

A Report on the
2004 International Democratic Education Conference

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“Politics is the art of preventing people from taking part in affairs that properly concern them.”

Paul Valery

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“Adults, why do you fear children’s participation?”

CWC Annual Report 2003

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Introduction:

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This year's themes promoted a new definition of education—one that would empower children to understand their situation, intervene, and change it. IDEC 2004 www.idec2004.com emphasized the right of children to interfere in the policy and program decisions of the classroom, school, and community that oppose children's rights.

IDEC believes children are naturally curious, and that all children are naturally creative and intelligent and want to learn. The conference suggested free schools, democratic schools, or alternative schools of choice can be a more viable alternative for many students underserved by the conventional schooling climate.

This questioned this traditional system's beliefs about the nature of children, its approach to learning and assessment, its narrow definition of what it means to be smart, and its ideas about the role of public schools in a democracy. This also challenged traditional policy definitions of special education, its over representation of certain groups especially males, and the use of medication for ADHD.

These themes were presented as an antidote to the problems many public schools around the world now face with respect to school violence, school disaffection, and low graduation rates.

IDEC 2004: Shanti in Education

Until the children are happy, there will be no peace in education

IDEC 2004

The 10 day 12th International Democratic Education Conference was held in Bhubaneswar, India with a view to strengthen a movement that aims to make both teacher and child participants in the process of learning through democratic ideals. Around 400 delegates, including children, youth, and adults from 19 nations, attended. Various workshops about free schools, alternative schools of choice, and democratic schools were held. There was a special effort to bring awareness of learning alternatives in marginalized communities especially groups working with poor children in Asia, Africa, and South America.

Education, traditionally, has been one-sided--teachers delivering lectures and the pupil being expected to understand all that is said. Democracy in education aims at involving both the teachers and child as participants in the process of learning and making necessary amendments in the learning process within the curriculum framework. The conference was organized by SchoolScape Center for Educators www.schoolscape.info of Bhubaneswar, and in cooperation with UNICEF.

The theme of the event was Shanti (Peace) in Education. According to *The International Journal of School Disaffection*, public schools around the globe are

unable to meet the needs of all families and students. Experiencing school violence, disruptive and troublesome students, high expulsion, suspension and dropout rates, thus low graduation rates, are now the norm. These circumstances encouraged the conference participants to talk about and critique contemporary schooling practices. Pointing out that the classroom is the most undemocratic place in society, the conclusion of the discussion was: Until the children are happy, there will be no peace in education.

In light of this summary, the conference began. Some of the more prominent workshops concerned presentations by the following international presenters and organizations.

If civic life is eroding, reinvigorating traditional civic education is not enough. We need to make education itself more democratic by involving students in meaningful deliberation of the purposes and goals of our public schools.

The Institute for Democracy in Education

Israel: Democratic Education

The keynote speaker was Yaacov Hecht, President of the Institute for Democratic Education (IDE) www.democratic-edu.org located in Tel Aviv. His theme was: *What is the purpose of education in a democratic society?* He discussed the international growth of democratic schools. Presently there are 500 democratic schools world-wide, with 25 in Israel. The IDE now has the Democratic Academy to train teachers for democratic education. There are 200 Israeli state schools involved. Historically, he argued, there have been 3 movements in education. In the 1920s, it was the progressive era, the 1960s reflected open schools and the free school/alternative education movement, and during the 1990s democratic education was discussed and practiced. The IDE believes this decade represents the *progressive democratic education* movement. He noted that in the future it will be easy to have the structure of democratic schools, but difficult to have the culture (human rights, freedom to think and talk, equality, and respect for individuality).

To encourage this culture, Hecht introduced his concept of ***Pluralistic Learning*** which describes what the learning process would be like. To begin, schools must have a renewed respect for the uniqueness of an individual. Schools must be a place that discovers, emphasizes, and develops the strength(s) of each student. Every individual on earth is unique. Human diversity is the fuel that runs the world. Thus, it should be the basis for all schools and places of learning. Human diversity means that the learning framework must acknowledge the fact that, "I am different and unique." If it does not, then it is not acknowledging the individual. This learning framework is founded on the idea that each person is unique and that each one makes a unique contribution to the world. This

school atmosphere will help each student acknowledge, accept, and express her/his own uniqueness.

Viewing students as a uniform audience leads to the creation of curricula that are dependent on age and content rather than on the unique individual. Pluralistic learning challenges the traditional system's narrow definition of intelligence or school success: students are tested and classified in terms of 2 kinds of abilities-- their ability to memorize information, and to a lesser degree, their ability to analyze it. And this closed system has a cost because it limits the value we place on diversity. In the traditional schools, a student's uniqueness is not relevant to life. What is more important is how close one gets to the norm: if you have high grades and are excellent. Thus, students continually check to see where they are compared to the average.

The educational system must make it possible for all students to discover their individual area of strength: the areas in which each person's individual nature excels relative to others. It is paramount importance that at the beginning of our lives we are allowed to grow in those areas in which we have the interest and capability to learn on a high level and the ability to experience success.

The result of pluralistic learning is a democratic culture. In such a school, different voices are heard—the school is not concerned with marketing success, but rather with encouraging the different voices within it as an opportunity for growth of the school as a whole. Different voices are not hidden or pushed aside; they are moved to the front of the learning community. In such a school, about every subject is open to debate: the building, organization of classes, school climate, lunch menus, the curriculum, or school governance.

A democratic culture advances every individual to the place where they can discover and express the unique individual inside and become aware of the enormous importance discovering and expressing the uniqueness inside every other individual and collaborating with him/her to foster school success.

To complement this pluralism, Hecht suggests schools/communities create *Excellent Centers* where students can be around experts who will help develop their unique individual interests and strengths. Students would spend 3 days in school and 2 in the centers.

To close his presentation, Hecht made the following points:

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 to human rights and increases social and environmental responsibility.

Democratic education views the declaration of human rights, and its pertinence to individual, social and environmental rights as the basis for the development of a true democratic culture.

Democratic education views life in a democratic community culture within the school system as the basis for promoting a global democratic culture.

Democratic education views the right of every human being to be recognized as a unique individual, and to express his uniqueness, as the basis for educational interaction centered on respect, tolerance, and love.

Democratic education views the right of every human being to direct his life in general, and his life within the school system in particular, as a preliminary condition for the promotion of independent, responsible, creative, and authentic individuals.

Democratic education views the educational field as comprised of all aspects of life, such as family, play, work, school, culture, and the environment.

Democratic education views every democratic educational system as a “laboratory” and every person involved in implementing democratic education as an “education researcher” who aims at creating new methods and breakthroughs in the fields of learning and education.

“If we are to reach real peace in this world, we shall have to begin with the children.”

Ghandi

India

Democratic programs with (not for) working and street children

Some of the more exciting and impressive presentations were those by the adults and children associated with programs that were democratic.

The Concerned for Working Children

In the mid-1970s, 40% of industrial accidents involved working children. Realizing these children did not have the tools to protect themselves on the job, Ms. Nandana Reddy began organizing them. She promoted a new definition of education—one that would empower children to understand their situation, intervene, and change it. She believed children had a right to interfere in policy and program decisions that opposed children’s rights.

Working with 9-15 year olds, the children decided not to join the adult union, but to create their own union. The group grew into The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) www.workingchild.org and is located in Bangalore. It is a secular, democratic, national, private development agency that works exclusively on the issue of child labor and children’s rights. CWC recognizes working children as the primary stakeholders in the organization.

Two other groups came out of the CWC initiative: The National Movement of Working Children (NMWC) in 1993 and the International Movement of Working Children's Organizations (IMWC) in 1996. The IMWC estimates there are presently 120 million working children in the world.

The children's participation in developing strategies is critical to the effectiveness of the CWC programs. CWC enables the children to access appropriate information, skills, and tools in order to realize their rights. CWC children have made presentations to the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child, taken on the liquor lobby, have influenced the India's child marriage tradition, environmental and children's health issues, and have formed special groups for children with disabilities.

The Bhima Sangha, a union of, by and for working children resulted from this process. It has membership of thousands of working children in the state of Karnataka and is a powerful advocate for the rights of working children. Along with the union, CWC facilitates Makkala Panchayats (Children's Village Councils) that enable all children of an area to participate in local governance.

School children's organizations have also been formed. Realizing the classroom is the most undemocratic place in society, in October of 2003, the NMWC submitted, "Education-related Problems Faced by Working Children and Their Recommendations" to the UN. This year CWC published, *A Unique Revolution: Children lead the way to decentralization and civil society participation*, which defends the rights of children to participate in decisions that affect them. Made with substantial contributions from working children, this informative rationale and how to book-- for both adults and children--uses education related issues and examples to illustrate working children's exceptional ability to be involved classroom, school, and district shared decision-making that have real-world outcomes.

Concerned that globalization will endanger democracy, Ms Reddy concluded her workshop by re-stressing that children must practice/experience democracy in order to understand it. She encouraged schools, religious organization, and civil organizations to create ways children can intervene. Thus, she demanded children must be taught:

How to have power:

- how to intervene in decision-making processes
- how to negotiate and advocate

Information is power:

- how to collect, analyze their own information, not the data of others
- how to use democratic means to make change

"Globalization will remove democracy in 25 years."

Nandana Reddy, CWC

Don Bosco Ashalayam: A movement with children in need of care and protection

Don Bosco Ashalayam (E-mail: ashayam@mantraonline.com) is a part of a global network running educational, technical, and community programs for street children and youth at-risk. Drawing inspiration from the 19th Century educator Don Bosco, the organization started in West Delhi in 1997. The word "with" is underlined because the organization's mission is to empower the young at-risk to be agents of personal and social transformation through a participatory approach.

Ashalayam runs drop-in centers, youth homes, night shelter homes, training and development centers, employment placement agencies, and outreach programs for homeless children. The "Childline" project is a national help line for children in distress. A Youth Bank initiated by street children supports other children in need. A board consisting of 8 street children as members manage the bank.

Butterflies Organization

In existence since January 1988 Butterflies Organization in Delhi has a democratic program through which street children and working children can get schooling. The emphasis is on children organizing and deciding what is important for them, and on developing pride and character.

With the help of adults, the children have organized a union of factory workers, shoeshine boys, rag pickers, flower vendors, tea shop attendants, bus and train station coolies, and set up their own restaurant for other street children.

"Children are the most learning-hungry beings in the world."

Ashley Montague

Montessori done the Indian way

The Abacus Montessori School is located in Chennai and was founded in 1987. Abacus believes that a child's education should be guided by the child's inner needs and interests. This system of education was developed in the early part of the last century by Dr. Maria Montessori, initially for 3 to 6 year olds who need to touch and feel, and then gradually for higher age groups up to 12 who need to use their legs and work in groups.

Abacus makes extensive use of the learning materials of the Montessori method, but also draws the methodology from the work done over the years in the field of education in India. Abacus was set up to bring new thinking into the life of a school, to try out new ideas in education, and to evolve an intensely child focused school. Children need to learn with spontaneity, rather than be taught. And, they need space, and the right learning environment for spontaneity to flourish. At Abacus, students are provided with an environment that is just right

for their specific age group. They have the opportunity to choose their work and whether to work individually or in small groups. In a mixed age group, children not only share their talent and skills with others, but more importantly, direct their own learning. Contact Pooja Pandit ppandit@hotmail.cm.

"The classroom is the most undemocratic place in society"

Nandana Reddy, CWC

New Zealand: The Tamariki Democratic School

Tamariki www.tamariki.school.nz is the oldest "free school" in New Zealand and one of the oldest in the world. It was founded in 1966 by a group of parents, teachers and people interested in preventative mental health and in supporting each child's own developmental pattern. It was loosely modeled on Summerhill.

The mission of Tamariki is to equip each child according to their nature and talents, to lead a personally satisfying life, and to be an effective and contributing member of a democratic society. To help insure the mission will be met, students direct their own learning and participate in school governance.

Tamariki stand as the antithesis of the current New Zealand public schools, a system it sees as primarily passing on only the academic part of the culture with its hidden curriculum of unquestioning obedience.

If the street children and the working children of Calcutta and New Delhi and Bombay can make important school and organizational decisions that affect them, so can urban students in America.

John Loflin

England: The Sands School

A unique and innovative alternative of choice for 11-16 years olds, the Sands School www.sands-school.co.uk is located in Ashburton, Devon, UK. In a democratic climate, students have a strong say in running the school. Thus, they are free to be themselves and enjoy their school life. Students are also free work at their own pace, and so to explore how to learn effectively.

"Peace and democracy go hand in hand."

Nelson Mandela

Brazil: Lumiar School: Where students can be responsible in a democratic space

Lumiar www.lumiar.org.br is located in San Paulo. It is a democratic multicultural school with a proposal based on the most advanced technologies through which children learn in an interactive and universal way. At this new school (founded in 2003) with 40 children form ages 2-10, the educator has the role of mentor or tutor of all students, listening, stimulating and guiding learning itineraries as the children follow their interests.

Democracy presupposes the participation of everybody. For this Lumiar works with small groups, making sure everybody participates. At weekly meetings each participant, student or adult, has one vote. School decisions run the gamut from behavior, video game rules, school projects, or the color of walls to where and when to go on outings. Monthly council meetings with students, parents, and teachers decide on school calendars, reports and reforms.

Children of various cultures and social background learn without hierarchy, acquiring the capability of respecting the differences. At Lumiar, knowledge is respected—professional experts from various areas share with the children their passion for knowledge and the study groups are formed based on common interests.

“Anyone who thinks children are the leaders of tomorrow is only procrastinating.”

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Germany: Berlin’s “Sudbury Valley”

The Sudbury-Schule Berlin-Brandenburg is a democratically run, non-graded, private school. With no set curriculum, students are challenged to figure out what they want to do and how to do it. Recognizing that many students do not do well in traditional schools because they are made to study things in which that have no interest, Sudbury redefines learning as studying what you enjoy. Students learn at their own pace, and they learn well because they are passionate about what they are discovering. Students end up with a broad perspective on life with greater personal resources and a sense of individual responsibility only an environment of freedom can offer.

As well as being responsible for their own education, students are responsible for the whole school community in conjunction with others. The school is managed during weekly School Meetings and this is basically where the day-to-day policies are created. Another group called the Assembly--which includes students, staff, and parents--meets to deal with broader school policies. A judicial system, which is an arm of the School Meeting—meets daily and investigates written complaints about possible rule violations. The Judicial Committee (JC) is made up of students, 2 of whom are elected and 5 of whom are selected by lot from the various age groups, and a staff member chosen on a daily basis. This group is like a little court system--investigating complaints and deciding what will happen. Trails sometimes result, and depending on the verdict, sentences given. To learn more about the Berlin program write Martin Wilke martin.wilke@gmx.net.

“What happens in the classroom will, in the final analysis, reveal how deep are the roots of our democratic commitment.”

H. G. Hullfish

Japan: School Refusers

During his workshop “Free School Network” Kageki Asakura discussed the 1980s

when the Japanese public schools experienced an increase in school disaffection. Some students stopped going to school and became what are now known as "school refusers" (or "futoko" in Japanese). In 1985, school refuser Ms. Keiko Okuchi and parents of other school refusers started an democratic alternative of choice to the traditionally large and very competitive government schools, where bullying was also an issue. Since the Tokyo Shure www.shure.or.jp free school opened, the movement has grown. In 1999, various students from Tokyo Shure started the Shure University. In 2001 a free school network www.freeschoolnetwork.org was founded to support other free schools. Presently there are 126,000 school refusers in Japan. The group publishes *Fonte*, the "futaoko" newspaper www.futoko.org. They have also established the Home Shure organization for Japanese homeschoolers www.homeshure.jp.

"And while the work of preparing citizens for a democracy must include more than the schools, the schools are the public institution best positioned to affect the vast majority of young people." Westheimer & Kahne

South Korea: Alternative schools of choice

In South Korea, alternative schools are places that provide learning opportunities for students who have dropped out of school or who have not had a chance to attend school. After the 1980s school attendance in South Korea increased, yet many youth had trouble adjusting and left school. As a result, various private organizations began programs for these disaffected youth. In 1990, legislation provided government approval of some of these options.

Presently, there are regular public alternatives, many of which are boarding schools in rural areas. In Seoul, 13 small Urban Alternative Schools operated by city youth centers or private groups work with around 300 middle and high school students. To support these many public and private options of choice, alternative educators created the Seoul Alternative Learning Community Network (SALCN) www.activelearning.or.kr. Although these current options are not democratic, one of the main reasons why the South Korean delegation attended IDEC, was to introduce the advantages for students/teachers of shared decision-making.

An interesting point to be made here is that these Asian options reflect an appreciation for genuine alternatives, alternatives **to** the traditional schooling approach. Currently, in the United States, there is a proliferation of alternatives **of** the traditional schools where students do not attend by choice. These programs are alternatives in name only: pseudo-alternatives that represent ineffective and punitive approaches that isolate and segregate from the mainstream students who can be difficult (Loflin, 2004).

The educators from both countries were very amazed that the majority of

alternative programs/schools in USA are the at-risk/rehabilitative options where only bad kids are sent to be "fixed" and then reassimilated. They were also not aware of the history of alternative education and the changes it has gone through to the extent that alternatives now have a stigma (Loflin, 2000).

Teaching students to share responsibility for their 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

Australia

The Booroobin School: Democracy's finishing school

The school provides for self-directed learning for students 4 to 19 years of age and is based on the Sudbury Valley School model of education. It was approved by the Queensland Education Dept as a non State School in January 1996 and commenced operation in February 1996. The school is a democratic place of learning founded on important principles not found in most other schools in Australia. These unique principles lay important foundations for life beyond school. The principles are that:

- equal status is given to students and staff (there is no hierarchy);
- a curriculum is determined by the individual interests of students and staff with equal status being given to all learning pursuits;
- individual responsibility is implicit in being enrolled at the school; and
- learning is best fostered by self-motivation, self-regulation and self-assessment.

These principles are supported through a weekly School Meeting which all students and staff can attend to make all the day to day operational decisions in the school; a Law Book containing all the rules which apply in the school, composed and decided only through the School Meeting; a justice system mainly comprised of students which upholds the rules; School Corporations which are special interest groups of students and staff completely deal with their own affairs; and by the wisdom, life experience and support of staff who are elected annually by secret ballot by voting members of the School Meeting.

Booroobin believes that children are naturally curious, creative, generally intelligent and want to learn. The school provides an environment for students to express and explore these qualities, with responsibility, in ways that best suit them as individuals regardless of how old they are.

Currumbera: Learning as a natural process

Currumbera www.currumbera.nsw.edu.au opened in 1969. The school believes all children are individuals with common needs for both security and challenge in their learning. The curriculum--all the learning experiences of the child--develops from the view that children are adventurous in acquiring knowledge,

intellectually curious, keen to find out and actively engaged in making sense of their world. Although topics in the classroom are decided by the children, it is up to the teachers to draw upon the New South Wales curriculum to ensure appropriate skills in all areas are acquired.

It has no school uniforms and children are individually assessed without competitive exams. It cares about the whole child, balancing academics with social, emotional and physical needs. This is especially the case as children are encouraged to express their needs, stand up for themselves, take responsibility for their actions and make their own decisions.

The children participate in running the school through weekly school and class meetings, chaired by children. They make school rules by majority vote and discuss matters of day-to-day importance ranging from rules about bringing balls to school to what equipment to include in the school playground. Debate and discussion of current issues are encouraged. Along with student input, the school is run by the School Council which consists of a majority of parents and some teachers.

"We children bear the brunt of the school's failure to implement and design child-centered policies and programs."

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United States

New York Albany Free School: School democracy on call at any time

Founded in the state of New York in 1969 by Mary Leue, the Albany Free School (AFS) www.albanyfreeschool.com is the oldest inner-city independent alternative school in the United States.

According to workshop presenter and former AFS teacher Michael Yoken, two important democratic developments that came out of that initial year. First, teachers and parents hammered out, in a series of intense sessions, the policy that only those actually present day-to-day in the building could determine the school policy. Others were welcome to attend meetings and to advise and suggest, but that would be the extent of their power. This absolute internal autonomy remains an operational cornerstone. Next, in order to empower the kids to participate in school governance, and to give them a way to nonviolently work out their differences (which were many in that initial period), Mary and the other teachers instituted a "council meeting" system, whereby anyone with a serious problem could call a meeting at any time, with everyone dropping what they were doing and attending. Meetings would be run by Robert's Rules of Order. Therefore anyone, with sufficient support, could set policy, make or change rules, and establish consequences for anti-social behavior. The council meeting structure provided a safety net for everyone, guaranteeing that, borrowing A.S. Neill's phrase, freedom didn't become license.

At the present time, the school's enrollment stands at about fifty-five, and approximately fifteen families and various individuals make up the Free School community. With no curriculum or any mandatory classes, AFS stress personal growth and field trips over blackboards, worksheets, memorization, and tests. Thus students, ages 2-14, determine what they'll learn, when they'll learn it, how they'll learn, and where they'll learn it.

This openness and freedom allows for a diversity that remains one of AFS's hallmarks. Approximately half of the kids come from the inner city, one-fourth from uptown neighborhoods, and the remainder from outlying suburbs and towns. Interestingly, this has brought about a situation where students with ADHD do not need Ritalin; they only needed freedom. At AFS, the behavior students get in trouble for in regular schools—restlessness, boisterousness, being flighty—are considered normal.

California Global Village School: A global school for peace and diversity

The Global Village School (GVS) www.globalvillageschool.org is an accredited private democratic k-12 independent study school preparing students to be global citizens, informed leaders, and effective agents of social change. Self-directed learning based on a student's learning style creates a school climate of independence and personal responsibility. To increase peace and understanding in the world GVS educates its student about the culture and contributions of all groups of people and presents role models and examples of peaceful coexistence.

A workshop "Honoring Learning Styles as a Pathway to Peace" by teacher GVS Sally Carless illustrated the school's philosophy: *Peace and harmony is letting people be who they are.* Problems occur in the classroom when students are forced to fit into the mold of, "Sit still, be quiet, and listen." When students are given the freedom to be different, to be themselves and are thus accepted for who they are, misunderstandings disappear.

Workshop attendees were give a sort of "disposition inventory" to see if they were of the performing, producing, inventing, relating, or thinking disposition. Once a student's disposition/learning style/who they are is respected, then activities formerly considered inappropriate or disruptive (i.e. talking a lot, needing to move around, wanting to work in groups, likes fun or is serious) less problems manifest.

Indiana A Learner's Bill of Rights: Preserving curiosity

The Learner's Bill of Rights (LBR) concept was presented at the conference. The LBR deals with learning and the processes involved with acquiring knowledge in a way so as to reduce anxiety and promote the joy and passion for learning. It tries to investigate the issues/factors involved motivation, joy, and passion. It

also attempts to address the student's relationship with "self", the teacher, and learning—how the student views learning, "self", and how the learner is viewed by the teacher/school.

Since virtually all children are born with the motivation to learn--this is a characteristic of our species--the objective of the initiative is to preserve the child's integrity, self-worth, and innate curiosity. Thus the problem is defined as the inability of the child and/or the school system to retain and maintain the qualities of curiosity and motivation. The solution proposed by the LBR is to provide a form to address the needs of the child by enabling the child to develop the assertiveness necessary to desire the best and to require the best from those involved in the education process.

Beginning in mid-January 2005, the Center for Inquiry (CFI), and magnet school in Indianapolis, and Mumbai's Dayanand Anglo Vedic Public School (DAV) will conduct a cross-cultural study of the affects of the Learner's Bill of Rights concept. A 4th and 7th grade class from each school will be involved. The year-long project will be done and published in coordination with Dr. H.L. Kaila Head of the (Psychology) Department of P. G. Studies and Research at Mumbai's S.N.D.T. Women's University. Students/staff will communicate via a LBR Yahoo group. Contact johnharrisloflin@yahoo.com

Colorado Lowerarchy: Democracy as a challenge to hierarchy

Workshop presenter Mr. Webb Eavenson guques@hotmail.com explained how the processes involved in the life of a tree can help educators understand how to process shared decision-making in the classroom and school. Each of the 7 levels of the processes is a stage of agreement that requires discussion and choices.

A Tree as a Living System same as stages of Democratic Process

Level 8

Regeneration: Next stage, processes of levels 1-7 repeated: Remember levels 2 & 4 need constant review; typical arguments between 2 & 4 blocked by strong level 3.

Level 7 *We see a tree as a part of an ecosystem; a school as a part of society*

Light: Atmosphere, oxygen

Completion: Happiness, nurturing environment, recreation, being more than the sum of its parts

Level 6

People want to see results

Fruit: With seed containing DNA

Results: Food, healthy children, profit, blueprint for others

Level 5

Actions actually take place

Photosynthesis: Multiple twigs/leaves turning sunlight into energy to grow/produce, reaching maximum potential

Action: Doing the many tasks, the hands-on work

Level 4	<i>Now we agree, let's decide; leadership with accountability to trunk</i>	
Branches:	Strong, reaching from trunk supporting the fruit and growth	Managers: Responsibility, delegate leadership
Level 3	<i>The more unified the vision, the stronger the trunk</i>	
Trunk:	Unified strength, it carries the sap from the root to each leaf	Shared perspective: the meeting place for listening & planning, unity
Level 2	<i>Ground level</i>	
Seedling:	Where the tree first breaks ground into the visible	Vision: One's mission in life, physical actualization, connections, foundations, deep passions
Level 1	<i>Below the ground—below conscious awareness</i>	
Roots:	Seeking water, growing deeper, can't be seen and must dig deep to find food	CoreBeliefs: Source of inspiration, beliefs from childhood, foundational motives, loves/hates

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

Westhiemer & Kahne

Summary IDEC 2004: Children's Participation

The major theme of IDEC 2004 was: *Participation is a natural instinct*. From the moment they are born, children begin to participate. They participate in order to communicate and to establish links with their environment. They participate in order to gain an identity and a membership in the community. They find meaning in their lives through their participation. Gradually, through their participation, they intervene in their external environments.

Children are attempting to participate all the time. IDEC 2004 illustrates this. There are many groups of children especially working children's unions and movements that have demanded and occupied space to participate, including political space. Also the IDEC presentations by free school and democratic schools students and staff proves that children can direct their own learning and can be a part of the classroom, school, and community decision-making process.

Children's classroom, school, and civic participation is not a project, it is not event based; it is a running theme through every action or intervention and it requires a major paradigm shift. The understanding of participation and the way it is translated into action varies and seems to be defined by the socio-cultural context of the child and the ideological frame surrounding this understanding. However, it is important to arrive at a culturally neutral definition of children's participation, where the principles are common, though the manifestations may vary according to the situation of children.

When children's participation is seen within the frame of protagonism it takes on another dimension: The right and the ability to advocate on one's own behalf, to be in control and to be a part of decision making processes and interventions. This form of participation of children and youth enhances the concept of civil society participation and strengthens democratic processes. We must ask the question, *What is the role of the public schools in a democratic society?* The DEC believes democratic education is the responsibility of our public schools. And, this is what we all must help our public schools do.

Adults in central Indiana can play a proactive role if they wish to enable children's civic participation. The business community, social organizations, the religious community, our political parties, labor and trade unions, community groups and agencies, as well as public health organizations must support the public schools in fostering democratic education. However, in order to perform this role adequately, adults need to prepare themselves. This has to be done with utmost seriousness and honesty. And perhaps the first lesson is that adults will have to "unlearn" many things before they can foster, in our own public schools, the very democracy we want for the world.

Remember, what happens in the classroom in the public schools of the United States will, in the final analysis, reveal how deep are the roots of our democratic commitment. This is the theme of Central Indiana Democratic Education Consortium.

Next year's event will take place in Berlin, Germany. See www.idec2005.com

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