Narrating Democratic Education

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Abstract

This action research uses grounded theory and constant comparative analysis of electronic portfolios to explore how prospective secondary social studies teachers connect theories and practices of democratic education to give meaning to the complexity of learning how to teach in more democratic ways. I use contrasting case studies to focus on the relative value of theoretical/experiential ways of knowing. I conclude that students need to move more fluidly between theoretical and experiential or narrative thinking to galvanize their wills to teach more democratically. Because teaching democratically implies that teachers have a democratic world view, documenting how one learns to become a teacher cannot be adequately accomplished with only lesson plans, unit plans, or K-12 student work. Instead, those who wish to construct identities as democratic educators need to articulate their struggles through theoretically positioned stories about day-to-day classroom interactions in which they acknowledge the central role of beliefs, values, and epistemic orientations.

As members of new knowledge communities – a teaching staff, student teaching cohort, a school, and the classes in which they teach – prospective teachers' theories and thus their identities are reformed through and in practice. According to Cochran-Smith (2005; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), because inquiry can promote the consciousness of lived experiences essential to a prospective teacher's evolving identity as a democratic educator, learning to teach should be situated within a framework of inquiry. This is particularly important for secondary social studies teacher education students who have a special obligation to prepare students as participating citizens in a culturally pluralistic, democratic society (NCSS, 1994). To enhance their consciousness of this mandate, I encouraged my students to use their electronic portfolios to explore tensions among theories of social studies and democratic education and their classroom practices and experiences. To assist them, I defined the electronic portfolio as a digitally mediated, hypertextually linked, autobiographical inquiry into the journey one makes in becoming a teacher.

My purpose in this article is neither to use students' electronic portfolios to evaluate a teacher education program nor compare the use of electronic to traditional portfolios. Instead, it is an effort to strengthen my own practices as a teacher educator and to share my interpretations with the hope that they may have some use to other social studies educators. To that end, I describe two student teachers' electronic portfolios, chosen for the clear discourses within which they situated democratic education and the disparate approaches they used to illustrate their emerging theories. Through these descriptions, I assert that pre-service teachers need to
interweave theoretical and experiential, or narrative, ways of knowing in exploring the intellectual, ethical, and professional tensions needed to deepen their consciousness of and, hopefully, their commitment to democratic educational practices. By sharing my work, I also attempt to shift the conversation about portfolios, in their electronic form, to one that focuses on engaging students in critically reflecting on their work as social studies teachers who place democratic participation and social justice at the forefront of their teaching practices.

The Rupture Created by Good Intentions

The action or pedagogical component of this research responds to a growing fear that claims teacher educators may be crowding out the reflective and growth purposes of portfolios while moving dangerously close to viewing portfolios merely as summative assessments and vehicles for marketing the competencies of prospective teachers. As teacher education has simultaneously moved into the digital information age and an era of accountability and high stakes assessment, electronic portfolios, at many institutions, have become integral to the evaluation of students' ability to enact teacher education standards. The Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology (PT3) website (ALTec, 2002) says that, in schools of education, e-portfolios are replacing the old 3-ring binder. In the United States, the movement toward electronic portfolios has been spurred on by PT3 grants, an emphasis on compliance with the International Society for Technology Education's (ISTE) National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers (2002), the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education's (NCATE's) frequent references to the portfolio as a desirable way of assessing teaching readiness (n.d.), and the development and promotion of web-based electronic portfolio tools designed to ease the burdens of producing NCATE accreditation reports.

The emergence of the electronic portfolio as a tool for assessing teacher preparation has, however, meant a standardization of content in which too many electronic portfolio projects describe portfolios as containers of artifacts that demonstrate how students have satisfied institutionally-imposed requirements while unintentionally de-emphasizing the complex, interconnected nature of learning how to teach (e.g., Drake & McBride, 2000; Gatlin & Jacobs, 2002; Ray, et al., 2001). While it is difficult to argue against standards for teacher education programs, the danger lies in the shift from an emphasis on the content of teacher education programs to the quantification, aggregation, and ranking of their output. In my institution and others, I have witnessed how this seduces teacher educators into teaching to reductionist accountability measures. At the same time, it decreases their capacity to promote the professionalization of teaching by developing pre-service teachers' abilities to learn from an intellectual examination of the complexity of their work in preparing students as participating citizens in a democratic society and as caring, agentive members of a world community. Thus, the impetus for this action research has been two-fold: to counter pedagogically what I saw as the negative synergy of technology and teacher education program assessment needs on the evolution of portfolio designs and systematically explore how prospective teachers use the portfolio as a form of reflective inquiry to narrate the complexity of structuring and maintaining democratic, learning environments.
Theoretical Framework

Throughout this study and the written re-presentation of prospective teachers' texts, my work is guided by two theoretical frameworks. Progressive and feminist theories of democratic education give direction to both the pedagogy I use in my classes and my data analysis while theories of intertextuality or the co-mingling of texts are used to guide students in the development of their portfolios and to serve as research tools to explain the construction of prospective teachers' professional identities.

Democratic Education

Like democracy, democratic education cannot be defined in a static way. Rather it is a way of being in classrooms that focuses on understanding and improving interpersonal and intercultural relationships and the world condition (Dewey, 1916; Mitchell, 2001). It avoids blueprints for teaching and learning in favor of an examination and assessment of social practices and existing knowledge, the construction of new knowledge as it relates to issues of importance in students' lives, and the blazing of new paths for personal and collective agency. In a democratic context, students become aware of themselves as participants in local, national, and global communities whose lives are shaped by social, cultural, economic, and political forces, and whose agency is motivated by concerns for equity and social justice. Because the mission of social studies education is to prepare students for the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic, equitable, and just democracy and a diverse and dynamic world community (NCSS, 1994), social studies teachers and teacher educators need to place concerns about democratic citizenship and what that implies in the forefront of their educational work.

John Dewey (1916) envisioned classrooms as learning communities where students experience working together in empowering and culturally democratic ways to solve common problems. Because democracy is grounded in social and global interaction, social studies teachers play a distinct role in forging its future. Therefore, the role of social studies teachers is to create spaces for students' voices, engage students' experiences, offer indigenous and contrapunctal knowledge alongside mainstream academic knowledge, involve students in collaborative inquiry and problem solving that focuses on recognizing and acting in opposition to hierarchical and colonial relationships, disrupt ethnocentric and hegemonic ways of knowing that support subjugation and under-representation, and expand student understanding of what it means to be part of a culturally democratic community and to act as responsible citizens of an interdependent world community. To encourage my students to see democracy as both a way of living and a moral imperative (Dewey, 1916), I focused their coursework on identity deconstruction, reflexivity, interdependence, diversity, cultural consciousness, asymmetrical distributions of power and privilege, situated knowledge, positionality, hybridity, uncertainty, and agency (Arnot & Dillabough, 1999; Banks, 1996; Bloom, 1998; Giroux, 1991; Kincheloe, 2001; Maher & Thompson, 2001; Merryfield, 2001; Mitchell, 2001; Stone, 1996; Weiler, 1988).

With regard to this, however, I want to note that while my own perspectives about democratic education are integral to my teaching and research, the focus of my research is on how my students define democratic education and connect it to classroom practice within their developing teacher identities. Their definitions, as I would expect, are quite different than mine.
Intertextuality and Hypertextuality

Since this study also involves the role of hypertext in the construction and communication of meaning and identity, I use theories of intertextuality, including the dialogic and polyvocal nature of texts, and their influence on one's identity to inform the articulation of the portfolio assignment and my data analysis (Kristeva, 1980; Bakhtin, 1981; Fairclough, 1992). Theories of intertextuality provide an ideal framework for considering the interplay of texts in framing prospective teachers' beliefs about democratic education.

Kristeva (1980) stated that texts are the product of the intermingling and transformation of prior texts. Bakhtin (1981) furthers our understanding of intertextuality with the concept of heteroglossia, or diverse and sometimes contradictory social viewpoints or voices orchestrated in a given text. Essentially texts are the reflection of previous texts in dialogue with each other and the writer, as well as with their readers, that is, they embody and anticipate polyvocality including ambivalent and contradictory voices. Intertextuality, considered in this light, has important implications for the constitution and transformation of one's social identity (Fairclough, 1992). Yet, coherence is difficult to achieve when one is confronted with diverse discourses. As student teachers interact with an array of texts related to democratic ideals and as they struggle to respond to these texts, they construct social studies teacher identities that position them relative to democratic education.

Hypertext and hypermedia environments have the ability to capture intertextuality in ways that traditional books, papers, and portfolios cannot. Hypermedia environments create opportunities for prospective and in-service teachers to embed the intertextual ways in which they connect ideas in theory and practice into the construction of their electronic portfolios. In articulating this project, I hoped that making these connections more explicit would increase the likelihood that my students would develop well-integrated, coherent, and reflexive understandings of what it means to teach democratically.

Landscapes of Inquiry

City University (pseudonym), where I taught and conducted this action research, is a private, urban institution located in the northeastern part of the United States. Its graduate school of education's conceptual framework centered on equity and social justice, and its graduate students expected a program grounded in the theory and practice of democratic education: one that would empower them as agents of school change. Students took at least three social studies education courses, a course with a diversity focus, and another course entitled Disability and Schools. Each student completed a 100-hour field experience and 12 weeks of student teaching in an urban and a suburban setting. All of their social studies courses and practica focused on connecting theory and practice.

Ten graduate students participated in this project: three males and seven females. Six were European Americans; one was African American; two were African-Caribbean, and one was white Hispanic. Eight were traditional graduate students in that they had recently completed their undergraduate programs; most were middle class.

As their major professor, I engaged students in successive and overlapping layers of self-reflection, research, and action with the intent to build reflexivity. Students autobiographically explored ways in which they learned about diversity; in groups they prepared an ethnographic portfolio of the inter-relationships among a school's demographics, history, and institutional
culture; they constructed oral histories, and they engaged in teacher action research. Each year, they also read numerous books and articles that shared sociocultural, constructivist, and critical multicultural and global perspectives.

Consistent with a reflective inquiry approach, I encouraged my students to use their electronic portfolios to study changes in their beliefs, values, and practices as they moved through the academic and practical aspects of their program. To anchor their electronic portfolios, I asked them to write an interactive essay that described their growth in terms of our program themes (e.g., social justice, inclusion, content and pedagogy, theory and practice, socio-historical perspectives, assessment, technology integration, and democratic citizenship) with an emphasis on those that best reflected their understanding of democratic education. To encourage them to explore the intertextuality of their own beliefs, I asked them to link statements about their growth to key artifacts such as lesson plans, video clips, photos, course assignments, student work, and vignettes describing critical incidences in the development of their professional identities. Because our teacher education program must comply with National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards, students also charted their learning as it related to the national standards for social studies.

Looking forward to this study, I explored the meanings embedded in students' electronic portfolios, shared them with the class, and then interviewed individual students to discuss my emerging assertions. The purpose of these sessions was to encourage students to articulate their implicit reflections: reflections used to make choices and frame narratives within their portfolios.

**Research Methods**

I situated this study of how my students gave meaning to the complexity of learning to become democratic educators in an action research paradigm. In overlapping roles, I worked as a practitioner on the inside with all the subjectivity that implies, while drawing from my tacit understandings as a veteran teacher and teacher educator as well as a researcher, to invent and direct learning experiences for my students. Simultaneously and recursively, I worked as a researcher who needed to place myself outside my role as practitioner to understand, from a distance, the complexity of my students' experiences. While this dual responsibility offered many advantages, it also highlighted the conflicts that can exist between research and teaching interests, particularly those related to the power I had over students as their advisor and major professor (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Erickson, 1993).

I announced the e-portfolio assignment and posted it online in September 2003 as my students began their field experience and social studies foundations course. Field notes used to capture significant events related to their experiences in schools and the development of their portfolios complemented data retrieved from their final portfolios submitted in May, 2004. I triangulated data drawn from students' portfolios, fieldnotes, and interviews targeting the reflections implicit in making choices related to their portfolios with course syllabi, course assignments, and work they completed but which they had not included in their portfolios.

Using methods of grounded theory, I analyzed the data through open-coding, selective coding, webbing, memo writing, assertion development, and constant comparison of emerging assertions with new data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Because of its flexibility, I used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to code and sort the data. I also immersed myself in the data both before and after the coding process. By doing this, I gained a more holistic understanding of the complexity of the data that was largely inaccessible through boolean-driven
The codes that emerged from the data fell largely within these themes: beliefs about democratic citizenship and education, sources of knowledge and beliefs about democratic education, teaching experiences related to democratic education, struggles with implementing democratic practices, and contradictions related to and ambivalence about democratic education.

Findings

To portray the interplay of related themes and the sources that generated my students' understandings of democratic education, I will describe and contrast two students' electronic portfolios. I will use these to demonstrate how prospective teachers may draw upon their experiences as students, their academic knowledge, their observations within schools, and their experiences as student teachers to construct an understanding of their roles as social studies teachers and their emerging identities as democratic educators.

Julia: Democratic Education as a "Pedagogy of Hope"

Julia's (pseudonym) table of contents anticipated a portfolio that included printed, visual, and video texts drawn from her student teaching experiences. She connected these texts to an interactive essay or narrative of her journey in becoming a teacher in her own words:

Reflecting has become the main way in which I can detail and examine my growth as a teacher. When I started the teaching program at [City University], I was full of self-doubt, but with a camcorder, photographs, journal entries, student work, student evaluations, lesson plans and through the professional observations, I began to realistically and critically view my growth as a teacher.

While intertextual conflicts resulting from differences between teacher education programs grounded in principles of democratic education and local public schooling based largely on hierarchical structures and a discourse of accountability can often be sources of ambivalence (Fairclough, 1992) in the formation of prospective teachers' consciousness (Bakhtin, 1981; Kamberelis & Scott, 1992; Wortham, 2004), Julia's electronic portfolio showed little of this. Instead, her narrative portrayed a coherent academic and personal understanding of and commitment to constructing democratic learning experiences in her student teaching classes.

As an immigrant schooled in the United States, Julia identified herself alternately as a Hispanic female and a "Spanish speaking daughter of African and Caribe natives from the Dominican Republic." She sought certification as a middle childhood and adolescent (5th through 12th grade) social studies teacher. To reflect her intercultural roots and her metaphor for American pluralism, she introduced her portfolio with a colorful quilt-like montage of world flags and islands of "children" encircling a global sphere centered on Australia.

Julia's frequent use of words like hope and want framed her understanding of democratic education.

At first, they did not understand the freedoms that I had allowed them, but by the end of my student teaching placement, I believe that they had begun to understand that I was providing them with the opportunity to make decisions and thereby started [sic] them on
the road to becoming participating and active members of their classroom community with the hope that this will someday translate into involvement with the democratic process of their country.

For her, being a democratic educator meant engaging in pedagogy of hope. On a simpler scale, this reminded me of the pedagogy of hope described by Paulo Freire (1994): hope that is anchored in historical understanding and practice and can be used to build a foundation for change.

As she reflected on her attempts to create a democratic learning environment for her students through the use of equal status group work (Cohen & Lotan, 1995), her statements mingled texts drawn from her experiences as a public school student with those encountered as a teacher education student and student teacher. She explained:

When I think back on group work experiences, I can now see that I may have been regarded as a lower status student and therefore not included in group activities. My group work experiences clouded the value that I placed on group work, but after reading various books and simply noticing the benefits of cooperative learning, my opinion has [been] altered.

Clearly recognizing that maintaining equitable participation structures involved struggles that were both personal and emotional, Julia used theory and practice to confront her prior beliefs. Taking still a different perspective on this struggle, she reflected on her personal biases while questioning how she might relate to predominantly white, middle-class suburban students:

When I found out that I would be placed at a middle-class suburban school, I was very apprehensive; it would be the first time that I would be in an all-white suburban school. I did not know if I would be able to relate to the children because of their racial and ethnic background.

In her teacher action research project included in her portfolio, she recounted a third aspect of the struggle—one that took place in student interaction. Julia stated:

[Megan] is one of my best students. She is very active and enthusiastic about history. She . . . is in a group with three very rowdy and not academically inclined students. As I walk around the classroom, I have noticed on various occasions that [Megan] is totally disengaged with the group work . . . . [S]he is not consulted or informed of what the group is doing. But [Megan] is an A student, what is bringing on this behavior? Does she not want to be involved, or is she choosing to not take part in the activity? If [Megan] does not participate in the group activity, she will not be able to partake in the learning.

Through this inquiry project, Julia connected Cohen's (1995) theories about equal status group participation to observations of classroom practices to conclude that in order for there to be equal opportunity for learning, all students must have a voice in the construction of social studies knowledge without regard for the way they are socially or academically positioned.

It is informative to note, in conclusion, that Julia did not see emancipatory pedagogy as a peculiarity of her teacher preparation program so much as she saw it as a way to bring her own
experiences as a person of color and her resulting wisdom into the classroom, "I felt that I was never represented in any of my textbooks and . . . I hope to change that for my students."

**Lisa: Democratic Education as Inclusive Education**

In constructing her portfolio, Lisa (pseudonym) meticulously complied with all aspects of the assignment and demonstrated her ability to reflect on how she might promote equal access to learning by all students. An intertextual analysis, however, manifested contradictions and ambivalence about democratic education. While espousing program-based theories of inclusive democratic education, she also appeared to align herself with the traditional, "banking" (Freire, 1993, p. 53) models of education provided by cooperating teachers. To further complicate the way she represented herself, she chose to view each standard and program principle as a separate learning outcome rather than as part of a well-integrated, contextualized whole.

In addition to an interactive essay that included hyperlinks to related documents, her portfolio included her philosophy of social studies education, her theoretical framework, her resume, and a personal metaphor for learning to teach, as well as lesson plans and video clips. She also included tables that charted her knowledge of the national standards for social studies and the principles of City University's teacher education program with hyperlinks to relevant lesson plans, coursework papers and projects, and related readings. Because she was unique in seeking certification as a special ed/inclusion teacher, she also incorporated her inclusive education program portfolio. Because of its process-product nature and size, its presence weighed heavily in the data analysis.

Lisa, a lower middle-class European American student, sought certification in grades 5-12 social studies and special education, which is a program developed by City University to equip content area specialists with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach in inclusive, heterogeneous classrooms. She was aware of the diverse needs of students as well as her own privileges with respect to the cultural and social capital needed to succeed in a highly selective institution. In her autobiography, written earlier in the year but not included in her portfolio, she was "critical of the way [education] was used to support the myth of American meritocracy."

In her portfolio, Lisa drew upon theory to build her meaning of democratic education. For her, democratic education was most appropriately described as *inclusive education*. Below are two examples of how she positioned inclusive education in both content and pedagogy:

- Through my studies, I realized that minorities and women are often left out in traditional historical accounts…. one of my goals as a teacher… is to present an inclusive history to my students.
- I believe in designing lessons that meet the needs of both culturally and educationally diverse learners.

However, evidence drawn from her observations and experiences as a student teacher lay elsewhere. Fifteen statements showed concern about the routine challenges of teaching; 17 reflected her understanding of the teacher as broadcaster of knowledge; 12 related to her role as classroom manager and disciplinarian, and 25 statements reflected her belief that instruction should be different for students in different tracks and for students with disabilities.
In particular, as her instructor, I was concerned about her descriptions of school practices that categorized students, offering students in different tracks a qualitatively different curriculum in classes that were structured and managed in quite different ways. "Through observing three classes of different ability levels--a pre-IB [International Baccalaureate] class, an Honors class, and a Regents class--I was able to see how the teacher varied the learning activities for the students." In a lengthy discussion, Lisa portrayed higher-ability students as responding to higher-level questions, pursuing ideas more freely, interacting with each other, and engaging with supplementary texts. On the other hand, students who were perceived as having less academic ability interacted primarily with the teacher, responded to largely literal-level questions, took notes as dictated by the teacher, and used the textbook as their principal resource. Lisa did little to question this differentiation and, in fact, said that this strategy "might be an idea to consider." One statement about another teacher's classroom stood as a reflection of her ambivalence on this issue: "Despite the varying degrees of difficulty, structure, and ability levels in the classroom, [the teacher] . . . uses the same learning activities in each class - going over worksheets, giving notes, and asking questions." Was Lisa representing the teacher's use of the same learning activities for all ability levels as an equitable practice? If so, then why wasn't she also questioning how this strategy failed to incorporate student experiences as an essential foundation for learning? Consistently, Lisa edited herself out of such uncritical reporting, thereby neutralizing ways in which teachers differentiated learners and marginalized students' experiences.

With her largely dualistic ways of separating theory from observations and experiences, she also consistently edited out students and their interactions with each other, herself, and the teachers she observed. Thus, she avoided the critical incidences that were so effective in communicating Julia's consciousness of students' classroom practices and how democratic education was being enacted through her teaching practices. As I considered Lisa's concerns about her role as disciplinarian and transmitter of knowledge alongside this omission of students, I questioned how she would balance theories of inclusive and democratic education with the tacit wisdom of school culture that promoted vertical lines of authority. Was she so anxious to take on the role of the teacher as it is situated in school culture that she would compromise her own beliefs about inclusive democratic education, or would she eventually find a balance that would favor inclusive structures for learning?

During her interview which took place six months after she had completed the portfolio and while she was a teacher at the urban high school in which she had student taught, I asked her what had driven the construction of her portfolio. She responded that she was very careful to comply with all aspects of the assignment and to address the principles of the teacher education program and the national standards. We examined a couple of places in her portfolio in which her statements demonstrated possible ambivalence and I asked her what she meant. In one case, where she appeared to promote the dominant narrative of American history as a history of steady progress, she said, "I can't believe I wrote that." As we moved on, she said, "You know, if I had this to do all over again, I would do it very differently. I would focus on different things."

At the end of her program of study, she was presented this opportunity in a somewhat altered form as she chose the programmatic portfolio option as her capstone project. Although the assignment mandated that she organize her portfolio by principles and standards, indeed she did focus on different things, make connections across program principles, and demonstrate a consistent belief in inclusive practices. While she did not include stories of interactions between students, she did narrate the personal meaning of inquiry assignments that required her to
observe a variety of teaching practices.

Her earlier portfolio was more a display of theories learned during her program of study and a reflection of what she thought was expected of her as a secondary social studies teacher--her role as a teacher--than it was a description of her emerging identity as an inclusive teacher. It became clear, given the greater autonomy she now had as a teacher and the distance between her practices and those who would evaluate them, that she was capable of reflecting more on her emerging identity as a teacher who used both content and pedagogy as tools of inclusion. Clearly neither the digital nature of the assignment nor the emphasis on our program's principles interfered with her ability to connect theory and practice; in fact, in the capstone portfolio she created dozens of hyperlinks to connect theoretical positions with classroom practices. Her second portfolio, however, did not require her to describe her journey in becoming a teacher. I believe that this omission contributed to the fact that she still failed to articulate the critical classroom events that were so important in helping Julia and other participants to recognize and articulate their identities as democratic educators.

**Interpretations, Conclusions, and Implications**

Julia and Lisa were both traditional, first-career students who had completed their undergraduate education at City University just prior to entering the Masters’ degree program. Julia addressed standards and principles in a holistic way by creating a complex portrait of her understanding of democratic education as a process of hope. In a way that integrated academic and personal theory with her experiences, she narrated critical incidences related to her biases and her relationships with students and their relationships with each other. On the other hand, Lisa's ways of knowing seemed dualistic, separating her beliefs in academic theories from observations and practice. She also was inconsistent in her support of democratic education as inclusive education, uncritically voicing the progressive views promulgated in her university inclusion classes alongside the more traditional *deficit model* approaches enacted in her school settings. In her zeal to respond to the requirements of the electronic portfolio assignment to address each teacher education standard and program principle, she failed to reflect on the more complex and holistic nature of what it means to develop an identity, albeit it partial and incomplete, as a democratic educator.

This comparison of Julia's and Lisa's electronic portfolios has significant implications for the direction of our social studies education program. If the purpose of social studies teacher education is to bring prospective teachers to the point where they can proceed in school settings to prepare students as participating citizens who seek social justice, prospective teachers need to find stories in their teaching practices to galvanize their wills as democratic educators.

Teaching democratically implies that educators have a democratic world view. Documenting how one learns to become a democratic teacher cannot be adequately accomplished through separate reviews of academic knowledge, observations of others, lesson plans, unit plans, and student work; it is a complex way of life that develops inside a classroom: one that promotes student and teacher interaction, reciprocal learning, and co-agency. Thus, teaching democratically is a struggle that is intricately linked to classroom interactions. To support a developing consciousness of themselves as democratic educators, prospective teachers need to acknowledge the essential role of their beliefs and values and how these relate to personal and student interactions as well as instructional planning and delivery.

Because a gap between theory and practical experience effectively reinforces the
institutional hierarchies between the university and the schools and, more importantly, may therefore fail to support students who wish to become democratic teachers, teacher educators need to understand the importance of expanding prospective teachers’ ideas about the nature of theory as both academic and practical. In her first portfolio, Lisa kept theory at a distance, divorcing it from experience and not recognizing the reciprocal process wherein one enables the other. Catharine MacKinnon (as cited in hooks, 1994) has said, "We know things with our lives, and we live that knowledge, beyond what any theory has yet theorized" (p. 75). The recognition of theory as social practice or the interplay between beliefs grounded in academic theory and emerging from social practices may galvanize prospective teachers' ability to see democratic education as a process that is enacted and changed daily within the context of their own classrooms. Since a personalized integration of theory and practice is necessary for the construction of an identity as a democratic educator, the question for teacher educators is how to best support moving between the two in our teacher education programs and through portfolio assignments.

As a result of this study, I feel even more strongly than before that social studies teacher education classes such as those that I teach, particularly as they are situated at the intersections of theory and practice, should enact a dialogue between the two. Theoretical knowledge can help prospective teachers know which stories to tell. The stories of critical incidences that they tell, shaped as they are by student teachers’ evolving identities, are not only a source of self-empowerment, but they also play a significant role in the formation of teachers’ continually evolving practical theories and professional identities. Julia finds, during her teacher action research, that Cohen's work on equal status participation--work that generalizes a theory of practice--facilitates the stories she tells about her prior personal experiences and her observations of students' practices of exclusion. Julia was not alone in using such dialogue to articulate her identity as a teacher. In fact, this was a consistent theme throughout the data that cut across differences in pre-service teachers' gender, class, and ethnicity and was intricately connected to inquiry assignments completed during students' field experiences and student teaching.

For students to engage in this dialogue, teacher educators need to demonstrate the value of moving fluidly between theory and practice, inventing inquiry opportunities in which students observe, experience, and narrate democratic theories in practice as a way of making sense of their student teaching experiences and the growth in their identities as democratic social studies teachers. Because hypertext used in the preparation of electronic portfolios provides opportunities for students to write in non-linear, intertextual ways, it is particularly useful as a way to encourage students to engage in integrated ways of knowing needed to consciously move toward more democratic practices. This is particularly important as we consider that teaching is text, that theories help teachers to choose their stories about teaching, and that those stories are bound to the ways in which they construct practical theories of teaching as well as identities as democratic educators.
References


