

# DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATION: BEYOND THE CONSERVATIVE OR PROGRESSIVIST STANCES

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## INTRODUCTION

The general aim of this chapter is to explore the relationship between democracy and education. There are several views that philosophers of education and educationists have put forth with regard to the relationship of these two contested concepts. In this chapter I will focus on two major views: (a) the conservative or traditional stance and (b) the progressivist or student-centred stance. After offering a brief description of these positions and their corresponding assumptions, I will identify problems with both positions. My brief account and criticisms of these views will attempt to show that the difference in the stances taken about the role of democracy in education varies according to the different beliefs held about the nature of the child or the learner – beliefs which are really embedded in a certain ideological or political framework. The greater the optimism or trust in the learner, the greater the call for democratic practices in education. However, even such calls for democratic practices may rest on problematic educational assumptions, which actually may run counter to the very democratic spirit. My concluding remarks will focus on an alternative view about the relationship between democracy and education – one proposed by John Dewey, Amy Gutmann and Maxine Greene. This position, which is not meant to be a *via media* or a compromise between the conservative and progressivist views, offers a view, which goes beyond the either/or mentality characteristic of the other two stances. Ultimately, this position rests on a *reciprocal* relationship between democracy and education rather than a cause-effect, linear relationship.

## SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Most philosophers of education assume or take for granted, as Russell put it, that “[d]emocracy is a desirable thing.”<sup>1</sup> Yet agreement on this assumption does not guarantee that philosophers of education share a common conception of democracy or that they agree on the educational practices that democracy entails, even if they share a common conception or vision. As R.S. Peters noted: “That education should be ‘democratic’ no one in a democracy would seriously dispute...But what such an announcement

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would commit anyone to is far from clear."<sup>2</sup> This latter point is exactly one of the major problems that arise when one considers the relationship between democracy and education.

Although 'democracy' is a contested concept, one can safely distinguish between democracy as a form of government and democracy as a way of life. As Dewey contended, "democracy is much broader than a special political form, a method of conducting government, of making laws and carrying on governmental administration by means of popular suffrage and elected officers. It is that, of course. But it is something broader and deeper than that."<sup>3</sup> To be clear, neither Dewey nor most of the contemporary philosophers of education deny the political implications of democracy as a way of life, for this way of life does involve a certain power relation among human beings. When philosophers of education refer to democracy in relation to education, they normally mean democracy as a way of life.

There are other substantive distinctions that have been made about democracy. Theorists have distinguished between participatory, public, and critical democracy, on one hand, and representative, privatized, and managed/market democracy, on the other hand.<sup>4</sup> It has been argued that while the former notion of democracy is associated with equity, community, creativity, and taking difference seriously, the latter is protectionist and marginalist, and leads to an extreme form of individualism and spectator citizenship.<sup>5</sup>

Democracy and education are intimately related. Although philosophers of education with different educational and political beliefs have argued for the importance of investigating the relationship between democracy and education, the differences in their ideologies have obviously resulted in differences in how that relationship is conceived. While, for example, some have focused on 'education for democracy', others have argued for 'democracy in education.' The former concept raises questions such as: What kind of education is appropriate for a democracy? Is there room in education for developing the dispositions usually associated with the democratic way of life? What kind of values ought to influence education in a democracy? What kind of education is needed to allow democracy to flourish in the future? While the notion of 'education for democracy' does not necessarily lend itself to democratic practices in education, the notion of 'democracy in education' implies that there is room for developing democratic practices and dispositions in education. That is a given. The questions that arise from this perspective include: Does 'education for democracy' make sense without 'democracy in education'? What do we mean by democratic practices and dispositions in education? Is this applicable to all levels of education? If it is, then does it vary with the level, and on what grounds? To what extent does this depend on one's conception of the child or the student? What is the role

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of the teacher and the relationship between the teacher and the students when one applies democratic practices or encourages democratic dispositions in the class? What follows about curriculum decisions?

While the notion of 'education for democracy' does not necessarily exclude democratic practices in education, too much emphasis or focus on what is needed educationally to obtain or maintain a democracy would encourage the view that a causal/linear relationship exists or ought to exist between democracy and education rather than a reciprocal one. A strict causal/linear relationship would call for a one-to-one correspondence between education and democracy as well as a clear distinction between the realms of the two concepts. While not denying the close connection between education and democracy, a reciprocal relationship would call for a symbiotic connection in which both education and democracy rely on each other in order for both to flourish. The difference in how the relationship is conceived may ultimately depend on substantive ideological differences, which envision different notions of and expectations from education and democracy. In the following two sections I will briefly sketch and critically discuss the major qualities of two popular and influential educational positions.

### THE CONSERVATIVE POSITION

According to this position education essentially involves the teaching of knowledge to those who do not yet have it. This is seen as the primary responsibility of teachers in the schools of a democracy. For if this is not done well, then the students, the prospective citizens, will not have the knowledge and understanding needed in order to be able to participate in a democracy by making choices that matter in a responsible, autonomous manner. By definition, it is claimed, the students do not yet have the needed knowledge, which the teachers have and which gives them the authority to teach. Given such a vision of education, it is not difficult to envisage the incompatibility between education and democratic practices in educational institutions, since democracy involves equality, which is excluded from education. Hence some, like Anthony O'Hear, conclude that "education cannot be democratic... [E]ducation is irretrievably authoritarian and paternalist."<sup>6</sup>

What are some of the basic assumptions of this position?

- ◆ Teaching and imparting knowledge are identical. Teaching involves a one-way transaction: the teacher passes on the knowledge to the students who, it is assumed, are unable, at this stage, to contribute to the production or construction of knowledge, at least knowledge deemed to be worthwhile by the teacher.

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- ◆ Knowledge is seen as something that is merely given rather than constructed by active learners. Hence the need to directly and clearly transmit "a body of essential knowledge." As a result of this, there arises the tendency for knowledge to be seen as something fixed and unchangeable.
- ◆ Education is merely seen as a process of formation from the outside rather than as a process of leading out any innate or natural personal qualities. The focus is on forming rather than a dialectical (and possibly even a reciprocal) transformation.
- ◆ The students, as learners, do not have anything to contribute to the process of education (including teaching and constructing knowledge) – the experiences of the students are neither valued nor deemed to contribute anything positive to this process. For example, O'Hear writes: "Children, being uneducated, are in no position to make judgements on their goals or motivations or on what they are being taught or on their teachers."<sup>7</sup>
- ◆ All knowledge is acquired by being taught directly rather than by doing; no account is given of different *kinds* of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Knowledge is seen as one monolithic entity.
- ◆ Students learn merely what they are directly instructed in, that is, no account or acknowledgement of collateral, indirect or hidden learning is made – for example, values transmitted by teachers (through their actions) and learned by students, yet unintended by the teachers.<sup>9</sup>
- ◆ The relationship between education and democracy is viewed as a linear or direct, causal relationship: education secures democracy by producing citizens who have a certain knowledge and understanding and not by encouraging any questioning of the notions and methodologies of the disciplines being studied. Thus, for example, according to O'Hear, true education has nothing to do with "Socratism: the idea that education ought primarily to be about inducing a spirit of criticism in the young."<sup>10</sup> While not excluding the development of reason from the educational realm, O'Hear insists that "this is quite a different thing from instilling a critical spirit."<sup>11</sup>

**PROBLEMS WITH THE CONSERVATIVE POSITION**

Given that teaching is seen primarily (exclusively) as a matter of imparting knowledge (beliefs, etc.) to others, how does one account for other forms of teaching (Socratic teaching, teaching that involves doing, experimenting, discussions, teaching oneself, etc.)? Are these other forms of teaching incompatible with democracy? Several have argued that they are not since these forms of teaching promote or encourage the very attitudes that are consistent

with or actually emerge from the notion of democracy itself.<sup>12</sup> If this is the case, then defenders of the conservative stance have the obligation to show why these other forms of teaching are not really part of teaching.

In the same vein, one can raise a similar objection with regard to the conservative conception of knowledge: if all knowledge is deemed to be of one kind, then how does one account for claims to different kinds of knowledge: rational knowledge, emotive knowledge, intrinsic knowledge, knowledge as a social construct, etc.?

The conservative position does not consider the notions of democracy and education by degree: We are either educated or uneducated, mature or immature, democratic or undemocratic. It does not allow for possibilities in between. It pushes us into an either/or mentality. Even if we assume that such a dichotomy is plausible, we are still left with unexplainable situations, for example, the reality of "immature adults" and "mature children." There is empirical evidence that shows that children are capable of engaging positively in critical thought. The rigid developmental stance that is assumed by this position has been challenged.<sup>13</sup>

This position accepts a functionalist picture of education and other institutions and therefore has to face the problems of reductionism, a "by-product" of functionalism. The position is unreasonably restrictive. It operates with a restricted notion of both democracy and education. Democracy is primarily (and possibly even exclusively) viewed as a political *structure* rather than as a *way of life*. Education is not seen as a political activity.<sup>14</sup>

This final criticism requires some further elaboration especially since even educators of a lesser conservative bent, such as Mary Anne Raywid, have developed their arguments against democracy *in* education on the assumption that politics and education do not mix. Raywid has argued that the notion of a democratic classroom is either a mistake or a misnomer.<sup>15</sup> She provides three arguments in support of her position. I will refer to them as (i) the logical argument, (ii) the empirical argument, and (iii) the political argument.

The first argument points out that there is no necessary logical connection between a democratic classroom and having a citizenry that will value and actively participate in a democracy. Raywid's point is a salient one to remember. While it is true that some contemporary educators give the impression that there is a necessary connection between democracy in education and the survival of democracy, Raywid's logical argument can be interpreted as meaning that there is no connection between the two. But such an interpretation fails to see that not all relationships are of a logical kind. The fact that there is no necessary logical connection does not rule out the possi-

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bility or fact that there are other kinds of relationships (for example, moral/political). There are many things that are not logically necessary yet morally and politically desirable. Raywid's logical argument, however, has the potential of diminishing, if not eliminating, the importance of moral and political desirability.

The second argument rests on the claim that no empirical data has shown that a democratic classroom enhances the possibility of democracy in the future. The effectiveness of a democratic classroom is questioned, and she calls for empirical investigation. Without ruling out the relevance of empirical evidence, it is crucial to recall that empirical data do not exist or speak out in and of themselves. Ultimately, empirical experiences are interpreted or deemed to support or reject a certain stance based on one's ideological framework. Given differences in political and axiological stances, empirical data may be used to support contradictory ends. It is, therefore, rather deceiving to expect empirical investigations to resolve the issue without clearly stating the criteria to be used, as well as dealing with the possibility of having conflicting criteria which would lead to different "findings." Again, Raywid's second argument may divert us from the crucial discussions dealing with political and moral implications and issues involved in the notion of democracy in education.

The third argument attempts to show that the notion of democracy does not meaningfully apply to that of a classroom because the purposes of politics and education are different: democracy deals with the political realm; the classroom deals with the educational realm. While "deeply committed to the idea of democratic politics and communities," Raywid disagrees with "plans to extend and import their control arrangements into classrooms"<sup>16</sup> because (i) "politics and its categories and concerns differ sufficiently from those of pedagogy," and (ii) "[D]emocracy' is an answer to the question of governing and control of arrangements; this is not the question that classrooms were designed to address."<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, her argument rests on what she refers to as "the ill fit of political values and educational realities..."<sup>18</sup> To be fair, Raywid is not arguing for an authoritarian education. She explicitly supports "humane, happy, lively and thoughtful classrooms."<sup>19</sup> However, she fails to realize the political reality in the classroom: her rigid distinction between politics and education, her view that the purposes of a classroom are not chosen by that class (contrary to what happens in a polity), and her acceptance of compulsory education, are all expressions of a certain political stance. To argue, therefore, that democracy (even as a way of life) does not apply to education because education works on a different plain than politics, is to fail to see the intrinsic political import of educational activities. Raywid creates a *qualitative* distinction between "what shall we do and be?" (the question fac-

ing the polity) and "what shall we learn?" (the question facing the classroom).<sup>20</sup> She fails to see that the two questions are ultimately *both* educational and political in nature.<sup>21</sup>

### THE PROGRESSIVIST POSITION

Both conservatives and progressivists in education agree that democracy is based on freedom, equality and respect. The differences between the two stances arise because of the different understanding in the conceptions of education and democracy and/or the differences in the very application or implications of these concepts. The extreme progressivist stance holds that the kind of education that is consistent with democracy is one that provides least constraints on the students, is not authoritarian and allows for the unique, individual qualities of the students to flourish. Education is conceived as a process of growth through leading out and developing innate, natural, individual qualities by providing students with a varied and rich environment that will help them learn. While the teacher is deemed to be more knowledgeable than the students, the role of the teacher is to facilitate the learning process rather than to impart knowledge. To do otherwise, this view holds, will hinder the students learning what matters to them. Students may be able to answer correctly, pass exams, or conform to the directions of adults, but that, it is claimed, is not the genuine learning which is essential for a democracy, since democracy involves free, active participation of the learner. Without active engagement and genuine learning, which will occur if the subject matter relates or connects to an interest of the learner, prospective citizens will not develop the autonomy, independence, critical and active qualities needed for meaningful and responsible participation in a democracy. Without such engagement and learning, the prospective citizens will turn out to be apathetic and conformist. From this perspective, therefore, education and democracy are not contradictory. On the contrary, as George Wood concludes: "...if indeed we learn what we experience, then the only way to guarantee a reservoir of democratic sentiment in the culture is to make public schooling a centre of democratic experience."<sup>22</sup>

What are some of the basic assumptions of this position?

- ◆ Teaching is primarily a matter of facilitation rather than imparting knowledge. The role of the teacher, primarily (sometimes even exclusively), is to make learning possible rather than to impose certain things, which the students have to learn.
- ◆ Knowledge is not a body of facts to be discovered and learned: "knowledge is created through social interaction; it is not something 'out there'"

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to be transmitted...[k]nowledge is created and recreated."<sup>23</sup> And hence the tendency for knowledge to be seen as constantly changing.

- ◆ Education is a process of leading out and facilitation rather than directly informing. This view arises from Rousseau's dictum that "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the author of Nature; man meddles with it and it deteriorates."<sup>24</sup> Education is seen primarily as a matter of self-development. Developing this perspective further, 20th century romantics, such as A.S. Neill, conclude that the child is "innately wise and realistic" and in Neill's own words, "the old idea that a child has to be guided is as false and stupid as Solomon's law about the stick."<sup>25</sup> Education, then, is seen primarily as a matter of self-development: "If left to himself [herself] without adult suggestion of any kind, [the child] will develop as far as he [she] is capable of developing."<sup>26</sup>
- ◆ Given the centrality of self-development, it is also assumed that the learners should have a primary if not exclusive say in what they want to learn. For, it is argued, children learn best when they are interested in something. A compulsory curriculum, as an essential body of knowledge which all have to learn, is thought to hinder the students from pursuing and developing further their interests and learning. Hence, the students, rather than the subject matter, become the focus.
- ◆ The role of the teacher as an expert or authority is reduced considerably and in some instances perhaps even eliminated. Such a view about the role of the teacher emerges from the tentative and changing nature of knowledge as well as the primacy of the student in the learning process.
- ◆ The notion of negative freedom, one that has played a central role in Eurocentric notions of individualism, permeates this perspective. An education in its practices in schools which is faithful to democratic principles and hence essential to the future of democracy, is seen as one that reduces compulsion, coercion, direction, and external authority. Holt states that it is not "the proper business of the state, at least one that calls itself democratic or free, to tell anyone what he should know or learn... The only educational resource that I will recognize as legitimate is one that helps people learn whatever it is that they may happen to want to find out."<sup>27</sup> And in relation to curricular matters Neill stressed that "...to impose anything by authority is wrong. The child should not do anything until he comes to the opinion - his own opinion - that it should be done... external compulsion... is fascism..."<sup>28</sup> And, once again, with regard to school, Neill concludes that "all external obediences are a curse to his [her] growth. In its psychological component this is the conflict between Fascism and Democracy. Grant that democracy is largely a sham, that the workers in



this democratic country are slaves to their capitalist masters. Grant that, but deep down in their hearts the people of Britain desire freedom from obedience, freedom to get rid of the indignity of being yes-men."<sup>29</sup> And in the same vein, Carl Rogers criticizes the restrictions imposed by the "traditional mode": "The political practices of the school stand in the most striking contrast to what is taught. While being taught that freedom and responsibility are the glorious features of our democracy, students are experiencing themselves as powerless, as having little freedom, and as having almost no opportunity to exercise choice or carry responsibility."<sup>30</sup>

#### PROBLEMS WITH THE PROGRESSIVIST POSITION

Criticism of the notions of "authority" and "expert" are not always clear. Are all notions of, or references to, authority necessarily authoritarian? Are there not reasonable differences between being authoritarian and being authoritative? Some may argue that even notions of authoritativeness ultimately rest on issues of power<sup>31</sup> and legitimation since we cannot clearly support criteria that distinguish the two because such criteria do not exist in and of themselves, "out there." The criteria themselves are actually social constructs. And in response to this one needs to ask: is this very theory of legitimation and denial of authoritativeness itself a social construct? If it is, then, we are bound to an infinite regress of social constructs that excludes the possibility of a workable notion of reasonableness. Some, such as Sharon Bailin, have argued that an extreme social constructivist notion of knowledge leads to a denial of "the entire enterprise of rational inquiry" and we would be left with "power as the means for adjudicating disagreement."<sup>32</sup> But since democracy ultimately rests on critical inquiry, debate and discussion, the extreme constructivist view is, according to Bailin, essentially anti-democratic.<sup>33</sup>

A common thread among progressivist views is the emphasis put on the individual: the essential, natural goodness of individual human beings, the needs of the individual, the self-actualization of the individual, etc. As C.A. Bowers remarks "the individual is the epicenter of [the] universe."<sup>34</sup> Critics of such a progressivist position, while not meaning to eliminate the individual from the scene, have pointed out illusions created by and ironies found in this progressivist stance. The frequent reference to individual self-realization gives the impression that once the individual has fulfilled him or herself, then the contradictions, problems and tensions in the world will be resolved. The individual is almost idolized in isolation from the rest of the universe, as if the individual exists in and of himself or herself. This perspective simplifies the complexities of human life; ambiguities, tensions, contradictions and controversies are seen as being in opposition to the development of the individual. It ultimately assumes a neutral context is both possible and desirable. Such a stance, critics argue, not only creates

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the illusion of the dichotomy of the individual from the rest, but also generates the illusion that the school (where these individuals are meant to achieve self-actualization) is distinct from, and impermeable to, the influences of other institutions, and once we fix the problems in school the rest will take care of itself. As a result of this illusion, as Jesse Goodman concludes, "[m]any people feel dehumanized and without a sense of personal identity in their encounters with social institutions (schools, workplaces, shopping centres, governmental institutions). In response, they withdraw from public spheres and devote their energies to highly personal projects."<sup>35</sup>

At the core of the notion of self-realization is the related view that individual interests are at the centre of learning. A version of this position is found in the work of Frank Smith who argues that interest and respect are the two major characteristics that facilitate "worthwhile thinking and learning."<sup>36</sup> Smith holds that "when thinking is done for ourselves... then we have no trouble with it... When thinking is done at the behest of other people... then it becomes contrived and difficult."<sup>37</sup> But is "difficult thinking" necessarily disconnected from our personal interests? May not a suggestion or "order" to pursue something turn into something which is in fact of interest to me or very relevant to developing (rather than simply pursuing) my own interests? Does everything have to be done for oneself? Moreover, can we fully distinguish between and separate the "contrived" from the "non-contrived"? Smith gives the impression that the public or social forum is contrived. But, then, is it unnatural or contrived for human beings to be social beings? Is he unwittingly promoting a "contrived" form of individualism? To be fair, Smith maintains that "teachers cannot abdicate responsibility for what students think about or learn... it is the teacher's role to ensure that students engage in worthwhile activities as much as possible."<sup>38</sup> Yet in the same book he concludes "learning is prolific when it is unfettered in any way, when it is not contrived."<sup>39</sup> But is there anything that is totally uncontrived? What does "unfettered in any way" really mean? Is Smith assuming that an ideal, decontextualized, neutral situation is possible? Is any teacher direction, or, for that matter, any direction from peers or others, unreasonable and contrived?

Underlying this ideology is the myth that we live in a context that provides all individuals with the opportunity to be "self-fulfilled."<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, this myth has given rise to the illusion that equality can be achieved or is taken seriously as long as we give the same opportunity to all. The illusion arises for several reasons. First, there is the focus on the individual child as if the child, in the teaching-learning context of school and elsewhere, exists alone or in isolation, rather than in association with others which inevitably influence the very nature of the child. Where do the so-called "natural qualities of the child" come from? Who identifies the criteria

and what criteria are used to identify what is deemed natural in the nature of the child and hence needs to be allowed to develop? The reply of progressivists is limiting because it assumes that the notion of a "self" is completely given by nature rather than a product of history or human interventions or human constructs. However, it should not surprise us that certain criteria, which may be developed on certain social class, gender, ethnic or religious inclinations, may become regarded as normal or natural, simply because they express the views of those who are in a powerful position. The problem with simplistic notions of naturalness and self-actualization is, as Valerie Walkerdine puts it, that "[i]t does not allow us to explore how these assumptions operate to produce categories of inclusion and exclusion, and thereby to regulate and produce 'normality'."<sup>41</sup> Walkerdine elaborates on this point with reference to the exclusion of "the feminine." She challenges the assumed neutrality of such criteria as the natural by showing that they are in fact gender-specific. And the same argument is made by the African-American Lisa Delpit in relation to race and social class. Delpit concludes "pretending that gate-keeping points don't exist is to ensure that many students will not pass through them."<sup>42</sup> Contrary to liberal beliefs, which she associates with "those whose beliefs include striving for a society based upon maximum individual freedom and autonomy,"<sup>43</sup> she urges educators to make the implicit criteria, rules and expectations explicit. Contrary to liberal beliefs, she maintains that such a move would increase rather than decrease the possibility of freedom and autonomy.

According to the progressivist view, the teacher should not act on authoritarian principles. The teacher's role is not to impart or transmit fixed knowledge or facts, but to facilitate the students' learning. In some instances this view has created the illusion that the role of the teacher is not to influence the students; influencing is deemed identical to imposing or indoctrinating. There are two problems with this. First, since we do not live in a completely neutral context, the teacher is inevitably bound to influence the students even by his or her very presence in class. The question becomes what *kind* of influence? (Rather than, does the teacher influence the students?) Second, facilitating is itself a form of transmission. Given the bounded nature of our being, transmission will take place. Once again, this stance seems to disregard the reality of the collateral, hidden learning. Ultimately, the picture of the classroom that emerges from some interpretations of this stance, indicates that the political, power-relations context of the classroom are not taken seriously or, at times, even not considered.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the assumptions of the conservative and progressivist positions are quite in opposition to each other, there seems to be a major common thread: the relationship between education and democracy is perceived as a linear or cause-effect relationship. From the conservative stance, unless we take the contradictions between democracy and education seriously and model formal education accordingly, then future citizens are not going to be well prepared for democracy; from the progressivist stance, unless we remove the restrictions, etc., in formal schooling – restrictions that are incompatible with democracy – then democracy will remain a mere sham. Another common element among both positions is the lack of recognition of the political element in the educational process. My contention is that these two common qualities are based on misinterpretations of or a disregard for the notion of democracy as a way of life and its application to education.

It was Dewey who elaborated on and popularized the notion of democracy as a way of life. He warned that this notion implies two crucial elements. First, the close relation between democracy and “a personal way of individual life,” a life that “signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life.”<sup>44</sup> And this implies, as he argued elsewhere, the participation of all mature human beings in determining the values that guide the relationships among human beings in a community.<sup>45</sup> This participation he recognizes as an essential quality. Second, the need of the continual reconstruction of democracy. “The very idea of democracy... must be continually explored afresh; it has to be constantly discovered, and rediscovered, remade and reorganized.”<sup>46</sup> This, of course, arises from Dewey’s insistence on the close connection between democracy and life and his beliefs in pragmatism. Life, he argues, is never fixed. Democracy and life are intertwined, so “democracy as a form of life cannot stand still.”<sup>47</sup> These two elements pose several challenges. And the challenges increase when they are applied to education. The major challenge concerns the kind of dispositions and habits that education ought to foster to ensure the sustenance and reconstruction of the democratic spirit. For Dewey this way of life depends on the “faith in human intelligence and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience”<sup>48</sup> – an experience that fosters certain attitudes, dispositions and skills, such as the development of “intelligent judgment and action,” free discussions and inquiry, the trust and support that is needed for self-correction, and “allowing differences a chance to show themselves because of the belief that the expression of difference is not only a right of the other person but is a means of enriching one’s own life-experience...”<sup>49</sup> And, as Russell put it, such a way

of life requires that we "encourage independence, initiative, thinking for [oneself], and the realization that anybody may be mistaken."<sup>50</sup>

Dewey's conception of the relationship between education and democracy is very clearly stated: "It is obvious that the relation between democracy and education is a reciprocal one, a mutual one, and vitally so. Democracy is itself an educational principle, an educational measure and policy."<sup>51</sup> While meaningful education has to be guided and embody democratic principles, "democracy cannot endure, much less develop, without education..."<sup>52</sup> Such a reciprocal relationship, together with Dewey's call for the continuous reconstruction of democracy, makes a serious attempt at democratic education a rather arduous task. But this is exactly intrinsic to the very nature of democracy for, as Maxine Greene reminds us, "[d]emocracy is neither a possession nor a guaranteed achievement. It is forever in the making; it might be thought of as possibility – moral and imaginative possibility."<sup>53</sup> Such a dynamic vision of democracy and education is bound to create tensions and uncertainties. But as Amy Gutman cautions us: "Perhaps the most distinctive feature of a democratic theory of education is its simultaneous refusal to dissolve these tensions philosophically and its insistence on finding a principled, rather than simply a pragmatic, way of living with the tensions. Living with tensions will never be easy, but the alternatives to democratic education that promise to make us easier people are far worse."<sup>54,55</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Bertrand Russell, "Education for Democracy," *National Education Association*, 37, July 1939, 527-534.
2. R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education* (London: Allen and Unwin), 291.
3. John Dewey, *Philosophy of Education: Problems of Men* (Totawa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams & Co, 1958), 57.
4. See, for example, Jesse Goodman, *Elementary Schooling for Critical Democracy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992); W. Carr and A. Hartnett, *Education and the Struggle for Democracy: The Politics of Educational Ideas* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996); David T. Sehr, *Education for Public Democracy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997); Benjamin Levin, "The Educational Requirement for Democracy," *Curriculum Inquiry*, 28, 1, 1998: 57-79; Art Pearl and Tony Knight, *The Democratic Classroom: Theory to Inform Practice* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1999); Noam Chomsky, "Market Democracy in a Neoliberal Order," in S.J. Goodlad (ed.), *The Last Best Hope: A Democracy Reader* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 115-130; Ken Osborne, "Democracy, Democratic Citizenship, and Education," in J.P. Portelli and R.P. Solomon (eds.), *The Erosion of Democracy in*

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- Education* (Calgary, AB: Detselig, 2001), 29-61.
5. See John Portelli and Patrick Solomon (eds.), *The Erosion of Democracy in Education* (Calgary, AB: Detselig, 2001).
  6. Anthony O'Hear, *Education and Democracy: Against the Educational Establishment* (London: The Clarendon Press, 1991), 5.
  7. *Ibid.*, 20.
  8. See the following for accounts of different conceptions of knowledge. Israel Scheffler, *Conditions of Knowledge* (Scott Foresman, 1965); Kevin Harris, *Education and Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); Elliot W. Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice* (New York: Macmillan, 1991); James, A. Banks, "The Canon Debate: Knowledge Construction, and Multicultural Education," *Educational Researcher*, 22, 5, 1992: 4-14.
  9. See John Portelli, "Dare We Expose the Hidden Curriculum" in J.P. Portelli and S. Bailin (eds.), *Reason and Values* (Calgary, AB: Detselig Ent. Ltd., 1993), 171-197.
  10. Anthony O'Hear, *Education and Democracy*, 28.
  11. *Ibid.*
  12. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998); B. Levin, "The Educational Requirement for Democracy," *Curriculum Inquiry*, 28, 1: 57-79; bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (London: Routledge, 1994); Ken Osborne, *Teaching for Democratic Citizenship* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1991).
  13. See Margaret Donaldson, *Children's Minds* (London: Fontana, 1978); Gareth Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Gareth Matthews, *Dialogues with Children* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Gareth Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Kieran Egan, "Education and the Mental Life of Young Children," *Australian Journal of Education*, 35, 1, 1991: 60-74.
  14. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*.
  15. Mary Ann Raywid, "The Democratic Classroom: Mistake or Misnomer," *Theory into Practice* (Special 25th Anniversary Issue), 26, 1987, 480-489.
  16. *Ibid.*, 480.
  17. *Ibid.*, 484.
  18. *Ibid.*, 488.
  19. *Ibid.*, 480.
  20. *Ibid.*, 484.
  21. Of course, agreeing with the view that such questions are both educational and political in nature is not in itself a justification for following in education the values and dispositions associated with the democratic way of life.

22. George Wood, "Democracy and the Curriculum" in L.E. Beyer and M.W. Apple (eds.), *The Curriculum* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 166-187, 176.
23. Jerome Harste, "The Future of Whole Language," *The Elementary School Journal*, 90, 2, 989, 247.
24. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (translated by Barbara Foxley) (New York: Dutton, 1974), 5.
25. A.S. Neill, *The Problem Teacher* (London: Jenkins Publishing Co., 1944), 48.
26. A.S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (New York: Hart Publishing Co., 1960), 114.
27. John Holt, "A Letter," in J.M. Rich (ed.), *Innovations in Education: Reformers and Their Critics* (3rd ed.) (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1981), 6.
28. A.S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, 91.
29. A.S. Neill, *The Problem Teacher*, 100.
30. Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's* (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1983), 187.
31. One needs to note here the distinction (which was brought to my attention by William Hare) between the power of philosophical argument and the power of violence or authoritarian decree. The former is based on reasonableness, discussion and allowing the argument to develop fairly. The latter is simply interested in accomplishing the end.
32. Sharon Bailin, "Culture, Democracy, and the University," *Interchange*, 23, 1 & 2: 65 and 68.
33. To eliminate misinterpretations, I should point out that Bailin's perspective does not necessarily lead to an essentialist or absolutist view of knowledge, nor does it lead to the view that power relations in education are not crucial.
34. C.A. Bowers, *Elements of a Post-liberal Theory of Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1987), 42.
35. Jesse Goodman, *Elementary Schooling for Critical Democracy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), 89.
36. Frank Smith, *To Think* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), 126.
37. *Ibid.*, 28.
38. *Ibid.*, 128.
39. *Ibid.*, 42.
40. I do not deny that individual self-fulfillment can function as an ideal. What I am pointing out is the difference between the ideal and our own actual and real contexts, which do not provide the opportunities, the ideal calls for. I am not denying that individuals ought to be given the opportunity to devel-

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- op themselves.
41. Valerie Walkerdine, "It's only Natural: Rethinking Child-Centred Pedagogy," in A. Wolpe and J. Donald (eds.), *Is There Anyone Here From Education?* (London: Pluto, 1983).
  42. Lisa Delpit "The Silenced Dialogue: Pedagogy and Power in Educating Other People's Children," *Harvard Educational Review*, 58, 3, 1988: 292.
  43. *Ibid.*, 284.
  44. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us" in Max H. Fisch (ed.), *Classic American Philosophers* (Prentice Hall Inc., 1951), 391.
  45. John Dewey, *Philosophy of Education: Problems of Men*, 58.
  46. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us," 391.
  47. *Ibid.*
  48. John Dewey, *Philosophy of Education: Problems of Men*, 59.
  49. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us," 393.
  50. Bertrand Russell, "Education for Democracy," 393.
  51. John Dewey, *Philosophy of Education: Problems of Men*, 34.
  52. *Ibid.*, 37.
  53. Maxine Greene, "The Role of Education in Democracy," *Educational Horizons*, 63: 3.
  54. Amy Gutmann, "Democratic Education in Difficult Times," *Teachers College Record*, 92, 1, 1990: 8.
  55. I would like to thank William Hare for detailed comments on an earlier version of this paper.