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Chapter 11

Fighting against the flow in theorizing education

Olli-Pekka Moisiö, Andrea Raiker & Matti Rautiainen

Introduction

This chapter explores the role theory plays in the field of educational research and classroom practice and how conceptions of educational theory can provide insights into the democratic processes at work in English and Finnish teacher education. In the Introduction to this book it was argued that differences in conceptions of educating for democracy would arise because of the differing historical, political, social and economic contexts in the two countries. Discussions in previous chapters have shown that educational practice and approaches to research are not the same in the two countries. By considering the way theorizing education is constructed in England and Finland, we will demonstrate a fundamental epistemological difference focused on conceptions of education as a discipline in its own right, and as an amalgam of facets of contributing disciplines. We will show how these conceptions reflect underlying political ideologies, and their combined impact on teacher education and classroom practice.

‘What is theory?’ is a contentious question. ‘What is theory meant to do?’ invites greater agreement: theory informs research. So, educational theory informs educational research. According to Biesta (2006), educational research is scientific and wide-ranging, based on paradigms and involving a variety of methodological approaches and data collection methods to investigate educational processes and practices. Consequently, there are diverse theories based on ontological positions underpinning educational research. Since the nineteenth century and the advent of mass primary education, a response to the development of Germany as a political and military presence, English education has been regarded as a necessary but subservient discipline serving capitalist and more recently neo-liberalist agendas. It is not surprising, therefore, that education in England is not perceived as a discipline in its own right but as embedded within other disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology, history, sociology and in particular, psychology. Thus, educational theory is taken from, and amalgamated with, theories from the ‘dominant’ disciplines. For example, theories currently in vogue in English research include Engeström’s activity theory (historical/sociological), Kemmis’ ecologies of practice (philosophical/anthropological) and Vygotsky’s social constructivism (psychological). Such a many-faceted approach to theory in education results in complexity and creativity, but also has the potential for conflict and confusion. In contrast, Finnish educational theory is influenced by German ideas and approaches to education. The notion of *Erziehung* underpins educational theorizing which, as developed by Biesta (2006), relates to the current context of education by focusing on the processes and productions involved in the development of the emancipated individual associated with contemporary and future social life. Such a theoretical approach indicates that education is a discipline in its own right and, centred as it is on the individual and his/her relationship to society, suggests a direct connection with ethics and democracy.

This chapter will now discuss theorizing education and democratic process by discussing the relationship between education, theory and democracy in Finland and England, and the influence Calvinistic doctrine has had on the approach to educating for democracy in the two

countries. Finally, the impact of this comparison on democratic practices within teacher and school education will be assessed.

The Finnish perspective

For this discussion on the Finnish perspective on theorizing education, it is essential to use as a theoretical frame the concepts of Max Weber, because Protestantism has had a profound influence on the development of Finnish thought. Despite Western Europe's focus on industry and business, teaching has always been thought of as a calling as well as a profession in Finland. Lutheran Protestantism is regarded as one of the reasons why social and political factors, including theory drawn from the social sciences have had so little impact on teacher education in Finland (Sitomaniemi-San, 2015). The data we are using is varied including official documents concerning education and educational policy, but also empirical data from Finland. We have interviewed professors who worked at the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Jyväskylä when teacher education became academic in Finland (1970s – 1990s).

Finnish teacher education has been called 'research-based' since the late 1970s when the Finnish education system, including teacher education, was undergoing substantial reform. Of significance to this discussion were changes to teacher qualifications. All prospective teachers had to attain Masters' degrees. This was considered to be radical, particularly for primary school teachers. Also subject teacher education, which included a pedagogical studies element of what is currently measured as 60 ECTS, was transferred to departments of teacher education.

Was there also a significant change concerning the theorizing of teacher education? Yes and no. Masters' degrees in education have strong theoretical bases and include students' own research; the former required qualification for teacher education, the bachelor's degree, did not. This is not to say that there was no research in teacher education before the 1970s. From the early days of teacher education in colleges (the first such college being established at Jyväskylä in 1863), some lecturers carried out research even if it was not part of their working plans. Their focus was on didactics and educational psychology, which remain important and popular areas for research in Finnish education. However, impetus for educational research was given in 1934 through the foundation of the first college for educational sciences in Jyväskylä. This not only improved the output of research in education throughout Finnish colleges of education; Jyväskylä became the centre for Finnish educational research and today the Finnish Institute for Research in Education is situated on the campus of the University of Jyväskylä (Valtonen & Rautiainen, 2013.) Increased emphasis on educational research resulted in many philosophers being drawn to contribute to discussions concerning educational philosophy, for example, Professors Erik Ahlman, J. A. Hollo J. E. Salomaa and Reijo Wilenius. The Finnish philosopher Johan Wilhelm Snellman, who was also for a short period a professor of pedagogy at the University of Helsinki in the 1850s, emphasized the importance of the relationship between practice and theory. His idea was to combine subject teacher training with the professorial teaching of pedagogy in training schools (*normaalilyseo*). He also thought universities should control and train teachers in the *normaalilyseo* (see for example Heinonen, 1987). It could be assumed that from such a positive starting points, teachers' theoretical understanding and identity as 'teachers as researchers' should be strong, but according to studies, it is not. New teachers do not recognize theoretic knowledge and understanding to be useful in their everyday work (Rautpuro et al, 2011).

Snellman's ideas were never realised. Teacher education developed in a practical direction; theoretical studies were separated from training. In the late 1970s, as part of the new academic teacher education resulting from the reforms outlined above, Snellman's ideas were resurrected as providing sound principles on which to base the new conception of teacher education. However interaction between theory and practice remained tenuous. Why? According to professors working currently at the University of Jyväskylä, the main reason was tension between the new conception and tradition. The majority of teacher educators and students were against the reforms. According to them, the profession of teaching was practically, not academically based. They did not resist the inclusion of theory in teacher education courses; on the contrary theories on learning, didactics and educational psychology were respected. Despite this, there was no understanding that their own research and methodological studies could have significant roles in their studies to become teachers.

The model of academic teacher education, which was mostly copied from other social sciences, was also problematic. Methodological studies stressed quantitative methods, and students' research projects were often far removed from the everyday work of teachers. Research groups studying the development of schools and teacher education were rare. Qualitative methods did not become accepted until the 1990s. Also attitudes towards research in authentic environments were unusual in teacher education.

These problems were well known among teacher educators and other stakeholders as they remained into the early 2000s (Opettajankoulutus 2020, 2009). On the other hand, alternative teacher education programs were established. There were new experimental groups at the Universities of Helsinki and Jyväskylä, groups that had strong theoretical bases behind their programmes. Educational psychology was an experiment started in Helsinki as part of the prospective teacher education programme. It was based on constructivism and was developed together with students, an approach which was considered to be radical (<http://blogs.helsinki.fi/educationalpsychology/>). An innovative programme called critical integrative teacher education (CITE) was begun at Jyväskylä in 2003. In this programme, psychodynamic theories and learner's experiences are used as starting points to underpin the learning processes involved in teacher education (<https://www.jyu.fi/edu/laitokset/okl/integraatio/en>).

At the same time critical pedagogy challenged teacher education from a different perspective. Finnish teacher education has always been based on psychological and didactical theories; content from the social sciences was rare. It might be argued that critical pedagogy in Finland, and maybe in the world in general, is in theoretical, methodological and practical senses 'a book to be written' (Suoranta & Moision, 2010). In 2001 Tapio Aittola and Juha Suoranta edited in Finnish a book which contained texts from the work of Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was released in Finnish in 2005, and bell hooks' selected writings followed in 2007. It has been noted that, during the last two decades, many doctoral dissertations and other studies have found their theoretic structures from the field of critical pedagogy (see for example Hannula, 2001; FitzSimmons, 2004; Saurén, 2008; Bedford, 2009; Moision, 2009).

Currently the relationship between teacher education and theory is in flux. On the one hand is the classic Finnish ideal of the teacher established by Uno Cygnaeus, the founder of the teacher education movement. This approach does not construct teachers' professionalism around theories but on cultural beliefs and assumptions of what a teacher should be. On the

other hand, there are teacher educators and students who are interested in developing teacher education through a range of projects, which are not only adapting theories but also creating them. In a sense this might be seen to be a venture towards what Zygmunt Bauman (2000:204) meant when he wrote about sociology as ‘...a third current, running in parallel with those [history and poetry] two. Or at least this is what it should be if it is to stay inside that human condition which it tries to grasp and make intelligible’. Theorizing, in education especially, is a way to search for possibilities to understand the human condition, be it in a learning environment or as life in general, from the inside.

The changes and processes described above are important from the viewpoint of democracy. Education has been traditionally constructed from top to bottom; the new experimentation in education is changing the direction of influence, coming from bottom to up. This direction is especially strong at the Department of Education at the University of Jyväskylä, which is the only teacher education unit in Finland which has phenomenon-based curriculum both in primary and secondary teacher education. According to the new curriculum, phenomena should be studied from a multidisciplinary perspective (from the points of view of history, philosophy, psychology and sociology), not by separate courses based on each discipline like earlier. In this new curriculum, the understanding of theory is also in a process of change towards the experiential, where research carried out by the students can be seen as ‘ending at the colon’, that is, an open ending process. As in life, student research needs to have a certain amount of mystery so that, to paraphrase C. Wright Mills, the “educational imagination” can be ignited.

Is there any place for theories concerning democracy and education for democracy in teacher education? Compared with earlier times, the content of ‘democracy’ has grown during the last decade. At the same time, the operational culture of departments of teacher education have become more democratic. However, students are still mostly on their own if they want to develop their own understanding of democracy and education for democracy (Rautiainen et al, 2014). The biggest difference compared with earlier times is that students have possibilities to develop and study theories from their own interests and needs, and develop new and in a sense more authentic questions and insights from their own encounters with theories and experiences in the learning process.

The English Perspective

In order to understand the concept of theorizing education and its relationship with democratic practice in the English context, it is necessary to provide, albeit briefly, essential historic and political background so that the cultural underpinnings to the argument are clear. As was outlined in the Introduction to this volume, notions of democracy in England are deep-rooted; they can be traced back to the Anglo-Saxon era (410-1066) and their legal system which formalised the relationship between ‘folkright’ and privilege. Folkright is the accumulation of shared, debated and voted ways of behaving, articulated and overseen by the local communities themselves in association with the shire moots, the assemblies or courts controlling larger administrative areas. Although the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the feudal organisation of society it imposed dispensed with folkright both as a word and in practice, the fundamental societal concept that ‘folkright’ signified in the everyday life of the people remained, eventually to re-emerge during the next century as ‘common law’, aspects of which survive in English legislation to this day. Consequently the democratic processes centered on the right of ordinary people to debate issues governing the relationship between individuals and society with a show of hands to signify the outcome is deeply embedded in

English culture. This right is in conflict with the dominant neo-liberalist ideology, a legacy of Empire that reflects the beliefs and interests of the socially elite governing class. The aim of this elite class is to create wealth so that the standard of living of the populace improves whilst at the same time the elite's position in society is maintained. The purpose of education is thus to produce more effective workers to improve the country's global competitiveness and hence wealth, whilst at the same time keeping them in their relative social position. Consequently, the role of educators is to legitimize and propagate the existing cultural hegemony, and the role of education policymakers is to create rules and processes to ensure educators' compliance.

It is to be expected that knowledge and understanding of the theory of education is neither prized highly by education policymakers nor emphasized in teacher training courses; they are not. The word used to describe a student teacher in England, 'trainee', supports this. Students who are teachers attending Masters' courses in education generally have little knowledge and understanding of theory. The reason is, arguably, that policymakers in the Department for Education believe that engagement with theory might encourage critical thinking and the undermining of compliance. As argued above, English educators have within them, to varying degrees the heritage of folkright, of grassroots participation in determining the acceptable behaviours that direct everyday life. They also have within them the legacy of humanism, a philosophy that focuses on individual endeavour for the public good. It might be expected that teacher educators would press to have theory recognized as necessary and equal to practice, and essential for teacher professionalism and individual personal development. But professionalism has been eroded as effectively as the managerialism of education has been established. Today learning is outcomes based, teachers teach to meet SMART targets, and career progression is tied to performance management procedures.

However, from the start of the de-professionalism process initiated by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, English educational thinkers were proposing ways that teachers could maintain and develop their professionalism themselves at grassroots levels. For example, Lawrence Stenhouse (1981) proposed that teachers should engage in action research to take back control. He believed that it was not politicians but '... teachers who in the end will change the world of the school by understanding it' (Stenhouse, 1981:46); that developing professionalism involved being active by studying the work of teaching and researching it oneself, not passively leaving it to others. He was convinced that involvement in research would restore in teachers a sense of democratic professionalism and power in the sense of teachers having a voice. His work was taken up in the 1990s by the renowned British educationalist Professor David Hargreaves. He criticised the quality of educational research produced by academics in universities at the time for what he saw as its lack of rigour. 'One alternative...' he wrote, '...is to treat practitioners themselves as the main (but not only) source for creation of professional knowledge' (Hargreaves, 1999:125). Stenhouse, Hargreaves and others said that teachers should be the subjects and the users of educational research- that is, for their own and their schools' development- and to generate educational knowledge and theory on teaching and learning for a wider, public audience. This provoked debate and tension. Should teachers be engaged with research and theory for self-improvement, to put political agendas into practice, for school improvement or to generate educational knowledge and theory on teaching and learning for a wider public audience? As theory informs research and this book is concerned with educating for democracy, a further question could be asked: what theories should be advocated to promote and research educating for democracy? As theory is time and context specific, it appears that theories

should be in the process of being created by teachers acting as researchers to reflect 21st century issues and interests.

Some years ago Carr & Kemmis (1986:221), in their work integrating Habermas' conceptions of communicative action with teacher education, proposed that teachers could '...organise themselves as communities of enquirers, organising their own enlightenment.' Enlightenment involves insight, the result of personal and purposeful critical reflection and evaluation. In another volume, we argue that insight in higher education involves growing awareness and understanding of the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of pedagogy (Raiker, 2012). At first glance, this appears to resonate with the definition of professional development given by the Department of Education's Teaching Agency (TA):

Professional development consists of reflective activity designed to improve an individual's attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills. It supports individual needs and improves professional practice (TA, 2012 online).

However, 'reflective activity' takes place in an education system controlled by government through imposed standards, inspection and competition stimulated by the publication of league tables. The outcome is that higher education courses for teachers, focused on improving their professional practice through 'reflective activity', become aligned with and conform to government neo-liberalist ideology. Being a government agency, the TA's role is to encourage improvement through conformity. This does not resonate with improvement construed as the deepening of personal insight into the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of pedagogy, which are the bases of understanding and creating theory. Indeed, the TA's definition of professional development does not even include the terms 'pedagogy' or 'theory'. A conclusion can be drawn that the TA does not consider knowledge, understanding and creation of theory as important in improving practice. Because of this approach, the one year postgraduate course that prospective secondary school teachers undertake to achieve Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) contains little theory. This top-down repression contrasts with the bottom-up investigations taking place in Finnish teacher education.

Consequently, we were inspired to research Carr and Kemmis' proposal that teachers working in communities of practice could organise their own enlightenment in terms of generating theory. In 2012, we worked with academics and practising teachers from 5 European countries on an action research project combining seminars in traditional university locations with online collaborative software (Raiker, 2014). According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1992:16), action research involves: '...changing individuals, on the one hand, and, on the other, the culture of the groups, institutions and societies to which they belong'. Furthermore, action research is: '...a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices...' (*ibid.*:5). Although we undertook the research in the spirit of 'teachers-as-researchers' as advocated by Stenhouse (1975) and Whitehead (1985), and 'researchers-as-participants' (Weiskopf & Laske, 1996), the democratic process was enhanced by colleagues being consulted and included throughout the project. This conception of action research would surely promote educating for democracy and be the stimulus for theory creation. Indeed, one aim of the project was to investigate if a blended physical/virtual environment enabled teachers, through reflection on practice in collaboration on a task, to create educational theory as a step towards questioning and potentially opposing ideological conformity. We saw the community of enquirers established virtually, in the digital habitat as

Wenger, White and Smith (2009) term it, as a ‘public sphere’ for communicative action (Habermas, 1991). The findings from two action research cycles indicated that although that the teachers in the project could, with the support of the academics, establish agendas for the practice of collecting data, there was evidence neither for the use of educational theory in creating agendas nor even the beginnings of creating educational theory. Furthermore, there was no evidence of knowledge and understanding of *existing* educational theory. This was disappointing, as we were persuaded by Freire (1978) in his proposal that the professional as agent must forge together *theory and practice* to create ‘praxis’. Praxis is a high-level mode of professional operation where the practitioner possesses skills and deep knowledge and understanding of the theories that underpin practice. This can lead to a profound change in teachers’ understanding of their professional identity, giving them the power to democratise their profession further through taking control as Stenhouse advised and intended. This was clearly not an outcome of the action research described above.

Three key issues arise from the discussion so far. The one year postgraduate secondary teacher course is not long enough for meaningful engagement with theory; knowledge and understanding of theory takes time to develop; for theory to be created, teachers must understand that the role of theory in praxis and professional development. How is this to be achieved? It appears that in England the decades-old educational policy of separating theory and practice, and constructing courses focused on the latter, is bound to continue. The government is moving initial teacher education out of universities with Ofsted approved training schools taking a greater role. Unlike Finland, this is not because teachers and teacher educators are against theory. Research by Procter (2015) showed that teachers wanted to know more about research and theory, but were constrained by time, workload, and lack of financial and school leadership support. It appears that, with the dearth of theory in ITE courses, Masters’ and doctoral programmes will become increasingly important in ensuring the survival and generation of educational theory. This view is supported by recent governments *not* showing any indication that they intended, or indeed intend, to reverse the cutting of funding for teacher-as-researcher projects, exemplified by the Best Practice Research Scholarships (BPRS) of the late 1990s and early 2000s. BPRS holders worked with university-based academics so that the essentials of improved knowledge of subject, practice and educational theory, and understanding of research methodologies in education were achieved. No more. In Finland, the relationship between teacher education and theory is in flux; in England it is becoming extinct.

This is despite increasing evidence in the UK on the impact of teachers’ research and their experience of being involved in research and inquiry. A systematic review of the literature by McLaughlin et al. (2004) showed that the research experience:

- reminded teachers of their intellectual capability and the importance of that capability to their professional lives;
- reconnected many of the teachers to their colleagues and to their initial commitments to teach;
- encouraged teachers to develop an expanded sense of what teachers can and ought to do

Although aspects of democratic practice can be seen here, there is nothing that can be identified as theory and its creation. More recently, last year the British Education Research Association’s published its final report on *Research and the Teaching Profession; Building the capacity for a self-improving education system* (2014). The report states that ‘The

evidence gathered by the inquiry is clear about the positive impact that a research literate and research engaged profession is likely to have on learner outcomes' (*ibid.*:6). The Report also calls for 'commissioners of education research [to] build teacher engagement into commissioning processes, so that wherever possible teachers are involved in the democratic process of being active agents in research, rather than passive participants' (*ibid.*:8). However, nothing was said about theory and its creation. University Masters' courses contain content on educational theory, but as a general rule, these have to begin at a level of basic or no knowledge because of the lack of theoretic content in initial teacher training courses. It appears that in England, the creation of theory remains in doctoral work and universities, not in teachers-as-researchers and schools.

Some further thoughts on the theorizing of education

In this chapter been, albeit in a brief and very general sense, we have discussed the changing situations and fates of educational theory in two different countries. Now it is time to consider whether in the different theoretical and methodological works of different times we might find from the old something new and useful for this book in terms of critical pedagogy and the theory of democratic teaching practices.

Over the previous 20 years, in most parts of the developed world, educational systems have been facing a problem, a problem which we have not fully addressed in our discussion of educational theory. It is the problem of the diminishment of the promise of hope, which is at the core of the whole endeavour of education. Hope underpins all action that is intended to promote change; hope that change will make things better. Change is at the core of all educational practice, and as we have seen throughout this volume, educational change is the result of social, cultural, political and economic forces, manifested in the life of every individual. Young adults in schools, colleges and universities face reality, possibly with more purpose and interest today they were in earlier decades, that following graduation they may not get work commensurate with their level of education. It used to be the case that the central promise of education was that education was the best and most efficient way to gain social and economic status; this promise has been profoundly betrayed. Education is still one of the key factors predicting the future of the individual but this factor has become and is becoming weaker.

Industry, commerce and many different educational policy think-tanks have rushed to offer a solution to the situation. Let's raise the level of education! This argument is based on the fantasy that the problem facing the educational world is that the educational system is functioning poorly when seen from the view point of different vocational requirements of the work life. When the level of education is fundamentally linked to the needs of industry and commerce it is believed that the skilled person is more valuable and usable in the labour market. This kind of thinking demolishes one of the key levels in the project of education: *Bildung* i.e. education itself! This project of changing the educational system to the functionary of industry and commerce, throws education completely upside down, and leaves individuals alone without a way to rise above the immediate requirements of their society. In this situation there is one intractable problem at hand if the assumption is made that a society should produce young people capable of evaluating and appreciating their personal understanding of the good, the meaning of life and the things making life meaningful. We argue that education in the form it has taken over the previous 20 or so years has actually marginalized those things that young people cherish as valuable and meaningful in general and particularly for themselves. How well, for example, do schools prepare young people for

the main events in their lives, for example how they express love? In many families young people face the situation after school where, instead of further education, they choose to leave without considering what tomorrow may bring, or the income needed to balance what is consumed. This will impact on the structure of society as a whole. When life can be taken into one's own hands, young people will take it completely.

The overpowering influence of the economical viewpoint in educational policy today is an example of the impact of ideology over educational thought. If the end product of education is seen as an asset or property, it is simple to perceive the impact of neo-liberalism on education. In the ethics of Calvinism, assets or property are not considered to be bad in themselves; quite on the contrary they were seen as an indicator of the value of the person. Calvin advocated a combination of democracy and aristocratic hegemony. Following Calvinistic thought, both John Milton and John Locke advocated that politics could and should protect the liberties of all and there should be a system of checks and balances to protect these liberties and freedoms. It is clear that education was one of them. In both Finland and England, it was accepted that those who worked hard and profited from that work should enjoy their gains. However, there was the danger that those who acquired economic riches through inheritance or had too much surplus would succumb to laziness and enjoyment. The words of the Paul from the Bible "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." was not directed against the poor but also against the rich. Instead he instructed "Such people we command and urge [...] to settle down and earn the bread they eat". Paul's instruction regarding those who preferred not to work was to "keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us." (2 Thessalonians 3:12). There is a paradox here; although profit seeking was criticized, the lauded compulsion to austerity promoted the development of capital and hence, it can be argued, the current neo-liberalistic hegemony.

As has been argued above, it appears that the goals and practices of education today promote the already privileged social groups. For them the salvation that education can bring is already given. We might ask the question: are our educational systems in any way Calvinistic? The objective sign that Calvin looked for was submission to the goals and requirements of society, to be able to act according to the ordained requirements of schools in particular and the educational system in general. In this sense, schools and other educational establishments become a way to licentiate and in a sense give learned people blessing for their social status. So the elite groups are blessed and those less privileged are struggling. This is hardly educating for democracy.

Concluding thoughts

To summarize this chapter, the most important point behind theorising education is the core idea of democracy. Before we can make any decisions, we have to understand the phenomena under discussion and debate. Theory is the key towards understanding education and its latent constructions. However in England, there is little theory or theorizing in ITE courses. University Masters' courses contain content on educational theory, but as a general rule, these have to begin at a level of basic or no knowledge because of the lack of theoretic content in initial teacher training courses. It appears that in England, the creation of theory remains in doctoral work and universities, not in teachers-as-researchers and schools. Epistemologically, theorizing education is not considered as a necessary pre-requisite for effective pedagogy. In Finland, compared with earlier times, the content of 'democracy' has grown during the last decade. At the same time, in Finland the operational culture of

departments of teacher education have become more democratic. However, students are still mostly on their own if they want to develop their own understanding of democracy and education for democracy (Rautiainen et al, 2014). The biggest difference compared with earlier times is that students have possibilities to develop and study theories from their own interests and needs, and develop new and in a sense more authentic questions and insights from their own encounters with theories and experiences in the learning process. Epistemologically, the Finnish approach is experiential and individualistic. However, social and political theories have no major role in teacher education. This means that knowledge and understanding of democracy and democratic issues in education is superficial. In England political ideology controls education, but we have argued that democracy is understood and enacted by educators because of centuries of engagement with local, if not national, democratic practices. The place of theory in English teacher education should be to support the externalization and investigation of such practices, how they have developed and where they might lead in the future. In the absence of political will in this direction, particularly in England, we are fighting against the flood. We conclude with the proposal that without understanding political and social connections in education, our understanding of education for democracy is one way or another incomplete, perhaps even non-existent.

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