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Teacher Education As Democratic Public Sphere

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Neil Hooley
Victoria University

Revolution is a critical process, unreliable without science and reflection. In the midst of reflective action on the world to be transformed, the people come to recognise that the world is indeed being transformed (Paulo Freire, 1972, p. 74).

Abstract

Being a proficient and professional teacher in Australia and similar countries is one of the most difficult and complex occupations imaginable. All teachers are confronted with carefully analysing the mix of socio-economic and cultural factors that present and design appropriate learning strategies that engage all students. Within this context, the following essay considers the purpose and structure of initial teacher preparation and possible changes to more traditional arrangements. It advocates a new type of school-university partnership where reflective cycles of practice-theory establish a close relationship with knowledge for all participants and where personal practice is the necessary condition of learning. Schools and classrooms are theorised as democratic public spheres where participants pursue understanding of serious issues for equity and the public good. Implications of partnership and public sphere for a new form of educational practice are discussed.

Teacher education in Australia

As one of the world's most wealthy countries, Australia is making progress towards a situation where it is expected that most young people will complete thirteen years of schooling. While it is generally the case that primary schools are seen as places of broad language development, a settlement has not been reached on the purpose of a mass system of secondary schooling. With a retention rate of approximately 75 percent to the final year, it is still not clear whether secondary schools are mainly concerned with

preparation for employment, or preparation for university. There appears to be increasing fragmentation of the curriculum between academic and vocational pathways and the notion of a broad, liberal education in the Deweyan sense, for all young people regardless of socio-economic background, does not feature strongly in the debate.

Initial teacher preparation is the responsibility of universities involving four years of discipline and educational studies. Most states require registration from a regulatory authority before employment can proceed (see for example, VIT, 2006). Schools in Australia are the responsibility of state governments and curriculum is generally guided in terms of broad policy directions and supportive framework documents. Teachers work within the policy of their school and exercise professional judgement in the specific detail of curriculum and teaching. Currently within Australia, the curriculum framework for both primary and secondary schools often consists of eight Key Learning Areas (KLAs), although a number of states are now moving to more open and flexible arrangements. University programs for pre-service teachers therefore need to ensure that graduates are familiar with a range of approaches to curriculum design and are adaptable when organising their teaching to meet the learning needs of their students.

The years immediately following World War II saw a rapid expansion of secondary schooling in Australia as an essential aspect of post-war reconstruction. The 1960s and 1970s were characterised by a move away from a set syllabus towards 'school-based curriculum development' and greater autonomy for classroom teachers. Since the mid-1980s however, a tension has arisen between the professional rights of teachers to determine the teaching and learning program for their students and more conservative political trends to centralise curriculum imperatives. This reflects a general economic situation that focuses on budget efficiencies and strident criticism of public sector institutions. Accordingly, graduating teachers often find themselves in difficult circumstances, where they need to grapple with a complicated maelstrom of political, educational and cultural factors in their schools and classrooms that may have been difficult to completely identify and analyse during their preparation. The nature of the practicum then takes on increasing significance.

In the state of Victoria, pre-service teachers are required for registration purposes to complete 80 days of school experience over their four-year Bachelor of Education degree. This generally means participation in different classrooms each day while at school and the planning and teaching of one lesson per day. Universities pay each teacher a small allowance for the mentoring of pre-service teachers that, over the course of a year, amounts to a considerable proportion of a faculty's budget. While most universities attempt to have lecturers visit all pre-service teachers when on placement, the pressures on time and budget means that this does not always occur. For these reasons, the question of the practicum in terms of extent, funding and support has been somewhat problematic for many years. For example, a review of initial teacher preparation conducted for the Parliament of Victoria (Victoria, 2005, p. xxii) commented in the following terms:

> The teaching practicum was a key area of contention throughout the inquiry, with the overwhelming majority of stakeholders believing that that the current time spent in practicum, as well as the quality of the experience, is largely inadequate. Many called for teaching practice to represent at least 25 percent of pre-service teacher education, with some suggesting a 50 percent split between university classes and school-based training.

Consideration of practicum arrangements in this way is really demonstrating that a consensus has not as yet been reached on the nature of knowledge, let alone the purpose of schools and the role of teachers within them. At the core of this debate is the relationship between human social practice and how we theorise that practice, perhaps the main problem that schools have yet to resolve. If we accept that knowledge is known and set, then it can quite easily be passed on from expert to novice. Conversely, if we view knowledge as evolving through collaborative endeavour, then the development of personal understanding over time becomes more appropriate. Both tendencies are of course seen in schools and curriculum, with the latter view being in the minority. If schools reflect the society in which they are located, then Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) provides an explanation. Under current economic

arrangements, schools merely reproduce the relations of power and privilege, the advantages and disadvantages that exist, in spite of the efforts of many progressive educators to change to more equitable systems for all children. How the practicum is conceptualised and organised then has implications for not only the operation of schools, but the social justice fabric of the broader society.

Australian schools have always placed importance on equity, with a watershed report from the Federal Government (Karmel, 1973) attempting to formalise both policy and program considerations including the funding of non-Government schools. Since that time, provision for disadvantaged schools many of which are in lower socio-economic locations, has been constantly debated. At certain periods equity is viewed as being pursued through a common curriculum for all, while at others, the idea that the curriculum should be differentiated between vocational and practical or abstract and academic pathways tends to dominate.

In discussing this question, Teese, (2006, p. 155) comments that 'Equity must include areas of the curriculum of high cognitive demand' and he notes that the changing social and educational conditions have caused many disadvantaged schools to be pushed 'out of the older academic areas and into newer and vocational studies.' These trends show the manner by which those Australian schools that are mainly comprised of disadvantaged or marginalised young people, but which must contend at the same time with a curriculum of cultural reproduction and social power, are continuously buffeted by political pressure and criticism, the changing theorising of educational position, the struggle for resources and the need to establish a robust and productive curriculum. Those who are concerned with pre-service teacher education, arrangements for teachers' work and the learning of school students have a joint interest in pursuing such matters together.

School-university partnerships

In the late 1980s and early 1990s in Australia, a series of Federal Government reports concerned with teacher quality raised a number of issues regarding teacher education

(Dawkins, 1988; Schools Council, 1990; NBEET, 1990a). These issues included the quality, structure, length, content and funding of pre-service teacher education. While the reports advocated closer co-operative working arrangements between the main parties involved in teacher education, the concept of 'partnership' although mentioned did not feature strongly. For example, a summary report of major documents (NBEET, 1990b, p. 14) noted that 'any co-operation there is between higher education institutions, employing authorities and the teaching profession in teacher education matters is isolated, cursory and curtailed by a reluctance to relinquish any element of control.' The type of relationship being considered here concerns the co-ordination, decision-making and overall development of teacher education, as distinct from the daily implementation of programs in schools and universities. This is a sensitive issue, given that higher education institutions are autonomous and responsible for running their own programs, schools operate within frameworks of state policy and employing authorities have their own priorities regarding staff planning and recruitment and the development and support of curriculum generally. Registration bodies and professional associations also have a vested interest in any co-operate arrangement.

At this time of the early 1990s, it can be suggested that the concept of partnership in teacher education in Australia was not strongly developed. This remains the case today where multipartite organisations involving schools, universities and employers to oversee the direction of teacher education do not exist. On the other hand, some initiatives have been taken by schools and universities to implement forms of partnership for the conduct of specific pre-service teacher education programs (Cherednichenko et al, 2002). The notion of partnership can be understood in two different ways. First, the coming together of stakeholders to share information and to discuss problems that have emerged such as funding for supervision and the difficulty of finding school placements. Second, how the professional capability of each pre-service teacher can be enhanced to ensure a comprehensive 'readiness to teach' in both practical and theoretical terms. In this latter view, partnerships are established between schools and universities to strengthen the relationship with professional and personal knowledge that enables each graduating

teacher to have an informed and defensible philosophical framework within which to locate their teaching.

In an influential paper, Shulman (1987) identified a number of 'teacher knowledges' that are required for proficient teaching. These included pedagogical, curriculum and educational knowledges and knowledge of learners, context and outcomes. This work indicates that the teacher's role is complicated and does not merely include the passing on of subject content from those who know to those who do not. There is a recognition that the teacher must draw upon a wide range of understandings at any particular time in the classroom when interacting with different students and that a restricted range of teacher awareness will make those interactions weak. A school-university partnership therefore needs to ensure that an agreement exists between the classroom teacher (sometimes called 'mentor' in Australian teacher education) and the pre-service teacher to pursue the varied and interrelated aspects of teachers' knowledge so that a more profound understanding of school student learning occurs. This is an essential detail of partnership, that the purpose of co-operative arrangements between the school and university is to focus on the learning of school students and by so doing, to enhance the professionalism of both mentor teachers and pre-service teachers alike.

At Victoria University, Melbourne (see http://education.vu.edu.au/partnerships) for example, the organising principle of partnership-based teacher education is that of practice. In grappling with the problem of how to integrate practice and theory and to overcome the traditional split between theory being covered in the lecture theatre and practical implications being encountered in the school classroom, it has been decided that an integrated social and educational practice is the starting point for each pre-service teacher. This does not exclude theoretical ideas of course, but means that pre-service teachers spend as much time in the classroom as possible and use this personal experience as the basis for reflection both at school and at university. This approach is called learning from 'authentic' environments and involves a continuity of experience, the acceptance of responsibility for school student learning and participation in the full life of the school, a range of activities which in total give credibility to the teacher

education program. This concept of practice does not involve merely 'doing' or attempting a superficial 'what works' approach, but encourages an integrated action/reflection/change process where the practitioner learns from the ongoing cyclic experience of thinking/doing and collaborates with others in the development of meaning.

Explicitly bringing practice and theorising together in this way is a difficult task for all concerned and cannot be assumed to happen elsewhere. For instance, in a review of research studies involving teacher preparation, Wilson, Floden and Ferrini-Mundy (2002, p. 196) found that the research base is not strong. They did suggest that the manner in which co-operating teachers work with novice teachers varies ranging across an emphasis on subject matter, the maxims of teaching and 'socialising student teachers into the status quo of schools or into the co-operating teacher's own practices.' They went on to comment that the role of co-operating teachers may also include the 'enabling of innovation and independence.' In extending this latter theme particularly around the issue of diversity, Nieto (2000, p. 186) makes a strong case that teacher education has 'a critical role to play in pushing the agenda for social justice and equity in our nation's schools.' Initial teacher education programs at Victoria University do attempt to 'enable innovation and independence' as well. Consequently they do not involve 'foundation' studies in educational philosophy, psychology, sociology and the like, but rely on important ideas and themes from these fields being integrated when appropriate and when significant issues are confronted by the pre-service teacher.

This principle demands a close relationship between school and university so that dilemmas that are encountered at school have a mechanism for being raised at the university and that there is always a determination to introduce broader ideas from outside the group to inform and challenge. In this way, teacher education is not dominated by external grand theory, but involves the personal theorising of practitioners in relation to the understandings and guidance of others. This process of personal theorising to guide practitioner action needs to be supported by how teacher education is structured such as the role of lecturers in introducing theoretical ideas, the use of formal literature and the incorporation of electronic forms of professional discourse. In addition,

account must be taken of the capacity to have all pre-service teachers visited on a regular basis when at school, the organisation of meetings of school clusters and partnership teams for the discussion of problems and ideas and the nature of formal assessment requirements at the university.

More recently at Victoria University, the idea of praxis inquiry has been raised as a means of taking partnership-based teacher education to a deeper level. While praxis inquiry continues an emphasis on the concentrated reflection on and in practice, there is a set of subsequent questions involving how reflection proceeds and reflection on what? A process has been developed to aid reflection that involves descriptions by pre-service teachers of their school and classroom practice and other written thoughts regarding how such practice can be interpreted, theorised and changed. Over the past decade, case and commentary writing has been successfully used to assist pre-service teachers in their writing and descriptions (Cherednichenko et al, 1998).

In terms of the Shulman knowledges mentioned above, reflection can be directed at one, a combination thereof, or attempt to reveal overarching epistemological and ontological questions. These may involve questions such as 'Can all students learn?', 'Why is democratic curriculum important?', 'Do children from lower socio-economic backgrounds see the world differently?' These matters are reflected in the way that classrooms are organised, the interactions that occur between teacher and student and how different children approach different subject content. Without an evolving and informed philosophical view however it is very difficult for any teacher, let alone a pre-service teacher, to arrange their teaching programs to meet the diverse learning needs of all children in a particular class.

The notion of praxis inquiry being developed here builds on the advice of Paulo Freire (1972). In his concern for ordinary people living under oppressive conditions, Freire proposed that it is possible for people to move through various phases of human consciousness. These phases included the intransitive, semitransitive, discursive and critical and involved a different relationship with knowledge as the social conditions

altered. In very oppressive circumstances for example, it is difficult to establish anything other than a direct relationship with experience and to be concerned in your thinking and action with matters other than survival. As conditions change perhaps even slightly, the opportunity is provided for a new relationship with knowledge, one that prises open the door of possibility. Eventually, a radical change may occur where the oppressors are overthrown, radical new conditions are instituted and through new daily activity and practice, new thoughts emerge.

Freire conceived this process occurring on a national scale where the practice, theory and change cycles of life, or praxis. Here, the tensions and contradictions that exist between the experience and encounters that constitute reality for the citizens and the procedures, regulations and power structures that are enforced by those in control. We thus have praxis at an individual and social level that lead to breakthroughs in understandings and learning for everyone. Such conditions exist in classrooms as teachers, pre-service teachers and school students attempt to negotiate and reach settlements on how to construct and reconstruct their mutual experiential and learning environments.

Partnership-based teacher education can have profound implications for equity and democratic epistemology. In setting up serious and respectful relationships of practice between all participants, the partnership can pursue knowledge in such a way that intellectual chains can be cast aside and new vistas of learning encountered. This is of particular importance when working with students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and other groups marginalised by prevailing structures of power and privilege. The partnership is not directed at merely reproducing current curriculum forms and outcomes directed from outside the school and schooling systems, but is concerned to establish legitimate communities of practice that seek to wrest control for their mutual interest. For Freire, this establishes a critical relationship with knowledge and the capacity to innovate and change the world for more democratic and compassionate intent.

Educational public spheres

According to the German social scientist Jurgen Habermas (1992), there exists in society forms of democratic association where citizens meet and discuss issues of community importance. These associations are not recognised as formal decision-making structures in the sense of parliaments or local governments, but provide avenues for the development of informed and reasoned opinion amongst the general population. It may be of course, that such association does not agree with the decisions of formal bodies and in some circumstances, encourages debate that might otherwise be difficult or illegal. Habermas spoke of the coffee houses of London and Paris of the 1600s as places where such democratic conversations could occur. Today, in countries like Australia, we could point towards trade unions, local neighbourhood groups, environmental organsiations, women's groups and schools and universities as being emblematic of public spheres. In this regard, Eriksen and Weigard (2003, p. 179) note that 'The term public sphere signifies that equal citizens assemble into a public and set their own agenda through open communication. What characterises this public sphere is that it is power free, secular and rational.'

In her analysis of the approach adopted by Habermas, Fraser (1992) raised issues of power and exclusion within the public sphere. She expressed concern regarding the place of women and suggested a number of public spheres that could be formed by marginalised groups. In this way, repressed and disadvantaged people could establish their own discourses as a counter to the dominant discourses in society. The question here is whether the view of Habermas is outdated and should be discarded, or whether it offers a useful model for adaptation as an avenue into participatory political life. It may be difficult to distinguish roles and identities when participating in a trade union meeting for example where power and ideological relations exist as compared with more informal gatherings that are held to discuss the issues underpinning the political decisions that must be made.

As Kemmis (2001, p. 24) explains: 'There is not just one public sphere, except in abstract terms; in reality there are many public spheres, constituted as *networks of communication*.' Accordingly, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, pp. 584-591) have taken

the notion of public sphere and have appreciated its significance for education. Following Habermas, they describe public spheres as having the following ten characteristics:

* Constituted as actual networks of communication among actual participants.
* Self-constituted, relatively autonomous and voluntary.
* Exist in response to legitimation deficits within current social practices.
* Constituted for communicative action and public discourse.
* Aim to be inclusive.
* Involve communication in ordinary language.
* Presuppose communicative freedom.
* Communicative power is generated through respect of participants.
* Indirect impact on public systems.
* Arise in association with social networks.

These characteristics encompass the issues raised above for partnership-based teacher education and seem to constitute a means by which pre-service teachers can locate their work in the broader public domain. It is particularly germane to note the emphasis on language and communication (a point made by Bruner above in relation to narrative), non-coercive dialogue and the independence and autonomy of general operation. Conceptualising the work of pre-service teachers as taking place within a public sphere also means that the issues confronted within classrooms or schools are intimately linked to the broader social trends that surround education. These school issues cannot be isolated from the broader society as a whole or be resolved in a manner disconnected from the socio-economic environment. In a more formal sense, the public sphere consists of a number of discourses that enable communication to be grounded in an informed baseline of experience and to arrive at viewpoints that are defensible and realistic. The types of discourses that one would encounter in an educational public sphere are shown below.

Figure 1. Educational public sphere

Socio-political Discourse

Legal Discourse   Narrative, Scientific Discourse

Epistemological, Ontological Discourse

Moral, Democratic Discourse

Practice, Reflection Discourse

These discourses may not be found in all teacher education programs, or be found systematically and in total. While it is not the purpose of a public sphere to reach definite conclusions on specific issues, it is the purpose to generate new ideas that are then available for implementation elsewhere. In Habermasian terms, this could be seen as communicative action informing strategic action (Habermas, 1984). Such ideas need to arise from interaction with social and educational reality and therefore will need to engage the range of discourses that make up social practice. Whether or not it is the public sphere that will spawn new conceptions, or whether this will occur in the heated crucible and contradictions of society that are then returned to the public sphere, may be a moot point for teachers. What is of significance under this model is that teachers have a theoretical construct of their work that links daily classroom tension and energy with the broader social realm so that the development of their teaching strategies occurs in a dialectical relationship with the socio-cultural basis of childrens' lives.

What are the practical implications of this notion of public sphere for the organisation of partnership-based teacher education? There appear to be five main and difficult considerations as outlined below:

1. In establishing a school-university partnership, doing and thinking are not separated from each other, but are combined at all times regardless of location.
2. The personal practice of educational work is seen as the driving force of teaching and learning.
3. Both logical-scientific and narrative forms of knowing are combined for pre-service teachers and for school students.
4. Engagement with the discourses of practice is systematically undertaken especially to link internal school issues with external socio-economic trends.
5. Formal course requirements and assessment procedures are democratic for all pre-service teachers.

This proposal will be difficult to achieve within university programs. Taken together however they begin to open up the possibility of new approaches to will formation and professional identity of teachers. There is a view of working with integrated, holistic knowledge rather than the often disjointed segments that schools provide. The life experiences and cultural practices of participants are privileged, not to the exclusion of the different understandings of others, but certainly to the extent that the key role of teaching becomes the seeking of connections between personal background and school knowledge. The process of teaching and learning involves both logical-scientific and narrative so that all children have appropriate avenues into knowledge and become serious epistemologists in their own right.

Ensuring that all discourses of the educational public sphere inform communication and challenge pre-existing ideas means that views that are stimulated and nurtured have a realistic chance of engaging social and educational reality for progress and improvement. Initial teacher preparation in recognising this new environment, will need to ensure that methods of assessment do not undermine the notions of democratic and communicative learning. Instead assessment should enable the new teacher to demonstrate learning in a variety of ways that do not demand judgements on ideological truth, educational and social, but allow progress on the investigation of key concepts and practices to be displayed, discussed and critiqued.

Pre-service teacher education conceived as public sphere encourages pre-service teachers, mentor teachers in schools and teacher educators to begin to reform the practice of teaching and indeed the role of schools themselves. It also suggests a new form of teachers' knowledge and teacher theorising in terms of the evidence that is used to inform and ground teachers' work. Donald Shon (1983) in describing the idea of 'reflection on practice' and 'reflection in practice' was supporting a debate as to whether teachers only think about their work after class, or whether this occurs during class as well. Here again, the split between doing and thinking, or action and reflection is being questioned, so that the integrity of learning for both teachers and school students is validated. That is, some practitioners including children do not act only, while others do not think only, but the work of practitioners is considered to be a rich integrated experience involving informed practice and a practical understanding. Again, as mentioned previously, this provides another basis for the recognition of all children regardless of prior experience and culture and the breadth of experience, perception and understanding that they bring to school.

Teacher education of a new type

Goodlad (1994) outlined the basis of school-university partnerships and the formation of professional development schools. He suggested that such arrangements enable a university and school districts to collaborate on matters of mutual interest. There is also opportunity for 'modelling new practices and immersing prospective teachers in them.' (p. 115) Goodlad recognised that it was perhaps too optimistic to expect the one school to engage in research, innovation, teacher education and demonstration to visitors as well as be excellent in teaching. He therefore proposed one type of professional development school that pursued innovative practice and another that concentrated on teacher education. In his survey of school-university partnerships in Australia, Brady (2002) found strong support for such activity and the possibility of extending past traditional practicum models. Cherednichenko and Kruger (2003) also proposed an inquiry pedagogy for partnership-based teacher education through the development of a protocol

for praxis inquiry that attempted to relocate emphasis from university knowledge to the knowledge of practice being constructed by pre-service teachers in schools.

There is scope therefore to continue the work of school-university partnerships in Australia already underway to encourage teacher education of a new type, teacher education that focuses on educational practice as the basis for establishing new relationships with knowledge and new equitable frameworks for learning. Restructuring and reconceptualisng teacher education is urgent and high stakes for families and communities. According to the Australian Council of Deans of Education (2004, p.55):

> For all the talk of democracy and equality, opportunity is inherited - in the form of the wealth you are born into, the place you are born, or the colour of your skin or ethnic background. Education however is the main thing which differentiates democracy from the world of kings and subjects, lords and serfs, masters and slaves, men and women. If you are born into poverty, or on the wrong side of town, or of the wrong racial or ethnic group, you still have a chance and this chance comes from doing well at school.

To begin to put into place the conditions that may maximise this chance at life, the practice of teacher education as public sphere could be adopted and framed by the following principles:

1. That school-university partnership arrangements be established between the university and clusters of primary and secondary schools and be known as Professional Development Clusters (PDC).
2. That the essential purpose of each PDC is to create a democratic, language-rich and communicative environment for the pursuit, evaluation, critique and public debate of professional practice and discourse.
3. That within each PDC, pre-service teachers adopt flexible modes of organisation across schools in ensuring that partnership requirements are met over the duration of their pre-service academic programs.

4. That the role of pre-service teachers within each PDC is to experience the full range of activities undertaken by school teachers including interaction with young people, curriculum design and implementation, decision-making procedures, classroom teaching, professional development, practitioner research and educational administration.

5. That each PDC is governed by a co-ordinating committee comprising school, pre-service and university personnel to plan and conduct professional development, teaching and research activities for all participants, including activities that provide recognition and pathways to university programs for school teachers.

6. That a proportion of classes within pre-service teacher education programs including seminars, workshops, guest speakers and the like be conducted at both PDC and university locations.

It may be the case that several elements of the above framework already exist to one extent or another in teacher education programs. One of the key points of difference however may be the requirement that conceived as public sphere, the Professional Development Clusters explicitly organise in such a way to link their educational concerns with the surrounding cultural and political milieu so that proposals accurately reflect the interests of families and are realistic for community adoption. In similar vein, Loughran (2006, p 174) talks about 'enacting a pedagogy of teacher education' such that:

> Seeking to better understand one's own practices is a natural starting point for better understanding teaching about teaching and to impact on learning about teaching. The knowledge developed through such learning may initially be informing, applicable and useful to one's own practice, but when it creates the need to better articulate and communicate such learning with and for others, a developing pedagogy of teacher education is evident.

In this passage, Loughran connects with one of the key features of a public sphere when he draws attention to the need for the learning and knowledge that arises from practice to 'articulate and communicate' with and for others. No knowledge is an island and that

which evolves from the collective experience is not only grounded collectively, but is available for public utilisation everywhere. Habermas again has something useful to say about the relation between the broad operation of society and the daily lives of citizens. He discusses what he calls the 'social macro-subject' (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 579) as a view of the state (and of organisations) not so much as an all-powerful unified set of regulation and administrative authority, but rather a collection of more independent and autonomous sub-sections that find their own creative expression within state apparatus for a different publicly-oriented purpose. Perhaps Freire had a similar arrangement in mind when he considered how social conditions can alter to form the basis of new equitable practices and ideas, even in the most repressive circumstances. A consideration of teacher education public spheres as located deep within the social macro-subject pursuing social and educational transformation is a conception of civil society that lifts aspiration beyond the narrow and immediate to the democratic and historic.

Viewed in this way, teacher education that is strongly connected with local communities and their knowledge interests through democratic partnership arrangements brings all partners together on serious projects of mutual concern so that the way forward can be charted and implemented. The notion of teacher education as democratic public sphere provides a theoretical frame to guide this work and a reference point for when the journey becomes a little unstable. It ensures that the practice of partnership is undertaken with integrity and that learning outcomes as seen by all participants have rigour and credibility. While large-scale and progressive social change for ordinary families may seem remote at present, such smaller-scale democratic work in local communities could dignify and transform lives in ways that make the impossible imaginable.

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