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DEMOCRACY, DIVERSITY, AND SCHOOLING

Democracy, specifically liberal democracy, is a form of government and mode of living with others—making decisions about public problems, distributing resources, resolving conflict, and planning for the future. Key characteristics are popular sovereignty, majority will, civil rights and liberties, the rule of law (constitutionalism), and free and fair elections. **Diversity** refers to the fact that people in society differ by ideology, social class, race, language, culture, gender, religion, sexual orientation, citizenship status, and other consequential social categories—consequential because privilege or discrimination result from one's position in these categories. In societies aiming to be liberal democracies, **schooling** brings democracy and diversity together because schools have diverse student bodies, more or less, because schools have problems, and because schools are charged with educating citizens for democratic life. Together, these resources—diversity, problems, and mission—can be mobilized for democratic education, but not without difficulty or limits.

Overview

This entry has two main sections. The first, "Democracy and Diversity," explains democracy—more precisely liberal democracy or republic—and its relationship to diversity. The second, "Schooling," presents the assumptions that legitimize and shape efforts to educate students for democratic life. This section has three sub-sections. "Education for Democracy" explains why schools may be the best available social sites for educating democratic citizens for enlightened democratic engagement. "Discursive Approaches" demonstrates how instructional strategies involving classroom discussion are pertinent to this end. "Tensions and Limits" concludes this entry.

Democracy and Diversity

Liberal democracy is a profound political achievement for those who value diversity. A diplomat working to restore peace to a genocide-ravaged country today could very well worry that free and fair elections might eventually be held but that those elected could be the same racists and separatists who engineered the mass rape, murder, and plunder. It would be a democratically elected government but one that would ignore constitutional limits on its power and continue to deny civil rights and liberties to, and in other ways persecute, revile, and perhaps even kill, members of the marginalized minority group. This would be an *illiberal* democracy.

Any sort of democracy—liberal or illiberal—is a rare occurrence historically, so its absence at any particular time or place does not demand explanation. Far from taking democracy for granted, historians are surprised when it crops up. Tyrannies are the

historical norm, the most common being theocracies, military dictatorships, and absolute monarchies—the latter often combining with theocracy in such a way that the monarch's total authority is believed to come from the heavens (known as the "divine right of kings"). By the time Aristotle wrote his political analyses in the 4th century BCE, there had been such a variety of political systems that he could classify and evaluate them. Among these were democracies, which Aristotle considered to be feckless. Either they devolved quickly into illiberal mob rule (majority will without constitutional restraint) or oligarchy (an elected but corrupt managerial class).

The founders of the U.S. constitutional democracy, such as Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, also were critical of the ancient democratic experiments. Having just won independence from the divine-right king of England, George III, and having been avid readers of Greek, Roman, and Enlightenment thinkers, the founders were convinced that democracy's chances for success were bleak. Democracies usually failed, they believed, not for lack of ideals but because they required "we the people" to be angels. But, the people are not angels. As Madison (1788/1937) wrote in *Federalist No. 51*, "If men were angels no government would be necessary" (p. 337). Government is necessary because "we the people" too easily become an illiberal mob, seduced by demagogues who become tyrants. Madison captured the tension: "A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions." For this reason, the U.S. founders built into the Constitution numerous controls on both the people and the government—among them the separation of powers into distinct branches of government, a system of checks and balances, a bicameral legislature, federalism, and eventually a Bill of Rights. These have become widespread features of liberal democracies throughout the world. (The current estimate by Freedom House puts the number of nations that are liberal democracies at just under 50%.)

It is well known that race, class, and gender oppressions were present even as these world-historic, liberal-democratic innovations were being inscribed in the late 18th century. When the U. S. Constitution was ratified in 1787, African Americans were chattel and women were only somewhat better off. Native peoples were in another category still—savages, primitives, demons. "We the people" referred to White, male, property-owning citizens of a certain age. Slaves and women *were* property.

In *Federalist No. 2*, John Jay (1788/1937) wrote that Americans were one ethnic group, "descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs..." (p. 9). They were, he said, a "band of brethren." The brethren faced a common danger, which was their dissolution into "a number of unsocial, jealous, and alien sovereignties." Jay's statement reveals the ethnic insularity and fear of separatism and fragmentation that, ironically, was present at the inception of liberal, constitutional democracy in the United States. White supremacy was in fact built into the Constitution—written into the law of the land. The "three-fifths compromise," as it was known, permitted Southern planters to count individual African slaves for the purposes of representation in Congress, but only as three-fifths of a person while White males were counted as whole persons. The United States' long-standing difficulty negotiating the tension between *unum* and *pluribus,* while all along trumpeting equality and *e pluribus*

unum, was present at the creation and continues to this day. For example, only White, male, English-speaking Christians—Jay's brethren—have been elected to the presidency of the United States, the one exception being an English-speaking Christian male who was Black.

That liberal democracies fall short of their aspirations is a plain fact and the chief motive behind social movements that aim to close the gap between the real and the ideal. In this way, liberal democracies have a sort of built-in progressive impulse to live up to their own proclaimed principles. The framers of the U.S. Constitution may have been the birth parents of liberal democracy on a large scale, but those who were excluded became the adoptive, nurturing parents. That is, the core values in the U. S. Pledge of Allegiance of "liberty and justice for all" have been pursued not necessarily by those already secured within "we the people," those citizens already privileged, but by those people living at the margins and struggling for inclusion. And so, woman suffragettes meeting in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, turned the civil rights principles of the Declaration of Independence to their own cause. In the *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments,* Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her associates (1889) famously altered the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence to read: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal…" (p. 70). The founding documents were invoked again, more than a century later, when Martin Luther King, Jr. (2001), in his 1963 March on Washington address, demanded not an alternative to democracy but its fulfillment. "Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy," he said.

> We have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir…. We have come to cash this check. (p. 82)

Schooling

Nations create and use school systems to support nation building and consolidation. In this way, the school system is structured by nationalism. In particular, schools institutionalize the nation's conception of the good society and thereby demonstrate its values and ideals. Schooling, thus, is fundamentally a moral endeavor, not simply a knowledge-building or technical endeavor; and "civic education," as it is usually called, becomes a central mission of the schools. In a liberal democracy, three assumptions undergird this work.

First is the assumption that liberal democracy is better than the alternatives—not perfect, certainly, but superior to *il*liberal democracy and the many forms of tyranny including theocracy, divine-right monarchy, oligarchy, and dictatorship. Liberal democracy is superior to these because, generally, it better secures liberty, rights, and justice. Also, it has the impetus, noted earlier, to recognize violations of its own principles and to make good on its promises. To say that it is better than the alternatives is to say pragmatically, as did British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, that it is the worst form of government—annoying, difficult, slow, unfair—except for all the others. It is superior because it aspires to and, to varying degrees, is held accountable for securing civil rights and liberties, equality before the law, limited government, and competitive elections.

Second, there can be no liberal democracy—no republic—without the "we the people" who create it anew in each generation, maintain it, and continue to close the gaps between ideals and realities. Democracy is not a perpetual motion machine; it is a human invention that must continually be reinvented, one generation instructing the next. People become democratic citizens not when they are born in, or move to, a democratic society, but when they participate in this ongoing reinvention of democracy. This is popular sovereignty. It means that these people create the government, not the other way around. In the words of the Declaration of Independence, governments are instituted to secure the rights of the people and derive their powers from these people. This is "government of the people, by the people, and for the people," as Lincoln said at Gettysburg.

Third, this kind of citizen does not materialize from thin air but needs to be educated for this work. Democratic modes of association are not given but constructed, and this constructive work is best undertaken by agents who understand what they are doing. These agents are not born already grasping principles of democracy, such as liberty, toleration, equality, justice, freedom of religion and press, and the need for limits on majority will. They are not born already inclined to live peacefully together with their cultural differences intact or to deliberate public policy issues across these differences. On this the historical record is awfully clear (Madison's "men are not angels"). Rather, these characteristics are social, moral, and intellectual attainments. John Dewey (1916/1985) summarized, "Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education" (p. 93).

This is not only a modern idea. Aristotle argued that the citizens of a country needed to be educated to suit their constitution. And Thomas Jefferson argued that mob rule could not be avoided simply by instituting the Federalists' "auxiliary precautions," but that education was needed in tandem. He sought, unsuccessfully, an amendment to the Constitution that would aid public education at a time when it was exclusively a private and often religious endeavor. His aspiration was revived when in the 1840s Horace Mann led a public school movement in Massachusetts. Concerned that the burgeoning market economy threatened the young republic by introducing the sharp class divisions that had shattered Europe, and concerned also by the immigration of famine-driven Irish Catholics into the northern states in the 1840s, Mann (1846/1957) argued that a public school system was needed to educate citizens for democracy. Public schools would be the great equalizer, he believed, and their most important attribute was the drawing together of diverse students into a common classroom for a shared civic education.

> The great moral attribute of self-government cannot be born and matured in a day; and if children are not trained to it, we only prepare ourselves for disappointment if we expect it from grown men…. As the fitting apprenticeship for despotism consists in being trained to despotism, the fitting apprenticeship for self-government consists of being trained to self-government. (pp. 58-59)

On these three assumptions taken together, educators aim curriculum and instruction toward the creation of democratic citizens. In survey after survey, the American public makes clear its expectation that schools do precisely this (albeit in addition to other things, including the upward social mobility of their own children).

Notwithstanding the creation of the public school system on the rationale to educate a democratic citizenry, racism flourished. The apartheid system in the southern United States lawfully and effectively segregated the new public schools. The Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 permitted these separate public facilities, a decision not overturned until 1954 in *Brown v Board of Education.* Well after *Brown*, schools remained segregated, however, sometimes with governors standing guard at schoolhouse doors until federal troops forcibly integrated them. Meanwhile, the Jim Crow system disenfranchised African Americans with voter-registration laws that restricted the ballot box to persons who could read, write, and interpret parts of the Constitution. Septima Clark instigated a new education movement, which became a key dimension of the Civil Rights Movement, and established "citizenship schools" in the 1950s and 60s to teach literacy skills to African Americans.

Education for Democracy

School segregation, both voluntary and involuntary, reduces the diversity of the student body, yet even a segregated school, for example a private religious school, a public urban high school, a private school for girls, an academy for African American boys, or an elite prep school, has a student body that is diverse in categories other than those that form the basis for segregation. This diversity—indeed, whatever diversity is present—can be mobilized as a resource for democratic education, and doing so is key to a strong democratic education that goes beyond rote learning in an isolated government course.

Schools, particularly public schools, are not private places like our homes but public, civic places with a congregation of diverse students. When five-year-olds come to kindergarten, they are emerging from their private silos of babyhood, family, and kin into the mixed public arena of acquaintances and strangers—of Others. While some schools are more diverse than others, all are diverse to some pedagogically meaningful extent. In a public school, boys and girls are both there; Jews, Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, and atheists may all be there; there are racial and class differences, and therefore differences in social status and power; and immigrants from the world over may be there. This variety does not exist at home, church, temple, or mosque. Knowing one another well or being fond of one another—being friends—is not a necessity for democratic relations; if it were, democracy would be impossible. This—diversity—is one reason why public schools especially, but schools generally, are arguably the best sites for democratic education.

A second reason is that owing to the mixture of students at school, there are, inevitably, problems. These problems are mutual, collective concerns; not 'mine' or 'yours' but 'ours.' They are *public* problems. Moreover, there are not one but two kinds of problems at school: social and academic. Social problems arise over resources, policies, classroom assignments, injustices and inequalities, and the friction of social interaction. Academic problems reside in each discipline, and expertise in a subject is defined largely by one's knowledge of them. A strong curriculum for democracy involves students actively in both sets of problems in pedagogically measured ways.

In tandem, then, a diverse student body and social and academic problems are key assets for democratic education. And both are amply available in school, more so

than in most other social locations. A society aspiring to be a liberal democracy requires an education system that inducts young people into a civic culture of speaking and listening to people of many kinds. These will include some students whose behavior and beliefs some other students may not warm to, with whom they may be unequally related due to histories of discrimination and servitude, and with whom they may have no occasion otherwise to be in the same room, but with whom they must be involved in interaction and deliberation on problems—governing. In this way, schools become places where democracy is learned through practice.

Discursive Approaches

But these assets—a school's diversity and problems—must be mobilized; otherwise, their potential goes untapped. First, educators need to increase the variety and frequency of interaction among students who are culturally, linguistically, and racially different from one another. Classrooms sometimes do this naturally. If the school itself is somewhat homogeneous or if the school is diverse but curriculum tracks keep groups of students apart, then this first key is all the more difficult to turn. It is not helping that resegregation has intensified in recent years, despite an increasingly diverse society. Still, school leaders can capitalize on whatever diversity is present among students and increase the variety and frequency of intelligent interaction, both in the classroom and in student governance and extra-curricular programs—music, debate clubs, and sports, for example. Second, educators need to orchestrate these contacts so as to foster competent public speaking and listening in the context of diversity. About what? About two kinds of well-selected problems: social and academic. Third, educators need to clarify the objective: not mere talk, not undisciplined bull sessions without aim, but competent, purposeful, educative talk—respectful, probing discussion on problems worthy of common attention and serious study.

At the core of teaching and learning strategies that feature this kind of interaction is discussion. Along with deep reading and writing, disciplined discussion is a vaunted practice in elite prep schools and colleges but a scarce resource in most other school settings. Even when acclaimed, however, discussion is often misunderstood to be an instructional method only—a means—thereby confining its role to the strategic and instrumental. Accordingly, discussion is a lively method by which curriculum objectives such as literary interpretation, historical understanding, and scientific problem solving might be achieved. But, while discussion is indeed a means to other ends (teaching *with* discussion), the capable practice of discussion additionally can be considered an end—a curriculum objective—in its own right (teaching *for* discussion). This distinction is important, for it has us consider not only how discussion can enable the learning of other things, but how the ability and disposition to discuss are themselves legitimate things to learn.

A second distinction that should be drawn is between discussion for the purpose of democratic enlightenment (knowing) and discussion for the purpose of democratic engagement (doing). Two discussion models correspond to these purposes: *seminar* where the purpose is democratic enlightenment, and *deliberation* where the purpose is democratic engagement of the most fundamental sort: decision making among competing alternatives. Both are difficult pedagogies to implement, requiring strong content knowledge and facilitative skill by teachers plus a school culture that values serious

intellectual work: inquiry, argumentation, and deep engagement with challenging subject matter. The two discussion models are species of collaborative inquiry, and their desired curricular outcomes—understanding and right action respectively—rely on the expression and consideration of diverse views. They rely also on powerful texts.

In a seminar, participants together interpret an essay, book, document, or artwork, and they speak and listen to *learn*. Seminars encourage students to see the world more deeply and clearly thanks to the selection of texts with provocative ideas and values, the teacher's carefully-framed questions, and the multiple interpretations and cultural experiences that are brought by discussants. Widely used texts for this purpose are often called the "fundamental documents of American democracy" and typically include:

- Declaration of Independence
- The Federalist Papers (e.g., 10, 51)
- Constitution of the United States
- Marbury v. Madison
- Seneca Falls Declaration of Rights and Sentiments
- Emancipation Proclamation
- Lincoln's Gettysburg Address
- Brown v. Board of Education
- King's Letter from Birmingham Jail

Like seminars, deliberations encourage discussants to think together, with and across their differences. However, in deliberations the discussion is aimed at *deciding* and the text is a controversial public issue. Discussants are finding, studying, and weighing alternatives and rival hypotheses in order to decide a course of action. Seminars don't try to make material progress in the world; deliberations do. Deliberations are concerned with action in the world, and they proceed under the often urgent conditions of a public—a "we," a jumble of difference facing a shared problem—needing to take action. Students may deliberate historical controversies (e.g., What caused the fall of the Roman Empire?), contemporary controversies (e.g., What is the surest remedy for racial inequality?), or perennial controversies (e.g., Should civil liberties be constrained for the sake of national security?).

The work of seminar and deliberation needs to be done *with others* for several reasons. First, the problem—whether understanding or deciding—is shared; accordingly, the decision making should be shared. Second, inquiry is a public matter that, when vigorous, is loaded with open disputation as to who has got it right. Third, the array of alternative interpretations (in seminar) and solutions (in deliberation) that a group generates will be broader than one could accomplish working alone. Fourth, within that broader array will be alternatives stemming from social perspectives, and these from social positions, that are more or less different from one's own, thereby developing the participants' social knowledge while contributing to a better solution. Seminar and deliberation particularly, and discussion pedagogy generally, comprise only one approach to the goal of educating for enlightened democratic engagement. However, these four reasons together indicate this approach's advantages over less interactive alternatives.

Tensions and Limits

Education for enlightened democratic engagement is not without tensions and limits. Several tensions have already been addressed, including those between liberal and illiberal democracy, controlling the government and controlling the people, schooling for public and private purposes, the educational disadvantage of school segregation and the educational advantage of what remains a more or less diverse student body, and education for democratic knowledge and education for democratic action. On the latter tension especially, democratic educators have taken strong positions. Conservative educators sometimes take the *know more* position: Students should deeply learn what democracy is and has been, and about the conditions that undermine and support it. (Students are citizens-in-preparation.) Progressive educators sometimes take the *do more* position: The best way to learn democracy is by being apprenticed to it through actual participation. (Students are citizens now.)

Another tension exists between multicultural education and citizenship education. Traditional citizenship education through the 1980s, with exceptions, tended toward an assimilation model based on Jay's "band of brethren." This model championed *e pluribus unum* as a central tenet but at the same time denied, ignored, or, at best, tolerated diversity. It celebrated diversity as a present and necessary feature of a democratic state while persistently glossing over power asymmetries and the exclusion or marginalization of those not already inside the political and cultural world of the brethren. By any measure this was a contradiction, and it helped drive the multicultural education movement into a distinctly different educational literature and scholarly community concerned explicitly with recognizing diversity and achieving equality. Contemporary citizenship education theory and practice are demonstrably more inclusive and display a more central and explicit focus on power, race, gender, sexual orientation, language, and class, but still the tension persists.

A further tension that can overwhelm school-based democratic education in any form is between a progressive discourse that concentrates on what actually-existing schools might accomplish and a radical discourse that emphasizes what they cannot accomplish. The progressive discourse has been featured in this entry, focusing on what schools *can* do. Schools, however, are embedded in society and tasked mainly with reproducing it. They are not autonomous arenas above the fray capable of steering society in another direction. Contrary to George Counts' famous challenge in 1932, schools cannot "build a new social order." They are simply not in a position to do so. As such, schools cannot solve many of the social problems assigned to them. They alone cannot educate democratic citizens, integrate society, or close the achievement gaps between White students and students of color or between poor and affluent families. They alone cannot rescue the nation's economy, increase its military prowess, or transform a largely monolingual society into a multilingual one. School reformers and public officials of every generation act as though they can but, as water cannot run uphill, schools cannot override or circumvent the structures of the political economy and cultural milieu from which they are created and in which they are nested.

The insight that schools cannot transform society, however, does not mean that educators, parents, and citizens should not try to improve schooling. Schools do matter, if in limited ways, and what teachers and other educators do for and with students does

make a difference in what they know and are able to do. This entry has concentrated on the possibilities of schooling and the role pedagogy can play in educating students for democracy and diversity. Schools are unequal due to segregation by race and class; yet, they possess key assets for democratic education: democratic aims, a diverse student body, social problems, academic problems, teachers, curriculum, and instruction. The challenge for democratic educators is to mobilize them effectively.

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See also these entries: Brown v. Board of Education; Citizenship Education and Diversity; Citizenship Education in Europe; Contact Theory; Multicultural Citizenship

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