

# **A History of Democratic Education in American Public Schools**

Schools in a Democracy & Democracy in Schools

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Discussions and recommendations concerning issues of democratic education in urban schools and civic engagement by urban students

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"There is perhaps no more problematic concept in American education than that of democratic schools."

-- Michael Apple and James Beane

John Harris Loflin  
International Association for Learning Alternatives  
Democratic Education Consortium  
Black & Latino Policy Institute

Is America possible?

-- Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why we must share the meaning of the movement* (1990, p. 178)

Democratic classrooms and schools offer the best hope for public support of public schools.

-- Institute for Democracy in Education

If we all agreed about everything, we wouldn't need democracy.

-- Deborah Meier

The philosophy in the classroom of this generation is the philosophy of government in the next.

--Abraham Lincoln

I want a democracy so compelling even the children will want to try it.

-- John Harris Loflin

A democratic school is one that above all, tries to enable people to create their own world collectively rather than to fit into one that is created for them.

-- Michael Engel

What does a democratic process look like in a large urban school?

-- Mark Koester, Jefferson Open School, Lakewood, CO

Democracy is like a life raft—it bounces around a lot, your feet are always wet, you're not sure where you are going. But, you never sink.

-- General Colin Powell

Giving children a sense of ownership in the classroom can lead to a kind of open and cooperative learning environment that most teachers just dream about.

-- Michelle G Zachlod, 1st grade teacher, California City, CA

To save the democracy we thought we had, we must take democracy to where it's never been.

-- Francis Moore Lappé

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Adults, why do you fear children's participation?  
-- Concern for Working Children Annual Report 2003

Listen, create an environment where students feel their voice is taken seriously and acted upon, and then involve them in school decision-making. The positive action and school improvement follows as sure as night follows day.

-- Derry Hannam, School Inspector, United Kingdom

If public schools exist to promote democratic values it would appear that they need to remove hierarchy. Education for democracy thus becomes education freed from authoritarian relationships.

-- C. Winch & J. Gingell, *Key Concepts in the Philosophy of Education*

We must remove the contradictions in our culture that embrace democratic ends for its schools, but resists the actual practice in schools of democratic means from which the ends cannot be separated.

-- The Institute for Democracy in Education

We need to treat students like citizens now, not citizens in the future.

-- Sheldon Berman, Superintendent of Hudson Public Schools

Although we teach about democracy we rarely practice it in most classrooms and schools.

-- H. Jerome Freidberg, Professor of Education, University of Houston

Implementing democratic governance and small democratic groups in a large public school is not only doable; it brings schools closer to their historic mission.

-- Sheldon Berman, Superintendent of Hudson Public Schools

Freedom and justice, however important, can never be enough; learning about democratic citizenship must be more than an academic exercise.

-- *First Amendment Schools*, p. 21

It is up to educators, then, to reconnect the heart of the educational process to the democratic mission of schooling — to reconnect education to democracy.

-- Westhiemer & Kahne

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Although I am aware of ideas and research in other countries that are more advanced or may contradict the various ideas and research presented here, this paper is limited to American public schools and especially those in urban settings.

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I was also inspired by a new sense of democracy compelled by the Internet, Wikipedia, You Tube, blogs, and the multitude of global possibilities for human voices to be heard via the World Wide Web. I believe the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be an era where the value and usefulness of democracy will be tested globally on a daily basis to see it lives up to its promises.

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AERO is the Alternative Education Resource Organization [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org)

IDEC is the International Democratic Education Conference [www.idec2008.org](http://www.idec2008.org)

IALA is the International Association for Learning Alternatives [www.learningalternatives.net](http://www.learningalternatives.net)

I speak the password primeval, I give the sign of democracy,  
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.

-- Walt Whitman (Song of Myself: 24)

## PREFACE I

If people are to secure and maintain a democratic way of life, they must have the opportunities to learn what that way of life means and how it might be led. Although common sense alone tells us this is a true statement, **there is perhaps no more problematic concept in education than that of democratic schools** (my emphasis), a concept that some consider almost an oxymoron. How can this be so? Simply put, many people believe that democracy is nothing more than a form of federal government and thus does not apply to schools and other social institutions. Many also believe that democracy is a right of adults, not of young people. And some believe that democracy simply cannot work in schools.

Others are committed to the idea that the democratic way of life is built upon opportunities to learn what it is about and how to lead it. They believe that the schools, as a common experience of virtually all young people, have a moral obligation to introduce them to the democratic way of life. They know, as well, that such a life is learned by experience. It is not a status to be attained only after other things are learned. Moreover, they believe that democracy extends to all people, including the young. Finally, they believe that democracy is neither cumbersome nor dangerous, that it can work in societies and it can work in schools (Apple and Beane, 1995).

Teaching students to share responsibility for the learning and school governance while also teaching and learning with them the ways to resolve issues and conflicts is to experience life in a democracy.

-- Institute for Democracy in Education

## PREFACE II

## **What happened with Dewey and democratic education in the United States?**

Historical studies of progressive education tend to be of two kinds or two points of view:

(1) The first relates how the well-intended, but faulty ideas of John Dewey and his cadre of pedagogical progressives successfully replaced the academic curriculum with an anti-intellectual, utilitarian one. As a result of these reforms, American schools lost their focus— a consequence we are still paying for today.

(2) On the other hand, the second narrative relates how Dewey created a theoretically sound, ambitious plan for improving American schools that, except for a few well-documented examples, never really took hold because conservative critics and social efficiency experts squashed the movement before it was ever given a chance.

Thus, Covello's Franklin High School (see page 24) largely followed the overall trajectory of progressive education, which, generally speaking, began with the innovative ideas of Dewey, found greatest support in the 1930s, evolved into the life adjustment movement, limped along through the Cold War, and died a sudden death with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (Johanek & Puckett, 2006).

What happens in the (public school) classroom (not in Iraq or Cuba) will, in the final analysis, reveal how deep are the roots of (America's) democratic commitment.

-- paraphrased from H. G. Hullfish

PREFACE III

**America: What changes will the war in Iraq bring to American society?**

Popularized by the rise of democratic governments in the former Soviet Union and South Africa, and the events surrounding the failed democracy movement in China, citizens around the world are more than ever looking to democratic ideals and democratic governments to replace non-elected ones. This is illustrated by the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar (Burma), and the drafting of a constitution in Afghanistan and Iraq. Articles in the newspaper such as, "Bush to pressure Cuba for democratic reforms" or "Bush calls for democracy in the Middle East" and "Bush urges democracy in African nations" provide evidence for the recognition of and respect for self-determination (Loflin, 2004).

Relevant to these events is the fact that every major U.S. war has brought or made possible social changes. American women's right to vote came after WW I. The seeds of the Civil Rights movement were planted during WW II and the Korean War. Vietnam influenced the lowering of the national voting age to 18 and pushed the Civil Rights Movement to fruition.

### **America: Practicing what it preaches—democracy in Iraq and in American public schools**

Although there is a strong debate over the reasons and purposes of the war, due to the fact that many see the conflict as one of democratization, raises certain questions such as, "How democratic is American society?" or "How can we improve American democracy?"

It will be hard for the women and men who fought in the Middle East to accept a vote counting method that may be manipulated, a two party system where the parties are so similar nothing really changes, various social justice issues that our democracy cannot seem to affect, or how some Americans are left out of the system due to democracy itself. (See "Democracy as Paradigm for Colonization" Evans, M., 2006)

*To the extent American soldiers are trying to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis--and especially the Iraqi youth--concerning the spirit and empowering qualities of democratic self-determination, how could they deny the same and more to their children and their neighbor's children?*

In other words, our Iraq war veterans will not be able tolerate a constitutional democracy that is less than the system they were "selling" to the Iraqis.

It will be hard for U.S. soldiers to return to America and not hear the voices of public school students who are beginning to want a say in classroom, school, learning, and community decisions that directly and indirectly affect them; and, who want to know how democracy works—all due to the America's desire to spread this method of governance globally. To say that we want democracy in China and not provide America's own children and youth the opportunity to practice this form of community in their classrooms and schools, is the worst form of hypocrisy--an image Americans cannot afford to present to the world.

### **OVERVIEW**

A recurring theme in this paper is the meaning of democracy and the meaning of education. Just how we are to approach democracy is a matter of considerable debate. Different understandings imply contrasting educational practices (Smith, 2001b). To help the reader it is necessary to contrast a "classical" conception of democracy in

which democracy is seen as a form of popular power, and a “contemporary” conception where democracy is viewed as a representative system of political decision-making (Carr & Hartnett, 1996).

	<b>Classical</b> Direct democracy	<b>Contemporary</b> Representative democracy
<b>View of democracy</b>	Grounded in a way of life in which all can develop their qualities and capacities. It envisages a society that itself is intrinsically educative and in which political socialization is a distinctively educative process. Democracy is a moral ideal requiring expanding opportunities for direct participation.	Results from, and reflects, the political requirements of a modern market economy. Democracy is a way of choosing political leaders involving, for example, regular elections, representative government and an independent judiciary.
<b>The primary aim of education</b>	To initiate individuals into the values, attitudes and modes of behavior appropriate to active participation in democratic institutions.	To offer a minority an education appropriate to future political leaders; the majority an education fitted to their primary social role as producers, workers and consumers.
<b>Curriculum content</b>	There is a focus on liberal education, a curriculum which fosters forms of critical and explanatory knowledge that allow people to interrogate social norms and to reflect critically on dominant institutions and practices.	Mass education will focus on the world of work and upon those attitudes and skills, and that knowledge that have some market value.
<b>Typical educational processes</b>	Participatory practices that cultivate the skills and attitudes that democratic deliberation require.	Pedagogical relationships will tend to be authoritarian and competition will, as in society generally, play an essential role.
<b>School organization</b>	Schools are communities in which the problems of communal life are resolved through collective deliberation and a shared concern for the common good.	Schools are organized around a pyramidal structure with the head at its apex.

**Education for public or private purposes: Democracy or corporatocracy? (Sleeter, 2008)**

These two conceptions of democracy (classical and contemporary) and their implications for America’s public schools are also the concern of school democracy advocate Christine Sleeter.

Since the U.S. is actively exporting its conception of democracy to the world, citizens in other nations might imagine that Americans would have a robust conception of what democracy is and are each totally involved in a

government "...of the people, by the people, and for the people..." That is not the case, however, according to voter turnout rates (United States Census Bureau, 2005) and the quality of civic knowledge of US public schools students (Nation's Report Card: Civics 2006, 2007).

### **The relationship between democracy, capitalism, and power**

How one views the extent to which U.S. political decision-making actually uses democratic processes and institutional structures depends on how one interprets the relationship between democracy, capitalism, and power. This is the essence of Sleeter's concerns about America's public schools in a corporatocracy which Perkins (2005) defines as U.S. government under global capitalism.

According to Sleeter's 2008 essay, advocates of capitalism link the ideal of free enterprise with democratic freedoms, extolling the primacy of individualism, property rights, and personal responsibility. Critics of capitalism view concentrated wealth as leading to minority control of power, which undermines governance by the people. This creates a limited conception of democracy, leading people to equate it with the right to vote for representatives, which "tacitly has become capitulation to rule by an elite."

Sleeter's "critique of capitalism" orientation fits well with the orientation of direct democracy. The advantages of representational democracy to "corporatocracy" are now clearer.

### **What does a 21<sup>st</sup> century American democracy require of its public schools?**

The importance of understanding the implications of the struggle for control of American public education between its traditional democratic values and today's more market oriented policies (Engel, 2000) is vital to helping America and its public school students find authenticity and responsibility in their 21<sup>st</sup> century "global village" home.

Using the dynamics created by contrasting direct and representative democracy and how each imply different values which lead to contrasting educational practices will simplify the seemingly complicated argument for the 21<sup>st</sup> democratic education paradigm supported by this paper.

"A History of Democratic Education in American Public Schools" will help traditional-oriented educators and democratic education advocates answer the thesis question of this document: What does a 21<sup>st</sup> century American democracy require of its public schools?

*I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion.*

-- Thomas Jefferson

## **ORIENTATION STATEMENT**

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> century--the century of democracy**

"To make the world safe for democracy" was the rationale President Woodrow Wilson used as the United States entered WW I in 1917. With just over 125 years of democratic development, Wilson believed that the time had come

for America to play a larger role on the world stage. America, Wilson reasoned, was the greatest force for democracy and good in the world.

Nothing much has changed if we look at the past 20 years during which the U.S. has declared the “superiority of democracy” almost daily to the world community. Through diplomacy and/or force, its present efforts to influence Iraq, China, and Cuba or supporting pro-democracy movements in Myanmar as well as legitimizing its own (presidential) election processes, US policies have kept the concept on everyone’s mind, *creating the potential to make the next 100 years the century of democracy.*

Oddly, voter turnout rates and involvement in civic activities by ordinary Americans appear in sharp contrast to US public relations efforts. For example, the current way the US is “selling” democracy to Iraq, the Iraqis must think 100% of Americans are registered and vote in each election. They might be persuaded to believe by US enthusiasm for reproducing American democracy that American citizens are completely involved in their community’s decisions.

As well, average Iraqis must think American public schools are the fertile soil; no, in fact the hotbed of democracy where its young are introduced to, prepared for, and given opportunities to practice this noble community in preparation for this great democratic way of life US citizen soldiers so wish Iraqis could experience.

It is strange that the schooling system which was created to ensure democracy is the most undemocratic institution in America—except for the prisons which you can avoid by behaving or the military which is avoided by not enlisting.

-- Dr. Donald Glines, *Educational Alternatives for Everyone All the Time*

However, the American public schools are not democratic and each American knows this intuitively. No statistics are needed. Now, many may not know of or understand this particular and presently obscure duty of public schools, nor otherwise care; but, they would be hard pressed to deny that it makes good American horse sense that if American society is to be truly democratic, its young must be provided ways--especially in their classrooms and schools--to understand and practice what that way of life means and how it might be led.

The problem is the topic has not been brought to the public’s attention the way it will be now that the US is supporting and in some cases fighting to enable self-government in various nations. The American public must realize that if its style of democracy is to be taken seriously as an example, it cannot be non-democratic in its own public schools and Public Square with its own young. The public must consequently renew this “obscure” spirit of public education. Public schools, as the common experience of most young people, provide the best chance to fulfill their country’s moral obligation to prepare students, its future citizens, for the democratic way of life.

This paper intends to expose hypocrisy. America does not provide its youth the same opportunity it desires for each world citizen. These writings will review the history of democratic education to seek an understanding of why the public schools of our globe’s strongest proponent of democracy are not, in all aspects, democratic.

## INTRODUCTION: WHAT DOES A DEMOCRACY REQUIRE OF ITS SCHOOLS?

### **American public schools and American democracy** (Bernard & Mondale, 2001)

The American Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776. As the United States grew in the early 1800s, citizens realized the importance of an educated populace to a healthy civic society and nation. Until the 1850s, most formal education in the United States took place in private schools. Pushed by a need to educate all children, especially recent immigrants, the locally controlled public “common school” was formed to instill the common set of political and social values needed for nationhood and a shared American society. By 1890, 9 out of 10 pupils were enrolled in public schools.

#### **Early “equality” meant difference, not sameness, of treatment**

By the early 1900s, the growing public schools were influenced by a need for school leaders. Some were reformers dissatisfied with the “politics” that influenced local control or what was to be in a common curriculum. To policy elites, “democracy at its best” meant schools administered by trained superintendents, not by lay people. As

well, "Equality meant difference, not sameness, of treatment." Spreading the curriculum into several tracts created equality of opportunity for students of varied ability and for the numerous ethnic/racial groups.

In the late 1960s, reformers encouraged a more decentralized administration, and smaller schools with increased parental involvement. Because tracking led to "academic segregation" they argued for the same high academic standards for all students.

In the 1990s, school choice (options within a public school district, choices between public and private schools, and the options of homeschooling, virtual schools, or free schools) created a competitive market, putting "...a new spin on democracy."

At the beginning of the 21 century, expanded versions of education include alternative assessments, self-actualization, global/environmental responsibility, educational equity (Friedlaender & Darling-Hammond, 2007); and, "democratizing" the concepts of intelligence (Williams, 1998), adolescence (Loflin, 2007), mutli-culturalism (Loflin, 2007), and the body (Loflin, 2006a).

*From* public schools as examples of democratic local control *to* assimilators of a common culture, *from* improving democracy by "expert" leadership *to* tracking, and *from* smaller schools *to* school choice as a means to high achievement by all, this public institution reflects what kind of democracy and society America has and wants. This paper will trace schools in a democracy and democracy in schools in all their definitions and forms. The summary and the insights in the "Recommendations" will be helpful to preparing Americans for a truly 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy.

#### **Is there a "participation gap" as well as an achievement gap? (Glickman, 2008)**

Democratic education advocate Carl Glickman notes that as well as an intellectual achievement gap, American public schools have a "participation gap." This and the stagnating intellectual achievement gap in America are major issues related to each other. To address them, he asserts, requires a renewed focus on the purposes of a democracy and the practices of education.

Glickman looks at indicators showing participatory democracy is in decline. He notes connections to civic and religious groups are down, people are less connected to family and friends and more live alone, people are less informed about public affairs, and trust in key institutions is low. People with the least education are the ones least involved. Glickman's research shows the following:

- In 1975 58% college graduates participated in some kind of community project for that year.
- By 2005 that proportion had been cut to 35%.
  - For those who dropped out of high school, the decline was from 32 % to 15%, a 55% drop.
- By 2007 few high school dropouts left their schools having participated in a community project.

As American cities have become more diverse, Glickman is concerned that its inhabitants may tend to withdraw from collective life, have more distrust of neighbors, and withdraw even from close friends. He sees less volunteering, giving to charity, working on community projects, and registering to vote. What is disconcerting, he believes Americans have less faith that they can actually make a difference to improve the quality of life in their community.

### **Elections returns reflect Participation Gap too**

According to the Higher Education Research Institute, the percentage of students who voted in high school elections fell from 72.0% in 1966 to 21.5% in 2006 (Pryor et al., 2007).

The United States Census Bureau (2005) figures, with respect to the percentages of registered voters 18 to 24 year who voted in presidential elections, show an average turnout rate of 41% between 1964 and 2004. The 1964 rate of 51% was the highest rate over next 40 years. The 2004 turnout rate was 42%. Lows were 32.6% in 1996 and 32.3% in 2000.

With respect to the percentages of all registered voters who voted in presidential elections, the average rate between 1964 and 2004 was 60%. The 1964 rate of 69% was the highest rate over next 40 years. The 2004 turnout rate was 58%. Lows were 54% in 1996 and 55% in 2000.

### **Democracy: A common terminology**

Many understand democracy as a concept with a meaning that is constantly changing due to challenges and disputes. This is not because people cannot agree on its definition, but because the very idea of democracy calls for a continuous discussion, re-evaluation, re-making, and re-organization about what it actually means and entails. (Dewey, 1916; Gallie, 1955; Parker, 2003; Biesta, 2007).

America has Abraham Lincoln's broad definition of democracy as government "...of the people, by the people, and for the people..." UNESCO suggests "the twin principles of popular control over collective decision-making and equality of rights in the exercise of that control." Members of a group have an equal right to be a part of the decisions that affect the group. This takes in Dewey's idea that democracy is more than a form of government, but is mainly "a mode of associated living." See Jefferson and Dewey p. 17.

### **From a political definition to include a social/cultural-orientation: A more inclusive democracy**

This is a movement from a political definition to include a social-oriented, and a culturally more inclusive democracy, taking popular sovereignty seriously by emphasizing forms of citizen action beyond voting. It opens up a new civic space for direct and cooperative involvement in public life for participatory democracy (Parker, 2003). See Recommendation 3, p. 60.

### **Democratic Education: A common terminology**

What is Democratic Education? Perhaps a view of possibilities can continue a conversation about the definition. Currently, the definition seems to be bound by general areas: (1) Democratic processes, school governance, civic education, citizenship; (2) Freedom to choose, learning without compulsion; and, (3) Self-actualization, global aspects.

### **Democratic processes, classroom/school governance, civic education**

All children, regardless of family economic status or future occupation, must acquire the skills, knowledge, and civic values needed to perpetuate American democracy. To meet these requirements, students should receive a type of education that actively engages them as citizens in their own schools and communities (ASCD, 2002).

Students can be highly involved in classroom decisions concerning class rules, curriculum, or assessment rubrics. Morning meetings, weekly class meetings, a classroom constitution, and a bill of rights and responsibilities are other examples. Involvement of students in democratic schools can go far beyond traditional student councils where participation in school decisions is limited to academic status and decisions concerning picnic menus or school dances. Globally, in many democratic schools, students help with school climate, school rules, scheduling, curriculum, budgeting, and hiring decisions. See: [www.idec2003.org](http://www.idec2003.org).

#### **Freedom to choose, learning without compulsion (IDEC Resolution, 2005)**

In any educational setting, young people have the right to decide individually how, when, what, where and with whom they learn, to have an equal share in the decision-making as to how their organizations--in particular their schools--are run, and which rules and sanctions, if any, are necessary. This implies that students who are presently not "able" to decide, are provided experiences to foster the progressive development from a more dependent "stage" to this level of self-directed learning.

#### **Aspects emphasize self-actualization, human rights, and environmental awareness (Hecht, 2002)**

Democratic education views the purpose of learning as creating a developmental process, which accompanies people throughout their lifetime. Such a process promotes the multi-facet development of one's personality, encourages independence and authenticity, fosters respect for human rights, and increases social and environmental responsibility.

#### **Democratic schools (Education Revolution, 2000a)**

This list includes schools, both public and private, which have described themselves as democratic, or have been described as democratic by researchers. Generally, these schools involve some or all of the characteristics noted below, although there is no exact definition or requirement for a democratic school (Education Revolution, 2008b):

- shared decision-making among the students and staff
- a learner-centered approach in which students choose their daily activities
- equality among staff and students
- the community as an extension of the classroom

There are currently 208 schools listed in 29 countries and 85 schools in 33 U.S. states and Puerto Rico.

#### **Characteristics of teaching for democracy**

Sleeter (2008) describes several key characteristics of teaching for democracy:

- students considering social issues in relationship to public good,
- students using democratic decision-making processes in the classroom,
- teachers embedding content in critical thinking about real issues,
- teachers engaging students in multiple perspectives and multiple sources of knowledge,
- schools affording all students access to high quality education, and

- students' cultural and linguistic identities being supported and viewed as legitimate aspects of citizenship.

Also see Resources: Public democratic schools, p. 144.

**Thomas Jefferson and John Dewey: What does a democracy require of its public schools?** (Bernard & Mondale, 2001; Smith, 2001a)

To understand the history of the development of democratic education in the U.S., a review of the ideas of Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and John Dewey (1859-1952) are needed. In the early 1800s, Jefferson believed the survival of America's budding democracy required the education of all citizens, with control by local communities, not the federal government. By teaching the correct political principles to the young, public schools for all could nurture virtuous citizenship. Literate citizens who knew the basics of democracy could better understand public issues, elected virtuous leaders, and sustain the delicate balance between liberty and order. Local control gave citizens a chance to practice self-rule.

John Dewey voiced a similar commitment to education in a democracy through an emphasis on political socialization and wise collective choices. Like Jefferson, Dewey recognized most Americans lacked knowledge of democratic processes. This limited democracy's potential. Democracy is not just a political system in which governments elected by majority vote make decisions. It is a public democratic life defined by a certain kind of *character*: (1) a mutual regard for others; and (2) an ambition, through communication and deliberation, to make society both a greater unity and one that reflects the full diversity of people's individual talents and aptitudes. To Dewey, public education is the fundamental method of social progress through which democratic character (social intelligence--individual activity-based community consciousness) is taught and experienced.

**Education's moral duty: Right social character** (Smith, 2001b)

Here, education must be oriented toward the individual because it recognizes the formation of a certain social character ("sociability") as the only genuine basis of right living. Yet this "right character" is not just about individuals, rather it concerns the influence of a certain form of institutional or community life upon the individual and that the social organism, through the school, may determine ethical results. *The community's duty to education is therefore its paramount moral duty.*

Thus, students learn democracy by being members of a group or community that acts democratically. Through communication and participating in the process of deliberation, in classroom shared decision-making and school governance, students learn to view themselves as social beings with individual interests and a concern for the common good.

Through its public schools, a democratic society makes provisions for participation in the common good of all its members on equal terms. This secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through the interactions of the different forms of associated life.

Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind (See p. 59 and Appendix K, p. 138) which secure social changes without introducing disorder.

### **Education for democracy is education freed from authoritarian relationships**

Public education fails when it neglects the fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life and education as a social process. School is more than a place where certain information is to be learned. When viewed democratically, school is a community in which communication and deliberation flourishes; thus, we consider the nature of relationships between student and student, students and teachers, and teacher and teacher. As Winch and Gingell (1999) note, if schools exist to promote democratic values it would appear that they need to remove hierarchy. *Education for democracy thus becomes education freed from authoritarian relationships.*

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## HISTORY

In their 1995 book, *Democratic Schools*, authors Michael Apple and James Beane list the following actions as examples of democratic practices in American public schools:

**Pasadena, CA, 1937 Students share solution to community problems**

Third graders study problems in their school, homes, neighborhoods, and community--they collect their recommendations in a booklet distributed throughout the community;

**Baltimore, MD, 1953 Students do citizenship**

High school students conduct a voter registration drive among ethnic minority residents, a study of housing relocation issue, and begin a community health campaign;

**Port Jarvis, NY, 1972 Students share in school design decisions**

Nearly 125 students, teachers, administrators, parents, board members, and community organizations meet to consider projects they might undertake to redesign their schools;

**Ulysses, PA, 1979 School graffiti problems**

At a weekly meeting, elementary students/teachers debate and vote on a new rule: anyone defacing school property will spend free time over 3 days working with the custodian;

**Belvidere, IL, 1990 1st graders impact environment**

Concerned about the size and contents of a local landfill, students undertake a campaign for conservation and recycling in their school;

**Madison, WI, 1991 Student/teachers collaborate to create relevant curriculum**

Middle school students/teachers create a curriculum out of their questions and concerns that arise in themes as "Living in the Future," "Problems in the Environment," and "Isms."

**The development of American democracy: The efforts of citizens to make it genuine**

The following is a review of the past century and the events and circumstances that inspired those demanding America live up to its Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights.

### **The women's suffrage movement.**

After 1910, progressive women's rights efforts began to grow. The movement had women entering more of public life. The National Women's Party was creating a female political culture led by politically savvy charismatic leaders. Between 1910 and 1917 the number of states giving women the right to vote grew from 4 to 11. In 1916 Montana elected the nation's first woman to Congress (Women's suffrage movement, n.d.).

World War I acted as a powerful catalyst for social change since it required people to break from their traditional gender roles. The necessity of the country to have people work and support the war effort brought women out of their homes and in more contact with the public, showing what they could do and their future potential.

Women became involved in many activities that substantiated and defended the idea of a woman's right to vote. Women were members of local and national advisory groups in finance, manufacturing, social ills, all aspects of national and European war relief, education, and civil defense efforts.

One outstanding WW I group, the National League for Women's Service ("The Woman Army"), was involved in every aspect of hospital work, entertaining soldiers, Red Cross/national disaster efforts, patriotism/propaganda, conservation, and home economics awareness (Stieber, n.d.).

Although World War I did slow down the suffrage campaign in favor of "war work," this added yet another reason to why women deserved the vote (Oregon Sate Archives, n.d.).

### **America's dilemma: Democracy or hypocrisy?**

The women's suffrage movement was the obvious way to test America's promise of equality and freedom under law for all citizens. This laid the groundwork for the many rights movements that followed

### **The "Rights" Movements: How returning soldiers challenged America to live up to its promises**

A review of American history since 1900 reveals a relationship between (a) the limitations of America's promise of "All men/ women are created equal" with its manifestation in equal rights and justice under law, and (b) the experiences of soldiers and personnel.

Many members of so-called minority groups risked their lives and culture in war defending an America where they were treated unjustly. Yet, these experiences provided the rationale to challenge these limitations. Re-experiencing discrimination after returning home from defending America in war against totalitarian regimes made it a duty to expose the moral hypocrisies in American culture.

Also, a major part of the American push for social justice was indirectly due to the foreign policies and the rhetoric of democracy that supported them. This put America in the political global spotlight and thus a scrutiny by a world audience. This pressured American leaders to "practice what they preached."

**WW I (1914-1918).** During WW I approximately 371,000 black Americans were involved. 200,000 fought in Europe. After WW I, many African Americans returned to the US to find the prejudice and discrimination, which they did not experience in Europe, still prevalent in the north and the Jim Crow south.

In 1941, due to economics, the growth of the US armed forces, and pressure from the government, the country's defense industries were opened to black workers.

**WW II (1939-1945).** A total 1,000,000 Black Americans were in WW II, with 500,000 stationed overseas. Aware of their contributions to the war effort in WW II, many Black Americans became restless. As they listened to patriotic songs and speeches about freedom for all, they became determined to make these ideas truly meaningful for themselves.

In 1946, **President Truman** moved to strengthen civil rights laws and integrated the armed forces. This provoked a storm of criticism from the South, but Truman refused to compromise, saying: *Yes, my forebears were [Confederates](#). . . . But my very stomach turned over when I had learned that Negro soldiers, just back from overseas, were being dumped out of Army trucks in [Mississippi](#) and beaten* ("Harry S. Truman," 2008).

**Korean War (1950-1953).** In 1950 almost 100,000 African-Americans were on active duty. By 1953, over 600,000 had served in the military. Over 5,000 African-Americans died in that conflict.

Anti-communist situations in **Cuba**, the **Congo (1960)** and **Dominican Republic (1965)** most likely required black intelligence officers and soldiers.

**Vietnam (1962-1972).** Of all the men and women who served, 275,000, or 10.6%, were black. At the time, blacks represented 12.5% of the U.S. population (Smith, 1996). It can be inferred that the experiences of armed service men and women before, during, and after Korea influenced **Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)**, and those in Vietnam influenced the passage of the **Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964, 1965 and 1968**. Their experiences also brought political support for Martin Luther King, Caesar Chavez, the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the women's rights movement.

**26<sup>th</sup> Amendment.** Throughout most of American history 18-year-olds could join the armed forces, but could not vote until they were 21. During the Vietnam War this glaring inconsistency stood out because there was a draft and the war was unpopular. In 1971, the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment was signed by President Nixon.

**Persian Gulf War.** (August 1990-February 1991) Out of the combined U. S. and international forces came 400,000 American men and women, and, among them, 113,000 African Americans (Sylvester, 1995).

**The Iraq War.** Current figures are not available on those exactly involved. Government figures do say almost 78% of the active component enlistment are Caucasian for Fiscal Year 2005 (United States Department of Defense, 2005).

**2000-2099: Democracy's Century?**

Democracy reform in the United States has taken on a renewed, urgent focus as presidential, congressional and state elections become increasingly hard-fought and closely decided. From basic concerns about election procedures to fundamental questions about full and equal representation, political leaders and the American people are engaged in a national dialogue about the health of American democracy not seen in a generation or more.

With the current global politics and wars, both civil and national, around democratization, plus the struggles of developing new democracies and national pro-democracy movements, the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is filled with individual, household, community, local and national conversations and debate about the potential of open and free democratic governments. In light of what is presented here, if this momentum continues, the world community will engage and judge, in a daily global experiment with democracy, to see if various democratic forms of government can live up to their possibilities--and in particular--will watch to see if a nation such as America lives up to its democratic potential.

#### **How will Middle East War veterans see America and will this mean a more democratic society?**

It is a substantial argument of this paper that the same rationale used by past US servicepersons--that there is a gap between American rhetoric and reality--to justify lobbying for significant changes in society in order to make America more authentic will, in "Democracy's century," be used to influence all Americans to be open to a better quality democracy—*one so compelling even the children will want to try it!*

What is potentially different about these veterans is the fact that many personnel are citizens in the National Guard, not professional soldiers. The Iraqi (and Gulf ) War vets, returning to their jobs and families, whose children attend public schools, will be open to seriously considering democratic education if approached. They may not necessarily be for democratic schools, but will not be against a pro-democracy movement in public schools either. How could they be? This is especially the case if they view:

- US/their efforts in Iraq as "a cause" to spread democracy to that country and the Middle-East
- Iraqi schools as places for children to be exposed to democracy's potential
- what has been going on since the early 1990s in regard to democratic education

The growth in the number of more democratic public schools and instances of shared decision-making in classrooms, plus the international development at the public and private levels--illustrated by the now 15 annual International Democratic Education Conferences (IDECs, see: [www.idec2008.org](http://www.idec2008.org)) and the new regional IDECs in Europe and Asia--will be influential. This momentum is illustrated by US organizations listed in this paper (League of Democratic Schools, CIRCLE, Forum for Democracy in Education, First Amendment Schools, etc., (See Democratic Organizations, p. 145) and the push to lower the voting age to 16 (Ferguson, 2004; Weiser, 2004; Kamenetz, 2008) will each combine to offer a rationale for veterans to consider democratic education when asked for their support.

Democracy's like a life raft. You're constantly going up and down. Your feet are always wet.  
You may never know where you're going, but you never sink.

-- General Colin Powell

**It's all about democracy: Being continually genuine**

Democracy is not a goal, it is a path. Democracy must constantly be reworked and improved upon. Middle-East war veterans know they defended American democracy and wished to share it with others. Thus, they know they must provide opportunities for their children, or their neighbor's and co-worker's children, to practice this ideal progressively by age and grade in their own public schools, carrying forward President Thomas Jefferson's dream that public education be education for democracy. In "Democracy's Century" democratic public schools and classrooms will provide the means for American democracy to be continually more genuine.

## HISTORY: INDIVIDUALS

### **Arthurdale Schools: Elsie Clapp and progressive education in the 1930s**

Arthurdale, West Virginia, was created by New Deal policymakers in the mid-1930s as a "resettlement community for displaced coal miners." Its schools (1934-1941) were a landmark in efforts to bring Deweyan ideals of progressive education to bear on community life. Community-centered pedagogy was central to school leader Elsie Clapp's progressive notions of child-centeredness, activity, and "culture community" which she professed fostered learning and citizen involvement (Perlstein, 1996).

### **Education as if citizenship mattered: Covello and Franklin High School (Johanek & Puckett, 2006)**

What might schools look like if citizenship mattered as much as reading and math? Dr. Leonard Covello (1887-1982) founded Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem, where he lived, in 1934. Influenced by social activists and his own immigrant experiences, Covello saw public schools as best situated to be centers for democratic education. Having direct contact with the community, they should cultivate a spirit of friendliness and intelligent cooperation. Like his contemporary Paul Robert Hanna (Stallones, n.d.) who in 1936 wrote the classic *Youth Serves the Community*, Covello wanted students to graduate with the willingness and capability to be change agents for a just and humane society. This promoted local democratic processes, cultivating a richer citizen participation in resolving intercultural conflicts among immigrants.

Through Covello's idea of "community-centered schooling" Franklin became a force for revitalization of the community in East Harlem. At Franklin, students studied and helped solve neighborhood problems. Teachers were dedicated to civic activism for democratic ends.

Covello left in 1956. Franklin became the Manhattan Center for Science and Math in the early 1980s.

For more on Dr. Covello see: <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=leonard+covello+democratic>.  
View the October, 14 1940 *Time Magazine* article mentioning Ben Franklin High "Lessons for Democrats"  
See: [www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,764836,00.html?promoid=googlep](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,764836,00.html?promoid=googlep)

### **Vito Perrone and the Struggle for Democratic Schools (Carini, 2005)**

Vito Perrone (1933- ) is an educator who taught at Northern Michigan University, the University of North Dakota, and Harvard Graduate School of Education. Influenced by Leonard Covello, he professes similar views about the role of education.

Perrone believes any educational practice needs to be assessed against its ability to contribute to building a society in which all members have increasing opportunity to participate fully in social and economic life, and in which every individual is better able to realize his or her potential within a socially interactive community. That education is about community, democracy, and concern for the well being of all humanity is what makes Perrone's vision and leadership so powerful. See his 1999, *Lessons for a New Teacher*, published by McGraw-Hill (ISBN-10: 0072324465).

### **Grace H. Pilon's Workshop Way: Self-managed learning and democratic schools (Thweatt, n.d.)**

Starting in 1927 and over the next 40 years, K-8 educator Grace Pilon developed the concept of "The Workshop Way." During the 1960s she refined the approach. Through other teachers, conferences, and universities, the word spread.

Through her observations she became interested in the attention spans of little children. Some children consistently finishing their work "on time" and were satisfied daily. There were others, however, who consistently became frustrated because they never had enough time to finish. It seemed to her that classroom living was a cruel way of life for too many children. Pilon loved children and dropped classroom approaches that hurt a child's nature.

#### **Self-management of learning: Students do more of the talking, modeling, and decision-making**

Pilon's response was to give 100% of students the right to be the active agents in the learning process, then the immediate mastery of knowledge skills cannot depend upon right answers. *It must depend on an environment that provides equal opportunities to manage the same experiences in different ways.*

Subject matter is not individualized. It is the way and the time for learning to learn and learning to think that are individualized. Students feel their worth as learners and thinkers and begin to believe in themselves.

In the Workshop Way, where the growth of worth and dignity is primary, students develop feelings of importance and intelligence, and experience the power of managing their own learning. Workshop Way develops in the student a strong self-concept, a comfortable sense of inner self-direction and self-discipline, and an internalized respect for the rights of others while exercising their freedom of choice.

#### **Workshop Way: Self-managed learning leads to critical consciousness**

Pilon developed a system that goes beyond rhetoric and gives teachers a step-by-step plan to bring about change in their individual classroom. Her Workshop Way, based on democratic foundations, helps build thinking individuals who are liberated from unhealthy fears of failure. This provides access to equal opportunities for whole person growth. *Here students develop the critical consciousness which will result from their intervention in the world as*

*transformers of that world.* These students will be prepared to challenge the status quo and become the active adult citizens of tomorrow (Pilon, 1991).

The National Association of WW Educators was established in 1977. In 1990, WW Inc. was formed. See: [www.workshopway.com/timeline](http://www.workshopway.com/timeline)

### **Dennie Briggs and the Val Verde Project: Creating and growing learning communities**

During the summer of 1965, one of the first demonstration projects funded under President Johnson's War on Poverty provided the means to temporarily change the traditional structure of a public elementary school. The Val Verde Project worked with 200 economically disadvantaged children in grades Pre-K to 6th, mainly Black and Latino students/families living in a rural area of Riverside County in Southern California (The Planned Environment Therapy Trust Archive and Study Centre, 2005).

The project was coordinated by Dennie Briggs, who brought his experiences as a former prison and Navy therapist and the influences of the "social learning" concept of Maxwell Jones. The staff was a team of elementary teachers. School dropouts, college students, and parents who were all trained as teacher aides.

The focal point of the project was the daily staff "seminar" meeting. These leaderless sessions set norms/standards, handled conflicts, and reviewed and planned the individual, classroom, and daily school activities.

What is relevant here is that the project continually questioned the inherent and underlying matter of authority and its use (or abuse) in the teaching situation. This was manifested in the concept of a "Learning Community." This was a group with a family-like atmosphere where all members have a say, and all members have something to learn and teach others. This climate came in the form of: (1) a non-hierarchical or "multiple leadership" orientation, (2) cooperative learning and peer tutoring, (3) daily classroom meetings/peer discussion groups which shared in decision-making, and (4) classroom peer-oriented meetings where problems were talked out--*turning conflicts into learning experiences.*

Although the school did not continue, the program did show the importance of para-professionals, and linking school and community. With the program being voluntary, attendance was considered "spectacular." The school had less behavior problems than regular public schools according to the evaluations.

Briggs went on to promote peer tutoring (See his: *A Class of Their Own: When Children Teach Children* [1998] Bergin & Garvey Paperback) and influenced educators to turn student-student conflicts into learning experiences. He created the Youth Action Teams concept, an organized way to develop and carry out projects, large or small, using a program development model which the Planned Environment Therapy Trust Archive and Study Centre promotes at the international level. See: [www.pettarchiv.org.uk/pubs-dbriggs-inschool4.pdf](http://www.pettarchiv.org.uk/pubs-dbriggs-inschool4.pdf) for his 2004 *Youth Action Teams* guidebook.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: 1950-2008

## **Youth who challenged America to live up to its promises**

As well as adults, youth, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have been strongly involved in civil rights, student and gay rights, and environmental activism.

### **Barbara Johns: Teens help initiate US civil rights movement ("Barbara Rose Johns," 2008)**

Barbara Rose Johns was born in [1935](#). She lived in [Prince Edward County](#), Virginia, on a farm. Barbara's uncle was the prominent civil rights activist Reverend [Vernon Johns](#) whose outspokenness influenced her.

In [1951](#), 16 year-old Barbara was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade at the all-black [Moton High School](#) in [Farmville, VA.](#) Across town was another school open exclusively to white schoolchildren. Barbara's school was designed and built to hold roughly 200 students, but in 1951 400 were enrolled. Frustrated with the separate and highly unequal facilities, Barbara decided to do something.

### **Organizing against "separate and equal"**

Ms. Johns met with several classmates and they all agreed to help organize a student strike. The principal of the school was tricked into leaving by being told that some students were downtown causing trouble. Meanwhile, she forged a memo from Moton's principal telling all teachers to bring their classes to a special assembly. Here, she delivered a speech revealing her plans for a student strike. The students agreed to participate, and on that day they marched down to the county courthouse to make officials aware of the large difference in quality between the white and black schools.

While the strike was being carried out, the students sought legal counsel from the NAACP which filed against the school district; but, that case failed. The NAACP's appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Davis v. Prince Edward County*, along with four others cases, became part of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

### **Youth Activism Overlooked**

As *Davis* was the only case in *Brown* initiated by student protest, it is seen by some as the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. Barbara Johns' contribution to civil rights is often overlooked due to the fact that she was a teenager when she made a difference.

## **Other student protests: Walk outs, boycotts, strikes, sit-in's, demonstrations, and rallies**

The history of student voice and student political/social activism, which is encouraged by a climate of democracy, is as old as America's public schools. Students of the history may have to infer the many individual and group writings, publications, and actions that may not have made the news as the following small event did. On September 23, 1922 many students at Mineola (Long Island, NY) High School walked out of school to show support for their senior class president who was suspended over a disagreement concerning her absence from that day's study hall (Mineola High School Students Strike, 1922).

African American young people led boycotts, freedom rides, voter registration drives and rallies across the south. African American high school students sacrificed their safety and often disobeyed their parent's wishes as they engaged in civil disobedience, filling the jails with their young bodies (Cohen, 2006).

A review of the events reveals that most student civic action was a product of efforts by students to make America live up to its promises of equal opportunity and equality under the law centering around faculty, textbooks, curriculum, dress codes/arm bans, funding, and facilities of the civil right era.

In 1966 students at Northern High in Detroit called a general strike to protest the future of urban schools and demand better learning opportunities (Bernard & Mondale, 2001).

In the fall of 1968 approximately 30,000 African American and Latino/a students started sustained boycotts to protest the quality of education (Bernard & Mondale, 2001). Protesting the lack of Black history courses, black teachers and administrators, and poor quality facilities, black high schools in Chicago walked out of school (Danns, 2003). High school student activism by Chicano students in the Los Angeles area in 1968 (Ochoa, 2008) led to subsequent rebellions and trials (Lopez, 2003). On Friday, April 5, 1968, the day following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 250 African American students at William Penn Senior High School, also known as "York High," in York, Pennsylvania, refused to attend class. Instead the students quietly barricaded themselves in the auditorium of the school to commence Black Pride Day (Wright, 2003). See the film *Walkout: Reading. Writing. Revolution.* ([www.hbo.com/films/walkout/](http://www.hbo.com/films/walkout/)) based on the East L.A. student protests of 1968.

The famous 1969 Crystal City, TX student boycott over lack of Mexican-American teachers, culturally relevant textbooks, and excessive pressure on students to "Americanize" grew to over 200 walk-outs across the nation. This led to the community organizing and winning 4 seats on the Crystal City school board in 1970 (Bernard & Mondale, 2001).

#### **Youth activism today: The legacy continues: MySpace, blogging, "buycotting," text messaging**

But no matter how important young African Americans proved to be to the Civil Rights Movement, they have been equally active and instrumental in other movements and politics. Whether it is the Black Power movement, the Anti-apartheid movement, or the organized mobilization against mass incarceration, African American youth have been and continue to be at the center of these efforts, providing leadership, analysis, and energy (Cohen, 2006).

On May 15, 1994 San Francisco Bay Area High School Students held a strike in support of Chicano Studies. See [www.rwor.org/a/rwindex/text/rw1994.htm](http://www.rwor.org/a/rwindex/text/rw1994.htm)

At the RadFest 2003 Midwest Social Forum in the workshop "High School Student Activism" 6 students covered their efforts organizing for social and political change in Wisconsin involving rallies, teach-ins, debates, vigils, walkouts, and student strikes. See [www.radfest.org/archives/radfest03/program03.htm](http://www.radfest.org/archives/radfest03/program03.htm)

June 6, 2003 was the day [Portland Oregon high school students took to the streets, occupying City Hall](#). The strike was a response to the failure of the legislature to pass Measure 28 which promised significant money for public schools. This strike resulted from a walk-out in December of 2002, a sleep-in at Lincoln High School in January of

'03, and their recent visit to the state capitol of Salem to lobby the legislature. See [portland.indymedia.org/en/feature/archive68.shtml](http://portland.indymedia.org/en/feature/archive68.shtml)

For an overview review of student voice see *Young Activists* (Graham, 2006), a look back at the social unrest and reform movements of the 1960s. The book specifically examines high schools in America and how they were shaped by these turbulent times. Graham also explores how students of this era actively helped further the change with their involvement in issues such as the Civil Rights Movement, racial segregation/integration, Black power/Brown power, anti-war, dress codes, arm bans, student rights, and underground newspapers.

Today's student protesters rally against high stakes testing, locker/personal searches, and the war in Iraq. Youth activism with respect to the environment (Buffett, n.d.) or global alternative energy sources ([www.solaryouth.com](http://www.solaryouth.com)), student unions ([www.phillystudentunion.org](http://www.phillystudentunion.org)), and protests against restrictive dress codes (Pesa, 2006) are notable.

Recent high school student walk outs on immigration used "MySpace" and text messaging to self-organize. Students are also engaging in new forms of politics: blogging, "boycotting" (not buying certain items to protest i.e. child labor), or making purchases because one agrees with the politics and social values of the company producing the good (Cohen, 2006).

### **The contributions of the Alternative Education Movement to democratic education in public schools**

In the early late 60's to early 70's, in an effort to improve public education, some public school educators began to try smaller schools, learning options, individualization, and having students and parents share in creating their school's vision and in other decision-making processes (MAEO, 1995; Barr & Parrott, 1997; Smink, 1998). In many ways this is what made them so different from the traditional public schools.

These schools (along with the ideas and philosophy from the Southern freedom schools, Black independent schools, private free schools, and urban storefront street academies) were studied and promoted as "alternative" schools. As a result of this challenge to the "one best system" professional educators learned that children and their parents were capable of making decisions about how and what they learned, and other important school decisions when given the respect and opportunity. The concepts of magnet schools, charters schools, and the current small schools movement are the legacy of these courageous innovators and their non-traditional school climates (Neumann, 2003).

The 70s alternative education movement also gave new impetus to the Thomas Jefferson/John Dewey inspired democratic purposes of public education. Many of today's educators, classrooms, schools, and civic education curricula, as well as democratic education and civic education organizations and programs are influenced by the re-birth of democratic practices involving all stakeholders—practices originally initiated and promoted by alternative public schools of choice.

### **Alternative school checklists that endorse school/classroom democracy**

Currently there are four national-class alternative school checklists that endorse shared decision-making with students as a factor in determining the authenticity and the effectiveness of public alternatives of choice. These checklists infer the inherent limitations of the current non-democratic “soft jails” (Raywid, 1994) alternatives where “at-risk” students attend involuntarily:

1. John Harris Loflin’s “Pseudo-alternative School Checklist” [www.educationrevolution.org/pseudo.html](http://www.educationrevolution.org/pseudo.html)
2. Dr. Ray Morley’s “Checklist of Quality Indicators” [www.learningalternatives.net/Quality\\_Indicators.pdf](http://www.learningalternatives.net/Quality_Indicators.pdf)
3. Seattle’s “Quality Indicators for Alternative Schools” from Elaine Packard’s alternative education study committee [www.learningalternatives.net/Seattle\\_alt\\_ed\\_survey.pdf](http://www.learningalternatives.net/Seattle_alt_ed_survey.pdf)
4. National Dropout Prevention Center’s “Essential Elements of Effective Alternative Schools: Type I” <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/dayart/PDF/NDPCReportFinal.pdf>.

## PART TWO: YOUTH AND CIVIC EDUCATION IN THEIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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### **High school Civics: A 20<sup>th</sup> century concept irrelevant to the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy**

According to the Center for Civic Education, civic education as a discreet curriculum began between 1900 and 1920 in efforts to Americanize the waves of immigrants. Sometimes referred to as "pressure cooker" civics, these early initiatives tended to be intricate and dull, but they carried on, sustained by the patriotism of WW I and II and the "us against them" mentality of the early years of the Cold War (Quigley, 1999).

The report of the 1916 Social Studies Committee of the National Education Association's Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (Evans, 2004) attempted to recast American social education by addressing students' immediate concerns and needs. Courses such as Community Civics and Problems of Democracy, both integrating various social science disciplines and stressing contemporary issues, were implemented.

The 1918 Cardinal Principal of Secondary Education stressed civic oriented goals such as citizenship and ethical character. The depression of the 1930s and the growth in the number of teenagers and high schools in the 1940s came to influence Civics. These economic and social changes of the 40s and 50s pushed civic education away from an emphasis on the individual to that individual's place in society.

From a 1960s anti-establishment's critique of America's traditional values, arose the respect for diversity and multiculturalism. With more immigration, the US now has a diverse society which is out of synch with the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Straight Male values that once dominated civic education. Quigley (1999) notes, "*Redefining civic education in this polyglot world is the overriding challenge for civic educators today.*"

#### **Civics: 1922**

In the early 1920s, [J. Montgomery Gambrill](#) (1922) described civic education as preoccupied with small-group relations and personal conduct and manners while teaching a patriotic belief that "...the United States is in every respect the greatest and best country in the world, and particularly that it is morally superior to any other nation and is the natural mentor of mankind."

#### **Civics 2005: Is Civics any different? A course description, Londonderry, NH High School**

The current course is concerned with the organization and operation of government on the local, state, and national levels (Londonderry High School Civics Curriculum, 2005):

- Students will be exposed to the major ideas, protections, privileges, and economic systems that affect the life of a citizen in the US political system.
- Students will be able to identify national and US foreign policy issues facing Americans, and understand their role (rights and responsibilities) as citizens at all levels of government and in the world today.

A review of the curriculum saw no more than academic understanding through memorization, essays, and projects. This limitation falls within the critique of Gutmann (1995) that school Civics courses tends to be too patriotic - discouraging critique of the United States, and repressive when it fails to teach respect and appreciation for the positive contributions by minorities to America's common culture.

Requiring students to help run Londonderry High School (help write school rules, budgets, assessment rubrics, or hire teachers) so they will know how to run America was not within the spirit of the curriculum.

#### **What does a national-level civics assessment study comparing 1998 and 2006 reveal?**

The 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics assessment study (Lutkus & Weiss, 2007) evaluated 25,000 students at grades 4, 8, and, 12 for their understanding of the democratic institutions and ideals necessary to become informed citizens in shaping America's future. The results are compared with those of the 1998 civics assessment.

- About 69% of American students at grades 4, 8, and 12 have at least a basic knowledge of civics. Average scores improved from 1998 to 2006 only at grade 4.
- Overall, knowledge of civics by students in grade 8 has not changed since the 1998 assessment. White and Hispanic students showed score gains.
- Twelfth-graders, tomorrow's voters, performed at about the same level in 2006 as they did in 1998. No student group showed a statistically significant increase.

#### **Urban youth's negative view of civic education (Rubin, 2007)**

Why do urban students and students of color tend to lag behind their suburban and white middle-class peers in such measures of civic knowledge and engagement? To understand young people's development of civic identity (their sense of connection to and participation in a civic community), Beth Rubin took the meaning youth, from a variety of socioeconomic contexts, make of their daily experiences with civic institutions and their agents (e.g., teachers, police, social workers).

**Disengagement or a rational response to hypocrisy in an American society that purports equality, but delivers injustice?**

What some see as “disengagement” for minorities and poor in the civic education in schools and civic activities before/after graduation may actually be a rational response to the “dis-junctures” they experience in an American society that purports equality but delivers injustice.

With suburban/middle class, affluent, and often white students, there is such a common congruence between daily experiences and societal ideals (combined with a lack of exposure to the existing dis-junctures) that a complacency develops that appears to fuel a limited view of civic engagement. Although these students have no personal negative experiences, those who have learned about injustice in school or from family, recognize their privilege, and become aware that disjunctures exist for others. They see civic involvement as necessary for equality and fairness.

#### **A proposal: New directions for school-based civic education**

Most civics and government classes are not structured to build upon both positive and negative “civic” experiences, instead emphasizing content coverage and traditional pedagogies. Although many educators choose to avoid controversial social and civic issues in their classrooms, they must realize identification and explorations of problems—disjunctures—are the very practices that students cited when describing a shift to a more active civic identity. Civic and government teachers might consider adopting an “attitude” of critical consciousness when teaching today’s students. See Recommendation 7, p. 66.

#### **The effect of social class culture on American conceptions of democratic practices: Rethinking democratic education with working-class students via “democratic solidarity” (Schutz, 2008)**

Although this paper intends to show that most attempts by public schools at democratic empowerment and citizenship skills in the US are an academic “civics” that lacks practice and real world engagement, Aaron Schutz argues that past and current progressive attempts may also be lacking.

Progressive curricula/teachers value the more middle-class forms (the active ideas put forth by progressive John Dewey) which foster practices enhancing individuality within informal collaborations; however, are they best for all students? Do middle-class teachers often misapply perspectives derived from their own life-world to the very different experiences of the poor?

[Schutz](#) sees current forms of democratic engagement as quite limited when compared to practices of “*democratic solidarity*” developed by the working class that emphasize tradition, hierarchy, and the pragmatic importance of speaking in a collective voice. Many progressive middle-class teachers tend to ignore the potential resources of the “democratic solidarity” concept, limiting their ability to foster effective practices of social action among working-class children.

#### **A brief history of social class in America**

Schultz explores the clear distinction between how the middle and working classes emerged in America after 1850 during rapid urbanization and industrialization. Well educated and using professional certifications and credentials, the emerging middle class had to learn to act as relatively independent and mobile individuals to obtain

and keep their status. A new character ideal emerged in this impersonal world: the “team player” able to constantly shift relational ties and work closely with relative strangers.

Industrialization molded the new working class. In factories, the holistic skills of artisans were broken down into separate operations, reducing worker control and holding wages down. In response, workers developed pragmatic strategies of collective solidarity very different from the individualism of the more privileged. They stressed the importance of “mutualism” and “reciprocity,” depending on their long-term relationships and closely knit communities for survival.

### **Parenting practices: Key characteristics of middle and working class culture in America**

Schultz also explores parenting styles. Middle-class children learn at an early age to monitor themselves and make their own judgments. They pick up their parents' preferences for relatively abstract forms of reasoning. Independent and individualistic, they learn to interact with a shifting cast of characters and form mainly “weak” social ties. This prepares them well for the kind of information-driven, symbolic management contexts they will face at the corporation or as employers.

Working-class parents, in contrast, tend not to focus on encouraging individual expression with their children, emphasizing the importance of tradition, authority, and membership in a strong network of community and family ties--practices and attitudes that fit well with the demands of working-class jobs.

### **John Dewey vs. Saul Alinsky: Discursive democracy vs. democratic solidarity**

Schultz points out two distinct approaches to democratic social action are associated with these class cultures: “Discursive democracy” and John Dewey, and the working-class approach, “democratic solidarity,” represented Saul Alinsky.

In Dewey's essentially middle-class vision, authentic democratic practices were those that nurtured individual distinctiveness amidst collective action—reasoned dialogue leading to consensus. Alinsky developed an approach to community organizing that focused on the enhancement of the *collective* power and voice of the impoverished--strategies for democratic collective empowerment that seem much more relevant to the socially and economically oppressed than the time-intensive and often culturally alien forms of discursive democracy preferred by the middle class.

### **Social class democratic empowerment and public schools**

Public schools are environments dominated by middle-class practices and values, ignoring working-class ways of being and rarely acknowledging this exclusion. Because abilities in discursive practices are general requirements of middle-class advancement, John Dewey's form of democratic education has become so dominant that it is rarely challenged.

According to Schutz, democratic education that intends to empower the urban working class must acknowledge the limitations of deeply held and largely class-based commitments to discursive democracy and give new regard for grassroots approaches to collective empowerment.

Although this paper recommends a direct democracy and an even more inclusive “democratic anarchy” (See Appendix G, p. 127) for today’s politically savvy global youth culture, both may not be appropriate to all students. More research is needed to see the effects of a form of representational school democracy--a situation that takes the traditional student council concept and transforms it into one enabling a working-class oriented student council based on the “democratic solidarity” concept.

### **A common interest, but no common ground: Rethinking youth’s civic engagement (Celestine, n.d.)**

Jamila Celestine is concerned with America’s civic life. She worries that people and communities are becoming less inclined to pursue shared goals, thus solidifying bonds of social trust and overcoming dilemmas of collective action. She believes this political apathy leads to even less civic participation which correlates to plummeting levels of social trust and neighborliness, which directly affects the quality of public life and the functioning of representative government.

This concern inspired her to issue a “Memo on Youth & Civic Engagement” she titled “African-American Youth and Civic Engagement: A Brief Review of the Literature.” The memo revealed that very few scholars within the field of youth engagement comprehensively consider influences and implications relevant to youth civic engagement.

The primary purpose of her memo is to provide an accurate portrait of the state of research on youth civic engagement, while paying special attention to the place African American youth occupy in current research agendas.

The influence of this thesis of civic decline, according to Celestine, is particularly pertinent to research regarding youth. She cites data to show youth are less involved and lists the traditional causes. As well, she notes that the *“DotNets” generation (15-25 years of age) may not be less engaged in civic life, but simply engaging in new and different ways traditional causal theories overlook.*

Celestine’s main concern is that while current research often includes descriptive references to racial subgroups, on the whole, social scientists who explore civic engagement are generally not interested in detailed evaluations of youth civic life along racial lines.

### **Civic participation vs. political participation: New ways to view youth engagement**

She distinguishes civic participation and political participation both of which are seen as “civic engagement.” Civic engagement includes any activity, individual or collective, devoted to influencing the collective life. Thus political voice can mean participation in formal government institutions, being a part of a group or organization, volunteering at a soup kitchen, protesting or boycotting, voting/running for office, or even simply talking to a neighbor.

### **Civic knowledge vs. civic competence: Does service learning increase engagement?**

To Celestine, there is a growing distinction between civic knowledge and civic competence--namely between learning facts about democratic citizenship and being inspired toward and equipped for it.

She notes that service learning is an attempt to bridge this difference. This suggests a need for research, along demographic lines, to see if service learning does lead to more civic engagement after graduation.

What is particularly relevant here is Celestine's assertion that service-learning initiatives are more effective among black adolescents whose group history and life experiences have engendered sensitivity to community needs or that service-learning approaches face unique obstacles in minority communities and must take a novel form in order to achieve successful outcomes. Also see Recommendation 12, p. 71.

**Can bad schooling inhibit desire for civic engagement?** She also suggest more research on specifically charting the ways that bad or ineffective schooling can act as a barrier to civic participation by reproducing and exacerbating existing social inequities that disadvantage poor and minority youth.

### **Misunderstanding of urban youth engagement**

Celestine points out research in two areas where urban youth engagement is being misunderstood and thus misrepresented: (1) Although urban youth appear disengaged, it is not because they are satisfied or blasé, but rather because they are alienated from the institutions and processes of civic life and lack the motivation, opportunity, and ability to overcome this alienation. This reflects the distrust youth have of public institutions due to the legacy of government not responding to minority concerns, and (2) Celestine notes research that suggests broadening the current limited definition of civic engagement. Traditional terms such as "cynical" or "alienated" to categorize broad demographic groups misrepresent the complexity of youth's attitudes. Instead of this limited view, she insists that urban youth, growing up in neighborhoods and schools with insufficient resources, are actively partaking in civic life via "critical analysis of structural forces and power." *Black urban youth*, participating in a complex process of "critical" civic engagement in which their civic activism is motivated by their personal experiences of social problems, *are engaged*.

### **There is common interest, but no common ground: Lack of agreement by youth advocates on the means to engage youth**

In conclusion, Celestine acknowledges the variety of ways to frame youth civic engagement--from perspectives that include educational, political, economical, cultural, etc. Although this adds to the richness of the literature, it also "engenders conflicting prognoses of how to cure America's civic ills." In short, there is common interest, but no common ground. This leads to little agreement across or even within disciplines on the means to engage and help youth.

She suggests interested adults draw on inter- and intra-disciplinary discourses in order to produce work that provides wide-reaching yet detailed explanations of the dynamic of civic engagement among the various youth populations in the United States.

### **Reinterpreting *e pluribus unum*: Combining Civics and multicultural education by teaching mutual respect**

Many contemporary controversies about public schooling turn on the "clash" of two apparently competing

educational aims: securing civic unity against respecting cultural differences.

Amy Gutman in her essay, "Challenges of Multiculturalism in Democratic Education" (1995) argues that democratic education, through the use of mutual respect, will integrate both the unifying aims of civic education and diversifying aims of multicultural education. In her attempt to reconcile these two competing impulses, characteristic of a country of immigrants, she reinterprets America's motto, *e pluribus unum*.

### **Multicultural education must expand politically**

*Gutman insists multiculturalism must expand politically through teaching students the civic virtue of mutual respect and its understanding through practice.* This can be accomplished by involving students in classroom decisions and the day-to-day activities of school governance--teaching students how to engage together in respectful discussions in which they strive to understand, appreciate, and, if possible, resolve disagreements, including those that may be partly rooted in cultural differences.

### **Is simply teaching tolerance enough to help students face individual differences?**

Gutman sees the "to live and let live" essence of toleration as an essential democratic virtue, yet not a sufficient condition. Mutual respect, unlike tolerance, expresses the equal standing of every person as an individual and citizen. This makes it both a public and a private good.

Mutual respect also enables democratic citizens to discuss their political differences in a productive way by first understanding one another's perspectives and then by trying to find fair ways of resolving their disagreements.

### **Morally-informed deliberation: Practicing multicultural education**

The other foundation of Gutman's idea of democratic education is the practice of morally-informed deliberation. This literal practice of multicultural education engages students in according each other the mutual respect and moral understanding that is too often lacking in contemporary politics.

A multicultural curriculum dedicated to teaching a morally-informed deliberation would encourage students to respect each other as equal citizens, regardless of the accomplishments of their ancestors, and to take different points of view seriously when thinking about politics.

### **Limitations of civic education**

The problem for Gutman is that traditional Civics I & II curricula, intending to unify society with a common civic language, is too concerned with making sure all students have essential background knowledge of the constitution, the 3 branches of government, and relevant history. The practice of civics in schools and/or the community, through an action-oriented curriculum, is minimal.

### **Limitations of multicultural education: An appreciation of cultural diversity is not enough**

However, Gutman's main concern is current multicultural curricula. Like the emphasis of civic education on facts, expanding the knowledge of students meets only half the intellectual and moral challenge of the democratic role/responsibility of public education. An appreciation of cultural diversity (including cultural and gender identity and ethnic and religious heritage) is not enough.

Bolstering self-esteem/-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) by group identification is also not enough. This is true not because self-efficacy is unimportant or insupportable by education, but because the self-efficacy that is compatible with mutual respect among citizens cannot be acquired merely by means of group identification.

Mutual respect that rests only on a student's cognition of cultural diversity is an incomplete democratic virtue. Recognition needs to be accompanied by a *willingness*, which is enabled by an ability to deliberate about politically relevant disagreements.

### **Edging closer to reciprocity**

Gutman believes a school, with a culturally diverse student body, that is dedicated to morally-informed deliberation will strive for reciprocity in relationships: fair exchange--the same equal responsibilities and rights shared by all. This climate will enable agreement on relational disagreements, as well as classroom, and school policies that are (as far as possible) mutually acceptable to all who are bound by them.

#### **Democratic education: Inspiring a curriculum that unites Civics with multicultural education**

What is important for Gutman is that democratic education can inspire a curriculum that unites Civics and multicultural education. Such a curriculum:

- teaches mutual respect among citizens, reinforcing the unifying aim of civic education in a multicultural democracy.
- puts multicultural education in service to democratic values (the curricular goals of Civics), not in opposition.
- supports rather than subverts one of the most basic lessons of democratic education: that all individuals, regardless of their cultural identifications, have equal civic standing, and are honored or dishonored by their own acts, not by the acts of their ancestors.

#### **Summary: Civics + multicultural education (based on mutual respect + morally informed deliberation) = Democratic Education**

In conclusion, Amy Gutman states that just as a citizenship education, unmodified by multiculturalism, represses cultural differences, multiculturalism, uninformed by civic values, discriminates among citizens on the basis of their group identities. Schools can meet this challenge of multiculturalism by allying common civic values with uncommon cultural appreciations through democratic education.

For another interpretation of *e pluibus unum* see Walter Parker's idea of an Advanced Democracy in Recommendation 3 on p. 61.