the central tenet of individualism is the epistemological priority accorded to the separate, essentially nonsocial, individual” (Shweder et al., 1998, p. 898). This independent self is characterized as an entity that is “(a) separate, bounded, stable, and consistent; (b) attribute-based...; (c) clear, confident, articulated, elaborated; (d) in control; (e) different from others and uniqueness-oriented; (f) particularly sensitive to positive regard, self-enhancing; (g) success-oriented; and (h) expressive and enthusiastic” (p. 901).

Although there is nothing wrong with the cultural values that comprise the folk theory of the independent self, Hatano and Miyake (1991) warned how “cultural effects on learning are both enhancing and restricting” (p. 279). Ritter and Lee (2009) demonstrated how European American values implicitly frame much of what is considered desirable in social studies education, and argued how such values can detract from more inclusive, and potentially more powerful, forms of democratic teaching and learning. Along these same lines, we (the authors), as university supervisors and beginning social studies teacher educators of European American descent, wondered how the cultural values we brought to bear on our work with student teachers might have influenced their understandings of democratic education. This study specifically focuses on the sorts of understandings we may have nurtured in our written feedback to student teachers. The idea for this study was not conceived until after the data were produced, so the feedback we examined retained a certain authenticity.

Methods of Analysis

A primary reason individuals engage in self-study is to investigate the relationship between their beliefs and their practices (Berry, 2004). The first three authors of this paper initially met, and worked together, as graduate assistants and university supervisors at a large research university in the southeastern United States. Although we now work at different institutions as assistant professors, we remain connected to each other through our shared belief that Parker’s (2003) advanced conception of democratic citizenship education represents a valuable objective for social studies because of its potential to facilitate justice-oriented citizenship through enlightened political engagement. Justice-oriented citizens are those who are able to critically assess social, political, and economic structures, seek out

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and address areas of injustice, and effect systemic change (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). For us, these are necessary skills and dispositions for democratic living in a pluralistic society, understood as an ongoing social process that “contains the possibility of continuous change and enlargement of ‘culture’...the potential for its own transformation” (Beyer, Feinberg, Pagano, & Whitson, 1989, p. 12).

Although we claimed to share these beliefs, we questioned if our former practices as university supervisors were consistent with and/or conducive to the advanced democratic beliefs promoted by Parker (1996, 2003). Whitehead (1993) suggested the relationship between ideals and action represents a “living contradiction” always in search of a resolution. By applying the construct of the independent self discussed earlier to our observation reports for student teachers, we sought to root out and purposefully confront any contradictions we promulgated in our practice as university supervisors. Specifically, we sought to: (a) identify the extent to which European American cultural values were present in our feedback, and (b) examine how the presence of these values might have worked against our goal of promoting more inclusive understandings of democratic teaching and learning rooted in pluralism. The main goal was to raise awareness of how culture can constrain certain understandings and actions, and use that awareness to spark dialogue amongst colleagues and students.

Because we were interested in testing the preexisting theory of the independent self against empirical data we already created, we decided to engage in content analysis (Ezzy, 2002) of a random sample of thirty-six observation reports—twelve from each of us—written for our student teachers over a three year period from 2005–2008. This random sample included reports written for a variety of undergraduate student teachers from our social studies program who held teaching placements across diverse teaching environments. This diversity was present in terms of the grade level and demographics of the students, as well as the social conditions of the communities in which the schools were located. Our observations sent us to schools easily classified as rural or suburban, and others that were located in smaller urban environments.

In addition to the diversity of our student teachers and their teaching contexts, our data were further enriched by the very nature of the observation reports we were asked to complete. Rather than filling out checklists or rubrics to evaluate student teachers, our observation reports required us to write narratives detailing a general summary of the observation, including its strengths and weaknesses, as well as any issues, topics, or behaviors for consideration in future conferences. This usually translated into us writing lengthy reports, usually about two to three single-spaced pages, in which we recounted what we observed, and then raised questions and/or considerations about aspects of the lesson or teaching more generally.

The categories for our data were predefined according to the characteristics of the independent self. As noted earlier, these categories included: “(a) separate, bounded, stable, and consistent; (b) attribute-based...; (c) clear, confident, articulated, elaborated; (d) in control; (e) different from others and uniqueness-oriented; (f)

particularly sensitive to positive regard, self-enhancing; (g) success-oriented; and (h) expressive and enthusiastic” (Shweder et al., 1998, p. 901). Following Ezzy’s (2002) lead, our work involved “reviewing each unit of analysis” (the feedback contained in the observation reports) and then “categorizing it according to the predefined categories” (p. 83). This deductive process of coding was initially carried out independently by each of first three authors as well as the fourth author of this paper, a research assistant who was not involved in producing the observation reports. Her involvement in this study represented an attempt on our part to add outside perspective and to ensure the trustworthiness of our results.

Following the initial coding by each of the authors, all four of us met together to review the preliminary results of our individual analyses. Final coding designations for all of the data from the observation reports were made after collaboratively engaging in comparative analysis across our discrete findings. This process allowed us to group similar chunks of data under the appropriate categories, and to discuss any variations in our interpretations. When our data were finally categorized through this process of conversation and consensus, cross-case analysis was used to facilitate the emergence of themes regarding our proclivities to invoke values associated with the independent self. The last stage of our analysis involved interpreting these themes in relation to our framework of democratic education, with an emphasis on uncovering how our collective feedback may have worked against our stated intentions. Instances of disconfirming evidence are also discussed in the findings. The next section reports these findings.

Findings

Our analysis yielded a number of insights that made us more aware of how cultural values held as European American were present in our written feedback to student teachers. This section examines these characteristics of the independent self as manifest in our written feedback, and considers the degree to which their presence and influence might have served to reify the ontology of individualism at the expense of facilitating understandings necessary to achieve Parker’s (2003) advanced conception of democratic citizenship education.

Separate, Bounded, Stable, and Consistent

The qualities of being separate, bounded, stable, and consistent are generally viewed as desirable in the European American context (Shweder et al., 1998). True to form, this code appeared in almost all of our observation reports written during the three year period considered for this study. Most often, this code was tied to our commentary regarding the ability of student teachers to adhere to and carry out the distinctive lessons they had planned, sometimes regardless of context. The typical pattern was that student teachers were either chastised or praised for how closely their practices matched their stated objectives.

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As an example of chastisement, after witnessing a lesson in which one student teacher seemed to simply follow her cooperating teacher's lesson plan, JKR wrote, "I would like for the student teacher to take a more active voice in the classroom. I would like to see lessons of her own design that attempt to accomplish goals listed in her rationale [for teaching social studies]" (01-18-05). By not acknowledging the possible value of the cooperating teacher's lesson plan, this feedback emphasizes the importance of the student teacher having her own separate lessons to accomplish her goals. This focus, rooted in an individualistic view of teaching, was also stressed in a different observation report when JKR wrote, "In the final conference I would like to speak with the student teacher more explicitly about *her* rationale. I want to talk about the alignment of her rationale and her practice over the course of the semester" (03-21-06).

In other examples student teachers were praised for exhibiting the characteristics of separate, bounded, stable, and consistent. For instance, in one of his observation reports, TSH wrote, "The strengths of the student teacher's lesson are in the connection between his rationale and his lesson plan ideas" (10-04-07). Similarly, DJP wrote:

This was not the most exciting or fascinating lesson I had seen a student teacher teach; but it was solid, competent, and well-planned. There is something to be said for that. The student teacher seemed to know what she wanted to accomplish and that clear sense of purpose had an obvious effect on her students' willingness to learn. (03-23-06)

Student teachers were praised in both of these examples for having their own separate and bounded ideas regarding what they wanted to accomplish as teachers, as well as for being stable and consistent in approaching their goals.

With regard to our shared vision of social studies education for democratic citizenship, what seems to be missing from our feedback to student teachers is any kind of judgment regarding the potential usefulness of their rationales, or stated objectives, in facilitating advanced democratic citizenship. We encouraged the student teachers to develop their own goals and to consistently engage in practices to help them accomplish their goals, but we stopped short of actually naming—or better yet, determining together—which goals seemed more worthwhile than others in working with diverse learners to both study and practice democracy. It remains unclear why this was the case. Obviously there is a tension inherent in the notion of telling others how to teach for democracy. However, we argue that our own seemingly instinctive proclivity toward advancing the ideals of the independent self in our feedback to student teachers only exacerbated the problem.

As we paid reverence to the characteristics of separate, bounded, stable, and consistent, we worry that we missed valuable opportunities to trouble student teachers' conceptions of teaching for democracy. We also recognized that, in touting the merit of our student teachers' individual ideas regarding the development and

implementation of their lessons, we almost entirely ignored the role of collaboration in teaching for democracy. This, in turn, may have reinforced superficial notions that what matters most in their own students' learning about democracy are the personal interpretations they form rather than the processes by which they form them—a view antithetical to the nature of enlightened political engagement.

Attribute-Based

The independent self valued in European American contexts also tends to be defined or understood in terms of its attributes (Shweder et al., 1998). Perhaps owing to this function, importantly, our feedback to student teachers primarily only addressed what we considered to be their positive attributes. Other attributes that might not have been useful or beneficial to them as teachers were not focused on in any of the observation reports considered for this study. Much of the attribute-based feedback provided to student teachers was of a general variety and essentially related to their personalities. For instance, JKR praised a student teacher because she “demonstrated a good rapport with her students and seemed comfortable leading discussion” (02-04-08). DJP commended one of his student teachers toward the end of her student teaching because she seemed “much more relaxed, confident, and personable now than she was when the semester started” (03-26-06). Similarly, TSH noted how he was “very impressed” with one of his student teacher’s “dedication to lesson planning” (11-02-05). Although these comments may have helped to build the confidence of student teachers, their function in advancing understandings of democratic citizenship is not as obvious.

Even though remarks of general praise were most common in our observation reports, there were instances in which we extolled specific attributes arguably more closely connected with the ability of student teachers to promote democratic citizenship in their classrooms. JKR noted how one of his student teachers “continues to impress me with his thinking about his own teaching and his willingness to engage in dialogue with me about the issues he is facing” (10-03-06). DJP appreciated his student teacher who “demonstrated a willingness to identify her weaknesses and work on them” (09-12-05). Likewise, TSH offered the following praise for one of his student teachers:

Her focus on the process of discussion and her continued push for students to backup their statements and to reflect on how their opinions may have changed over time is a major reason for the successful discussion and participation of the students. (11-02-05)

These comments suggest a desire on our part to make it clear to our student teachers that we particularly valued attributes like collaboration and reflection. Nonetheless, our feedback seemed to fall short of facilitating understandings of teaching for democratic citizenship because we never situated the importance of such attributes in the larger discourse on democracy. Instead, we played into the cultural

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trap of simply placating our student teachers by praising behaviors without regard to the motivations driving those behaviors. In this way, we can not be sure that our student teachers ever really considered the ends to which they were to collaborate or reflect (i.e. democracy), and why.

Clear, Confident, Articulated, Elaborated

Additional qualities typically valued in European American contexts include being clear, confident, articulated, and elaborated (Shweder et al., 1998). This code surfaced in nearly every observation report considered for this study, and was usually connected to our critiques of student teachers *not* being clear or confident enough in their lessons. For example, in one of his observation reports, DJP wrote that his student teacher “did not leave me with the sense that she knew what she wanted her students to get out of that prodding and questioning. I’m concerned that if I didn’t see the point, few of her students did either” (03-05-07). In a similar critique, TSH wrote, “I think that there could have been more clarity on exactly what he wanted students to do so that he could spend more time responding to their questions related to the content and not to the instructions” (02-11-08).

Obviously it is important at times for teachers to be clear, confident, articulated, and elaborated. But, in retrospect, we wonder if our incessant focus on these qualities in our feedback might have led some to confuse structure and poise with unbridled assertiveness—a move that risks casting the teacher as a bully of sorts, who, worse yet, implicitly models such domineering behavior to students as an appropriate form of interacting with others. In addition, we fear that our emphasis on these rigid characteristics of the independent self might have detracted from the equally important abilities of teachers to be creative, flexible, and spontaneous in their instructional endeavors. As a consequence, student teachers may have been led to embrace the idea that social studies education is more about the study than the practice of democracy. Such an understanding fails to capitalize on the potential learning about democracy by avoiding its messiness as a lived process.

In Control

Another desirable characteristic of the independent self valued in European American contexts is being in control (Shweder et al., 1998). This code was used to track the numerous references we made in our feedback to classroom management, and the importance of student teachers being in control of their classes. Although such feedback tapered off in our later observation reports, instances of encouraging student teachers to be in control were found across each of the three years considered for this study.

As an example, JKR observed, “Many of the issues that we discussed were related to classroom management; however, we also addressed certain procedural aspects of the lesson and the purposes that they were supposed to accomplish” (09-13-05). In a different observation report, he made it a point to note how “all of the

students seemed to be paying attention and acted very well-behaved” (01-18-05). DJP also lauded the importance of classroom management and being in control when he wrote, “The student teacher was much more effective this time as a classroom manager and did a much better job of giving directions” (09-13-05). Finally, TSH focused on classroom management in his observation reports as well, noting how one of his student teachers “did a good job of handling a few students who were really off task and disrupting the class,” and then adding that they would “continue to focus in on student behavior and classroom management” (02-11-08).

As with the previous characteristics of being clear, confident, articulated, and elaborated, it is obviously important for teachers to be in control of their classrooms. But we are concerned, nonetheless, because our feedback was almost entirely couched in terms of our student teachers’ development as singular forces in their classrooms. In short, we typically described our student teachers as the most important individual actors in the classroom; in contrast, we all felt that we might have better used the opportunities present in our data to think of ways for teachers to play a role of first among equals more consistent with promoting democracy.

Different from Others and Uniqueness-Oriented

In European American contexts, it is also generally considered desirable to be different from others and uniqueness-oriented (Shweder et al., 1998). Similar to the code of separate, bounded, stable, and consistent, this code primarily surfaced in our feedback as we either chastised or praised our student teachers for developing and carrying out different and unique lesson plans that fit with their own stated purposes for teaching social studies. As an example, in one of his observation reports DJP wrote:

When all was said and done here, I didn’t get the sense that this lesson was really the student teacher’s lesson and I think in that regard she may have lost an opportunity to reach her students in ways that many teachers cannot. (03-01-07)

In a different observation report, DJP made it a point to note how, “The lesson plan itself this time was mostly unoriginal” (09-30-05). Both of these examples seem to highlight the notion that part of being a good teacher is to develop original lesson plans of one’s own design.

This notion was reinforced in other observation reports when we offered praise for different and unique lesson plans and ideas. For instance, TSH wrote positively about one of his observations as follows:

The goal of the lesson was to get students thinking about the period of colonization in Georgia by having them assume different identities in groups and then have them respond to a few hypothetical situations and then to interact with various other groups to see if their cultural differences would lead to conflict or cooperation. Overall, I was very impressed with the idea of the lesson and how the student teacher did a nice job of thinking on his feet. (09-13-08)

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Other than the fact that this lesson was somewhat original, it seems that TSH might have also been more willing to praise it as exemplary because of its ability to foster understandings crucial for democratic citizenship, such as tolerance through deliberation.

But such connections were never explicitly made with student teachers in our examples, thereby raising the question of why the student teachers might have perceived they were being praised for certain lessons. In order to offset the natural impulse of our student teachers to simply be grateful for praise, we have come to recognize the importance of also making explicit why such praise is being given in the first place. This represents one simple way in which we realized we could strengthen our efforts to encourage student teachers to engage in teaching for democracy as opposed to simply trying to be “different” as teachers.

Particularly Sensitive to Positive Regard, Self-Enhancing

The independent self valued in European American contexts tends to be particularly sensitive to positive regard, self-enhancing (Shweder et al., 1998). In searching for examples of this code in our feedback, we identified instances where we either encouraged our student teachers or applauded them for encouraging their own students. Surprisingly, this code did not appear very often across the observation reports considered for this study. In one of the only examples, DJP wrote:

The student teacher has developed and cultivated very positive relationships with her students. Sitting in her classroom, it's easy to see that she likes her students and her students like her—and, of course, that goes a long way toward the creation of the kind of supportive classroom climate that makes the other thing that the student teacher does so well so effective. (09-29-05)

This example demonstrates sensitivity to positive regard toward both the student teacher in question and the students in her classroom. As DJP noted, this sort of encouragement is likely useful for building positive relationships and supportive climates for learning.

With that written, it seems strange that there were so few examples of this code in our feedback. We can only speculate as to the reasons why we were not more supportive. In our discussions during the analysis of the data, most of us seemed to believe that we did offer support and encouragement during our conferences with our student teachers, but simply did not include it in our written feedback. The consensus seemed to be that each of us viewed the observation reports as teaching tools the student teachers could reflect back on for the purpose of improving their practice. Thus, we thought critique was the most important feature of a good observation report.

Moreover, we reasoned, democratic citizenship is very much tied to the critical exchange of ideas. While we are not willing to back away from this stance, we now question if we overlooked our power as supervisors and fooled ourselves into

thinking our conferences with student teachers represented actual exchanges of critical ideas as opposed to one-way commentaries. Although our feedback here did not fit with the model of blindly promoting characteristics of the independent self, we still fear that we fell short of our goal of teaching for democratic citizenship by failing to model more inclusive modes of communication in our repertoire as university supervisors. Our concern here is that our relatively poor attempts at modeling were internalized by our student teachers as part of their understanding of what it means to instruct or to teach democracy.

Success-Oriented

Another characteristic of the independent self is that it is success-oriented (Shweder et al., 1998). This code manifested itself in our feedback in the form of general comments regarding the ability of student teachers to become excellent teachers—a view that conflates engaging in the process of good teaching with the accomplishment of being a good teacher. For example, in one of his observation reports, JKR wrote, “In general, I feel that the student teacher is progressing rather nicely. She seems to understand the function and purposes of the various parts of an effective lesson” (10-26-05). Similarly, in a different report, JKR noted, “The student teacher admirably performed many of the functions of a good teacher—and I am quite confident that schools will be more than pleased to have her as a member of their faculties” (02-04-08). This success-oriented feedback was also present in the following excerpt from one of DJP’s observation reports:

I continue to have full confidence in the student teacher’s ability to distinguish herself not just as one of the most accomplished and effective student teachers in this program but, further down the line, as an extraordinarily effective and expert professional teacher. (02-02-07)

These examples make it clear that we felt the need to make the student teachers under our charge feel as though they could become excellent teachers.

Taken as a whole, these examples offer an interesting contrast with the previous code of particularly sensitive to positive regard, self-enhancing. Even though we did not offer much in the way of specific praise to our student teachers throughout our observation reports, we still felt the need to include general comments about their future success. If nothing else, it does not seem pedagogically sound to simply inform student teachers they will be successful without offering the context for such praise. In retrospect, it seems possible that our practice of including these comments may have represented a way to covertly let some of our student teachers know that we agreed with their aims as social studies teachers. This seems especially likely with the student teachers who understood the notion of teaching for democratic citizenship. But, still, we are left wondering how we might have used such success-oriented feedback, or any kind of feedback for that matter, to reach out to all of our student teachers to promote the ideals of democracy.

Expressive and Enthusiastic

The final characteristics of the independent self typically valued in European American contexts include being expressive and enthusiastic (Shweder et al., 1998). Again, this code was not as prevalent in our feedback as some of the others. When it did appear, it was usually used in such a way as to support the assumption that expressive and enthusiastic teachers and/or students translate into better teaching. As an example, DJP offered the following praise for one of his student teachers: “He was extraordinarily enthusiastic, he was funny (describing a particularly brutal portrait of Henry Clay: “brilliant man, face for radio”), he was as engaging as he could be, and he met the stated objectives for his lesson” (02-22-08).

On the surface, being expressive and enthusiastic appears to have a connection to democratic citizenship in so far as the premise can be trusted that if teachers effectively expresses enthusiasm for being active citizens then maybe their students, too, will gain some interest in carrying out this important role. But we worry that when this focus did appear in our feedback it too often missed other important aspects of democratic citizenship. In the first place, the content about which a teacher is expressive and enthusiastic makes a difference. For instance, in the example provided, there is little about a lecture on the biography of Henry Clay that would necessarily promote understandings germane to democratic citizenship. We are also concerned that we paid so little attention to the process the student teachers used, if indeed they used any, to get their students to work with each other. This represents one way for students to receive practice in developing and using skills beneficial for civic participation. It is within these two areas, surprisingly neglected in our feedback, that we feel expressiveness and enthusiasm might be most useful for democratic citizenship.

Implications for Practice and Research

The preceding analysis revealed how much of the feedback we provided to student teachers in our observation reports reflected characteristics associated with the European American ideal of the independent self. Within that larger discussion, a number of specific arguments were presented highlighting how such a cultural frame for our critique, implicitly conveying the value of the ontology of individualism prized in European American contexts, might lead to adverse consequences in terms of student teachers’ understandings and implementation of democratic teaching and learning rooted in pluralism. In particular, it was suggested that we may have inadvertently promulgated a highly individualistic conception of teaching for democracy relatively unresponsive to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Furthermore, it was argued how the cultural values of self-enhancement underlying much of our feedback did not appear particularly useful in encouraging student teachers to become self-critical professionals willing to honestly reveal their vulnerabilities, ask questions, or collaboratively inquire with

others for the improvement of their practice. Ironically, the kind of reflection and deliberation that would support such self-criticism is precisely the kind that Parker argued would lead to promotion of advanced democratic ideals both in classrooms and in society at large. This finding, in particular, speaks to the disconnect between our practice as field-based teacher educators and our intentions.

In thinking of ways to develop practice through field experiences, Knowles and Cole (1996) noted how “people who enter teacher education programs bring with them established conceptions about teachers’ roles and practices and about classrooms and schools” (p. 650). These preconceptions must be challenged if educators are ever to engage in conscious modes of professional activity responsive to both their student needs and their intentions as teachers. To this end, the authors argued for the importance of an inquiry orientation that would encourage teachers to engage in systematic reflection on, and inquiry into, the following questions: (1) Who am I as a teacher? (2) What are schools and classrooms like? What goes on and who works in educational institutions? (3) Who are the students? How do I develop relationships with the many participants in the learning community? (4) How do I learn about and understand teaching, and how can I forge my own ongoing professional development? (p. 651)

In light of the findings of this self-study revealing how implicit folk theories worked against our stated intentions at times, the framework for inquiry suggested by Knowles and Cole appears just as relevant and useful for university supervisors and teacher educators as it does for preservice or student teachers. For this reason, one particularly powerful approach to field instruction might be for university supervisors and teacher educators to model their own inquiry into these questions as they work with student teachers. This would allow them to purposefully challenge their own preconceptions while also providing student access to their thinking and learning about teaching. In this way, student teachers could become more active participants in their learning as they grapple together with their supervisors to understand and traverse the uncertainties of teaching for democracy as a learning problem.

At the same time as this approach offers us hope that we might be able to encourage future teachers to enact more inclusive teaching practices, we also recognized as we analyzed our observation reports that the game, in a sense, had been rigged—and not in our favor. The classrooms that our student teachers work in are almost invariably places where students are expected to model the same independent self ideals that we tried to expose in our own work. Moreover, teaching is still largely non-collaborative, solitary work, as it has been for decades (Lortie, 1975; Goodlad, 1984). Thus, we understand that any attempt to promote advanced notions of democratic citizenship in schools, or even to just work together to pursue worthwhile learning for diverse groups of students, has to account for these structural impediments. More research on individuals and/or schools that have managed to defy the odds to create and sustain visions of practice beneficial for teaching and

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learning in a pluralistic society is required. It does not seem too bold to claim the welfare of a free and prosperous society hangs in the balance.

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