Chapter 11
On Becoming a Democratic Teacher Educator

Nathan D. Brubaker

Introduction

Twenty years ago, as an undergraduate teacher education student, I could not have been more passionate about becoming a teacher. I exhibited a relentless desire to learn about teaching—commencing classes having already read assigned texts while studying resources my teacher educators had not. As administrators and honor societies recognized my academic accomplishments, veteran teacher educators described me as the most focused student they had ever taught. As a prospective teacher, I aspired to complete projects involving—oftentimes—more work and greater depth of study than my teacher educators expected. I was nevertheless disappointed when they insisted I fulfill their predetermined requirements regardless. One semester I had a seldom-offered opportunity to complete a project of my choosing. I proposed exploring my personal purpose for becoming a teacher. My proposal was rejected on the basis that it had nothing to do with education. The more I questioned such views, the more my grades dropped. A growing sense of personal and professional disillusionment soon took hold.

From such experiences, I grew resentful of my teacher educators' dictatorial practices. Such feelings only intensified as my teacher educators repeatedly stifled my efforts to examine more deeply the realities of racism and injustice in society and discern their relevance to my own and others' teaching. Being responsive to such social ills had become of increasing importance to me as a result of lessons learned from my extracurricular pursuits. Attending community events and auditing extra classes concerning multicultural matters helped me realize—whether aware of it or not—I was both personally implicated in perpetuating racial oppression and

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N.D. Brubaker (✉)
Faculty of Education, Monash University,
Peninsula Campus A3.12, P.O. Box 527, Frankston, VIC 3199, Australia
e-mail: nathan.brubaker@monash.edu

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benefitted from its continued function. From my past experiences with sports, politics and schooling—through which I had developed mounting levels of confusion, frustration and dissatisfaction with persistent societal inequalities—I was well positioned to embrace such an outlook. The centrality and prevalence of racism provided a powerful explanatory mechanism for all that seemed wrong with the world. It fulfilled an intellectual need for which I had long been searching.

By the time I finished my first year of university studies, I considered it necessary to assume responsibility for dismantling racial injustice to help construct a better society. I was no longer content with blindly perpetuating systematic patterns of unearned privilege, power, and advantage distorting my own and others' realities. I harbored a profound desire to not only act against racism, but to understand its complexity. Yet, it was with continued dismay that my enthusiasm to further my learning about teaching from such a perspective was not always embraced by those whose job it was to help stimulate and foster such learning. From a sympathetic member of the university community, I received the following advice: find a way to subvert the dominant paradigm, or it will own you. Thus began my journey of becoming a teacher educator—as a deliberate quest to subvert the dominant paradigm of authoritarian teaching and to realize a pedagogical vision different from that which I had experienced as an aspiring educator. Out of my efforts to become a teacher, my quest to become a democratic teacher educator was born.

Context of My Pedagogical Transition and Transformation

My knowledge and practice as a teacher educator are the result of numerous interrelating influences from throughout my educational career. Having previously transitioned across a range of institutional and cultural settings—from rural to urban environments, small to large institutions, liberal to conservative political contexts, progressive to traditional pedagogical cultures, and from northern- to southern-hemisphere nations—I have experienced plenty of transition throughout my career. The contrasts in such experiences have been dramatic, intense, and significant. The transition and transformation that has been most central to my identity as a teacher educator has nevertheless been one that has permeated my presence across each of these settings: how I actually teach teachers in the university context. My *pedagogical* transition and transformation—from an outlook and actions associated with conventional teacher-centered teaching towards ones more closely aligned with democratic alternatives—has therefore been most pivotal to my knowledge and identity as a teacher educator.

My experiences as an undergraduate teacher education student are of particular relevance to the multiple layers of identity informing my transition, transformation and journey concerning my pedagogical practice as a teacher educator. From past documents and diaries, it is clear I was a highly self-directed and intrinsically-motivated student from the beginning of my university experience. I was serious about learning and about helping others learn. Teaching was the only occupation I had seriously considered joining. I decided to become a teacher while in high school. Over my final 2 years of secondary schooling, I devoted myself to learning as much as I could about teaching before starting my university studies. Hometown teachers mentored me through firsthand experiences with children to help cultivate my skills with diverse learners. High school teachers provided personal insight into their thinking to expand my insight of pedagogy. My parents, also educators, afforded opportunities to encounter and engage with broader professional issues. Before beginning my university studies, I was already deeply invested and immersed in professional affairs concerning educational practice.

It did not take long before my overriding perception of my academic experience at the university level became one of imprisonment. From my second year, I likened my experience of attending classes and completing assignments to being in a cage—prohibited from thinking broadly and exercising intellectual autonomy. I wanted to do more as a learner, yet many of my teacher educators insisted I do less. I wanted to tailor assignments to my own needs, yet many of my teacher educators refused to even consider doing so. Those who did were deeply cautious and skeptical of any potential benefits. In my view, they considered any effort to provide individualized opportunities more akin to insubordination than responsible instructional practice. They, it seemed, were ultimately responsible for knowing what was best. It was my duty to comply. Any desire to learn, question, and think beyond what they were prepared to offer constituted, fundamentally—and oddly, in my view—a threat to their domain. Such educators, in hindsight, were not ready—pedagogically—for my arrival. My presence not only disrupted their sense of classroom normality, but destroyed it. My desire to learn was sufficiently unusual as to shatter the mold of teaching to which they expected me to adhere.

Upon completing my undergraduate studies, en route to the registrar's office in pursuit of an official transcript for prospective employers—a certificate of indoctrination, as I called it—I stumbled upon a stack of discarded books. One—*Freedom to Learn* by Carl Rogers—proved a fortuitous find. Upon returning home, I was immediately taken by his conception of whole-person learning—self-initiated, based on what the learner wants to know, *its essence is meaning*. While reading his concept of "becoming a facilitator," I was in awe. According to Rogers:

> The traditional teacher—the *good* traditional teacher—asks her or himself questions of this sort: 'What do I think would be good for a student to learn at this particular age and level of competence? How can I plan a proper curriculum for this student? How can I inculcate motivation to learn this curriculum?…'
>
> On the other hand, the facilitator of learning asks questions such as these, not of self, but of the *students*: 'What do you want to learn? What things puzzle you? What are you curious about? What issues concern you? What problems do you wish you could solve?' When he or she has answers to these questions, further questions follow: 'Now how can I help [you] find the resources…[to] provide answers to the things that concern [you], the things [you] are eager to learn?' (Rogers 1983, pp. 135–136, emphasis in the original)

Having just endured 4 painful years of university study, in which even my self-created summer syllabus—"my personal venture into genuine learning"—was received skeptically, I could not help but feel deep inspiration from Rogers' proposed alternative to traditional teaching. It became etched in my mind as a pedagogical ideal—a possible path for my future teaching. As an elementary educator over the next 4 years, I knew full well I was not yet prepared to actualize this ideal. I had not yet developed the skills and knowledge necessary to confidently and competently put into practice such a vision. It nevertheless flickered through my mind as a tantalizing image of what, pedagogically, I could become. With transition away from the teacher-centered understandings and practices to which I had long been subjected towards ones which departed more fundamentally from students' active involvement and participation—not just as I envisioned in my planning but actually embodied and enabled in my classroom—it could be brought closer to my grasp. Consciously or otherwise, my pedagogical transformation towards becoming a democratic teacher educator was underway. Building my capacity to help students realize such a fundamental shift in their lived classroom reality was the task to which I was implicitly turning.

Theoretical Framework

Upon leaving my teaching position in 2001, I traveled the U.S. in pursuit of a graduate program that could help me develop the skills and knowledge necessary to fulfill my vision. I found what I was looking for at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at Montclair State University in New Jersey. Fostering philosophical inquiry with children provided a pedagogical vehicle for teaching democratically and promoting critical thinking about authoritarian assumptions in education. Such a goal, I found from my graduate studies, was perhaps best embodied by Dewey's pedagogical vision (Dewey 1966), from which Rogers himself and many other progressive pedagogues drew inspiration. As a means of emphasizing the interaction of curricular subject matter with students' experiences, and of accentuating the importance of students' interests—not as ends in themselves, but as attitudes toward possible experiences, as signs of "culminating powers," "germinating seeds" (2001, p. 112), and "dawning power[s]" (1996, p. 173)—I sought to find a way of fostering a facilitative relationship between myself and my students in a manner that profoundly reconstructed the basis of classroom authority (Brubaker 2010, 2012b). By interpreting subject matter as an outgrowth of students' interests instead of unilaterally transmitting subject matter expertise, I endeavored to transform my pedagogical practice from transmission to dialogue.

Such a shift represented the central defining transition of my professional career. It required learning the skills and knowledge necessary to construct collaborative actions characterized by relations *with* rather than *for* or *over*. Purposefully and explicitly negotiating authority in a democratic fashion represented a means of humanizing students in ways authoritarian practices cannot (Freire 1996)—of helping students more fully maximize their growth and fulfill their potential as prospective teachers. Rejecting external authority and finding "a more effective source" in the collective actions of community life (Dewey 1963, p. 21) became the ideal to which I was committed to actualizing in my teaching. Without having found Philosophy for Children—without the opportunity to pursue my vision—I would not have remained a teacher. From my experiences fostering philosophical inquiry with children, I learned to both partake in classroom dialogue, and to lead it. It was a transformative journey. It set the stage for becoming a teacher educator.

My Initial Journey into Teacher Education

Transitioning from teaching to teacher education embodied, for me, an opportunity to build a new pedagogy, a new self, a new society. This journey took on a life of its own in the Fall 2004 semester, when I was assigned, as a graduate assistant, to teach my first undergraduate teacher education course: Teaching for Critical Thinking. Bolstered by the support of numerous like-minded colleagues and mentors, I set off on what was, to me, the ultimate experiment in democratic teaching. In my view, as discerned from my writings at the time, students would be so much more motivated to learn, and would learn so much more, if they were only allowed to follow their *interests*. The opportunity to have an authentic voice would ensure their full-scale investment and commitment to the class. Our shared space would be neither mine nor theirs, but *ours*. Together, we would enact dialogue, not monologue. Students would freely wonder, be uncertain, openly puzzle, pose questions, and inquire. We would jointly construct knowledge instead of being filled up by an expert.

More passionate about education that semester than I had been in years, it did not take long before I was barraging students with an emotional outpouring of fervent support for classroom democracy. Whether ready for it or not, they would soon experience, in my mind at least, what had so desperately been missing from undergraduate teacher education—in particular, *my* undergraduate teacher education. They would, after all, soon be colleagues, working in schools, entrusted with the awesome responsibility of educating youth. They needed to be adept at structuring their own learning so as to be prepared to do the same for others as teachers. The class was therefore what we wanted it to be. If they wanted to discuss the readings, they were to arrive ready to discuss the readings. If they didn't understand what was being addressed, they were to speak up. Students were only going to get from the class what they put into it. From our collective interactions, a group dynamic would emerge. Two students shared with me early on in the experience their view that I was setting up the course in just the right way—our discussions would only help them become better teachers. We were off to an exciting start.

As our experience unfolded, powerful indications emerged that my vision of building on students' interests would not be free of complications. The first day, for example, on an introductory questionnaire, I was surprised that virtually no one identified any questions they had about teaching or critical thinking. Not having the material I had anticipated using as generative themes (Shor 1992) for future class experiences, I figured this was just a temporary roadblock. But then the challenges began to mount as I presented on-going opportunities to negotiate our group agenda. As I recorded in my journal after class one day:

> I presented my four main ideas about what we could do: we could share our interests and passions, we could discuss readings, we could share questions and concerns, or we could start with [a particular children's text]. Nobody had anything to say whatsoever. I explained that I was inviting them to take part in this process, to help construct it together. Still nothing. I tried to get from them what the different options were on the table. Still nothing. So I started calling on people. Fran, Sabrina, Tom, Daisy, etc. [all names are pseudonyms]. Still not much. So I reiterated the options. Still nothing. So I wrote the options on the board. Still nothing. So then Kevin finally spoke and tried to engage discussion about a particular issue involving substitute teaching. Before Diego could answer from his experience, I froze the discourse and called for a meta-moment. I asked them what had just happened. Leona offered an interpretation of Kevin trying to break the ice.

It was fast becoming my experience that breaking ice in our class was akin to precipitating a glacial melt. Concerned, I wondered: Was this what school had done to us? Had it turned students from question marks to periods—with no wonder, questions, or curiosities to discuss? How was it they could go—presumably—from talking, questioning, listening, and probing in other contexts to attending class and simply going silent? Would students themselves want teachers—for themselves or children—that had few interests and needed to be told what to do? My level of agitation was quickly ratcheting upwards.

While teaching the course, I was fully immersed in my own doctoral studies and in formulating the very conception of democratic teacher education I was endeavoring to enact. The academic sources with which I engaged that semester proved influential in shaping my underlying view. From the authors whose work I had read, I gained insight into the two "minimal meanings" to democracy: a form of rule—by and for the people—and an embodiment of freedoms (Benne 1990), to which participation, control of the agenda, full inclusion, and voting equality (Dahl 1998) were central. From such an outlook, implementing a democratic approach was important for undermining totalitarian control, fostering self-determination, assuring political equality, and fostering moral autonomy (Dahl 1998). By bridging the divide between unity and diversity (Parker 1996), individualism and community (Goodman 1989), and goods and associations (Dewey 1954), we could resolve differences through deliberation (Gutmann 1999) and thinking (Dewey 1997). The more people that were involved in creating the class agenda, the more engaged and invested they would ultimately be (Kivlighan et al. 1993). With sufficient persistence, those in the group would eventually come to embody the qualities and characteristics of its leader (Fielding and Hogg 1997).

As a beginning teacher educator, I broadly understood my responsibility as cultivating classroom conditions in which democratic associations could flourish. In teaching the class, this meant cultivating a classroom environment characteristic of a public democracy, where students could actively participate, critically examine their social reality, advocate for justice, share control, and build community (Sehr 1997). It was my job to create problems for students through a lack of direction (Rogers 1961), where the solution to authoritarian control was not simply to change the content of the class, but to reconfigure the relationships within it (Hooks 1994, 2003). In doing so, I envisioned a reality of shared authority and shared vulnerability, in which we would move beyond the progressive-traditional dichotomy (Oyler and Becker 1997) and bring to life students' internal drive to learn (Bruner 1963). Since the medium was ultimately the message (Postman and Weingartner 1969), I aspired to create the conditions in which students could take initiative, direct class content and process, and claim expertise through linking personal experience with class texts (Oyler 1996). It was a noble vision—only sometimes our lived reality.

Themes from My Research

As Dewey suggests, teachers "must connect with [students' interests] or fail utterly" (1996, p. 172). As a teacher educator, I have had my share of experiences in which I have perceived myself to have both succeeded and failed at effectively situating subject matter in students' experiences and responding to their expressed interests and needs. Such experiences, as documented in my research (e.g., Brubaker 2012c), have been complicated by students' deeply rooted familiarity with authoritarian teaching. Embedded in the gap between students' realities and my pedagogical ideals have nevertheless been idyllic teacher identity beliefs (Friesen and Besley 2013) concerning the actual, ought, and ideal selves (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009) informing the enterprise of democratic teacher education. My pedagogical identity underlying such beliefs has been continually re-created (Trent 2010) in ways that have involved conflict (Hoffman-Kipp 2008), negotiation (Lopes and Pereira 2012), compromise (Brubaker 2012a), and a struggle between external threats and internal values (Doecke 2004)—all of which have been particularly evident during times of transition and change.

My first semester of becoming a democratic teacher educator represented, in many ways, the height of my pedagogical transformation. It was the first time in which I had encountered, in raw and unadulterated form, the soaring highs and crashing lows of democratic teaching. In one respect, I had no idea what I was doing; in another, I could not have done it any better. As I described my pedagogical intentions with colleagues and mentors before the semester started, I detected from them some ambivalence concerning my democratic project. I wrote in my journal:

> [W]hen I get comments like, '[L]et me know how it goes!' I'm sensing that what people are really saying is, '[G]ood luck, and be sure to tell [us] about all the surprises, unexpected disasters, genuine disappointments and failures, and complete letdowns!'

Amidst all my enthusiasm for what I envisioned, my democratically-minded teacher educators seemed to telegraph a view that I would soon encounter a disconnect between what I had hoped to accomplish and the reality for which my students were prepared. Ten years on, I am more deeply informed about this disconnect. I now report on the aspects of my experience they had implicitly anticipated—those I could not fully fathom until experiencing for myself from the standpoint of a teacher educator their look and feel. Below, I outline key themes from my research as they were particularly evident in my first semester of becoming a teacher educator.

Surprise

For Dewey, students' interests should not be aroused *after* subject-matter has been selected, but subject-matter should be selected in response to the interests already at play. Conceptually, I felt I had a pretty good handle on such a pedagogical imperative. What I failed to realize was the extent to which students had to actually have interests to effectively implement the approach as I intended it. Having long had clearly defined interests of my own, the thought hardly crossed my mind that students would not—or could not—readily identify their own interests and embrace the opportunity to commence with that which they found most meaningful. From students' struggles in doing so, I expressed repeated surprise. As I wrote in my journal:

> I'm essentially making the huge assumption that people actually have a path of inquiry and are driven enough to pursue their own resources and track down their own materials in an effort to satisfy their own inquiries and desires to learn. But this in fact may be a hugely erroneous assumption which could entirely backfire on me.

My teacher educators had already shared with me that the students were used to being told what to do, how to do it, and to being graded on doing so. I recognized it would be a tough battle to fully enact my pedagogical vision. I was nevertheless startled by the extent to which students were utterly immobilized by the opportunities I presented them to interact in class with myself and each other. As students themselves expressed, they were afraid of being asked questions and not knowing the answers. The thoughts of saying "I don't know" terrified them. Just the idea of setting up a fishbowl discussion, as one expressed in class one day, made her get really hot and sweaty and nervous. Many felt intimidated, freaked out, and anxious about the opportunity to experience a discussion-based classroom. As a white male, it is perhaps no surprise that I felt most comfortable with my facilitation model of teaching since it affirmed my privileged social standing (Johnson-Bailey and Cervero 1998). Dewey's "catch" and "hold" aspects of situational and personal/individual interest (Krapp 2002) nevertheless seemed of limited relevance. Students' repeated difficulty bringing interests to class proved puzzling from my emerging pedagogical outlook.

Unexpected Disaster

According to Burbules (1986), power is manifested in every relationship and dialogue presents a useful vehicle for negotiating differences instead of operating on a unilateral basis. In enacting a relational conception of power, it is important to attend to conflicts of interests which may or may not be capable of being resolved. Who wins and who loses such zero-sum battles is a function of resistance, acquiescence, critical-mindedness, and autonomy. In class, I sought to employ dialogue as one means of enticing students to actively construct such a reality in class—to be actively present and share responsibility for what took place. By engaging students' interests and negotiating any conflicts that emerged—indeed, actively precipitating conflict where necessary—I envisioned an authentically emergent experience in which coercion would have little role.

I gained great satisfaction from employing few coercive measures. I nevertheless considered it an unexpected disaster when, in response to my actions (and lack thereof), and particularly to the multiple pressures students experienced from their other classes, many students began coming only sporadically to class. As one student expressed it at the time, their grades in some of their other teacher education classes were dropped five percentage points for each absence. The costs of not coming were severe, while our class was more based around students' intrinsic commitment to learning. Around mid-semester, exams and other pressures from elsewhere in their university experience kept them from making our class a priority. How could we construct a shared experience without people actually being present? How had I gone wrong in employing techniques of power (Gore 1995) to attain such ends in our class alongside the competing realities of our broader context? The consequences of students acting on largely imposed interests over internally-driven ones, in my view, were catastrophic—the solutions to such calamitous conditions far from certain.

Genuine Disappointment and Failure

By the end of the semester, I was genuinely disappointed by what I perceived to be a complete failure to realize my envisioned aim—a constitutional convention of shared decision-making and democratic association in the class. From my view, I had worked steadfastly to treat students as adults—as mature learners capable of entering into, and benefitting from, partnerships of mutual interdependence. I did not believe in precipitating an environment in which limited guidance, structure, and coherence resulted in a free-for-all akin to how I perceived schools like Summerhill (Neill 1992). Instead, I sought to employ a combination of procedural and epistemological authority to develop students' autonomy (Tirri and Puolimatka 2000) within a spirit of mutual responsibility.

When all was said and done, however, I wondered if there was value to providing such momentary freedom within a broader sea of confinement. We had experienced some extraordinary moments throughout the semester where I threw away my class plans for days at a time and went with the energy in the room, using the passion that students exhibited—as though unforeseen bolts of lightning—to generate thoughtful reflection about issues that mattered. Such moments, though, were only fleeting. I was unable, overnight, to de-socialize (Shor 1992) students from how they had learned to operate in classes while also socializing them to a different reality—certainly not to the extent I had imagined possible. We were collectively imprisoned by the broader context of authoritarian practices. Not even the grand boldness of my experiment could sufficiently match the overwhelming forces bearing down on students' lives beyond our classroom walls. My efforts to open a new frontier of interpersonal and inquiry-based possibilities were disappointingly dashed by the pedagogical realities both within and outside the university—effectively undermining our on-going negotiations as a result.

Complete Letdown

My overall assessment of the experience was one of complete letdown. Not because of what transpired in the course itself, but because of what the experience suggested was not happening in the teacher education profession more broadly. As a graduate student at the time, it bothered me that several of my own teacher educators who were most vocal about advocating democratic practices were in fact amongst the least democratic in actual practice. From firsthand experience in their classrooms, I saw how some were just as dogmatic as authoritarian educators—just preaching a radically different message of social justice and equity but struggling to enact it. As a beginning teacher educator, I wanted to help students to actually *experience* democratic practices. A "language of possibility" (Giroux 1992), "transgressions" (Hooks 1994) of political perspective alone, and swinging between pedagogical extremes of abdicating and dictating with only fleeting moments of negotiating in a democratic fashion (Brubaker 2009), in my mind, were not enough.

Moving beyond indoctrination to dialogue required more than tinkering around the edges of traditional teaching. Doing so would not be easy, in my view, but was necessary. My initial efforts to become a democratic teacher educator brought me face-to-face with the fact that the students in my class, through their experiences at the university and beyond, had been seldom provided opportunities to have genuine input into their learning. They had grown all too accustomed to their teachers and teacher educators providing unilateral experiences in which students were silenced—where they worked from the assumption that teachers were all-knowing experts and students knew nothing. Such a reality presented a far more substantial challenge to my pedagogy than I was prepared to overcome at the time. It nevertheless framed the central concern with which I would be forced to wrestle in future experiences to have any hope of helping to construct a different reality with prospective teachers.

Overall, while such themes were particularly pronounced in my first semester of becoming a teacher educator, they have been evident to some extent in each of my efforts to enact more democratic practices in teacher education settings. I have consistently, for example, exhibited surprise over the extent to which students find it difficult to challenge their beliefs (Brubaker 2014) and imagine alternatives to conventional grading practices (Brubaker 2010). The process of jointly constructing the course curriculum (Brubaker 2012c) has presented a source of unexpected disaster, while genuine disappointment and failure have ensued from efforts to help students think for themselves and introduce matters of personal relevance (Brubaker 2013) to their individual and shared learning. Needing to continually adjust my practices to the prevailing context of conventional teaching (Brubaker 2012a) has likewise presented a source of complete letdown.

Satisfaction

Embedded in such challenges—indeed, made possible by them—have nevertheless been multiple triumphs from which I have gained considerable satisfaction. As a teacher educator, I have continued to gain satisfaction from demonstrating congruence with my personal, pedagogical, and professional beliefs (Brubaker 2010, 2012b) while building bridges across differences (Brubaker 2012a, 2014) and exhibiting boldness and courage in countering the prevailing tides of authoritarian teaching (Brubaker 2012c, 2013). Such experiences have helped me more clearly comprehend the extent to which prospective teachers desperately need additional guidance beyond what they are currently receiving—far more—to actualize participatory ideals. Maintaining my commitment to providing such assistance, regardless of the perceived difficulty of the task, has been a central hallmark of my on-going quest towards becoming a democratic teacher educator. Deriving satisfaction from such persistence and action may not outweigh the inherent obstacles to creating democratic classrooms, but nor should they be entirely overshadowed by them. Collectively, they help comprise the complexity of enacting a more democratic pedagogy of teacher education.

Contributions to Teacher Education

Transitioning as a teacher educator across a range of institutional and cultural settings throughout my career has invoked continued challenges to my pedagogical identity. Whether navigating political complexity in transitioning between rural and urban environments (Brubaker 2015), confronting regional assumptions concerning religion and gender in traversing liberal and conservative political contexts (Brubaker 2014), or questioning educational priorities and standards in transitioning across northern- and southern-hemisphere nations (Williams et al. 2014), the contrasts I have experienced have been significant. While my journey towards becoming a democratic teacher educator has represented, for me, a process of pushing the boundaries of conventional pedagogy, daring to be different, and attempting to prepare future teachers to teach with similar commitments in their own classrooms, others can benefit from insights presented in this chapter into the challenges of acting on one's pedagogical vision, balancing ideals with institutional and cultural constraints (Sweet 1998), and envisioning possible selves (Beauchamp and Thomas 2010) of relevance to their own future practice.

Clarity of pedagogical vision, I have found from my experience of pedagogical transformation, is of utmost importance to becoming a democratic teacher educator. Consciously shaping my pedagogical vision to include a social order in which people are empowered to act on their own and others' behalf has required being mindful of not just my own past experiences in teacher education, but the full breadth of experiences informing my pedagogical practices. As I have previously concluded, it is "the on-going process of conflict and compromise between who I was, who I had become, and who I aspired to be—relative to my students' experiences" (Brubaker 2012a, pp. 11–12) that has represented the primary phenomenon of significance in my quest for classroom democracy. Without clarity concerning my past experiences as a student, teacher, and teacher educator—and from life more broadly—as they have informed my particular vision of democratic teaching, I believe it would have been difficult—if not impossible—to sustain the conviction, courage, and strength of character necessary to teach democratically. Discerning the inner contours (Palmer 2011) of one's pedagogical journey is central to actualizing civic ideals in one's teaching.

Balancing democratic ideals with institutional and cultural constraints, I have found, is also central to teaching democratically as a teacher educator. Doing so is difficult, demanding, and delicate work, since authentically involving others' input in their learning not only reduces the predictability of such learning, but magnifies its complexity. Like walking a tightrope, the margin of error narrows. One slip in reconstructing authority and the consequences can be devastating. As I have previously established, such teaching is "clearly situated in opposition to the prevailing tides of educational practice" (Brubaker 2012c, p. 16). Few teacher candidates have been equipped from firsthand experience in schools or universities to partake in deliberative decision-making concerning issues affecting their lives (Brubaker 2012a, b, 2013). Consequently, such work is often experienced as both highly unique, original, and yet contrary—perhaps even somewhat threatening—to commonly accepted pedagogical norms. As a democratic teacher educator, I have had to learn to be comfortable continually blazing new terrain—not allowing myself to be stifled by pedagogical solitude. With the ethical use of power (Noblit 1993) comes enormous possibility but also danger. Attaining balance through compromise, when necessary, concerning one's pedagogical purposes and trajectory is key for sustaining such aims in the face of relentless pressures and obstacles (Brubaker 2012a).

The process of envisioning possible selves—ideas of what one might become, would like to become, and is afraid of becoming (Markus and Nurius 1986)—has likewise been central to my journey of becoming a democratic teacher educator. Such ideas have defined the selves I have sought to approach as well as avoid; as such, they have functioned as incentives for future behavior. My journey towards becoming a democratic teacher educator has involved a complicated blend of desired and feared selves—the embodiment of which has been unique to my own circumstances yet which has relevance to others interested in undertaking similar journeys. My own journey towards becoming a democratic teacher educator has consisted of a dual transition: away from authoritarian practice, and towards dialogue. Having attained neither, yet aspiring to both, I am driven to make sure others' teacher education experiences are not marred by the same pedagogical maladies that limited me in my own undergraduate years. Simultaneously, I am motivated to precipitate and enact powerful learning experiences for myself and others that, from firsthand experience in university classrooms as both a student and teacher educator, I have learned are not only necessary and desirable, but possible—with the potential to transform our collective sense of selves as both teachers and citizens.

As a teacher educator, I accept the responsibility of engaging prospective teachers in actual democratic practices (Rainer and Guyton 1999), where students' voices count and where constant vigilance is exercised (Colin and Heaney 2001). Doing so is particularly daunting in light of the resurging prevalence of transmission-based pedagogies defining our contemporary age. Becoming a democratic teacher educator, for me, has nevertheless provided an opportunity to actualize pedagogical transformation and learn to inhabit the world differently. By challenging prevailing assumptions, expanding my pedagogical possibilities, and courageously constructing pedagogical identities congruent with democratic aims, a new horizon has appeared—a landscape of pedagogical possibility from which I could neither imagine nor desire returning. As an expression of some dawning power—a "flickering light"—bound up in future possibilities that cannot be predetermined (Dewey 1966, p. 125), my narrative of experience (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) illuminates a particular path towards teaching teachers in an increasingly uncertain era as teacher educators. When others' paths are likewise illuminated, we could well be on our way to improved professional prospects in a society increasingly desperate for democracy. May such work, collectively, proceed without delay—an engaged citizenry depends on it.

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