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Necessary Educational Reform for the 2lst Century: The Future of Public Schools in our Democracy

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Abstract We offer a theoretical and ecological argument for the preparation of citizens in U.S. public schools. This democratic education draws legitimacy from the concern of the nations founders for a populace educated to govern itself. We also emphasize the need for new democratic skills and knowledge in the face of today's challenges, and our responsibility to prepare the young for the 21st century. A critique of the current school reform movement is provided because of its undemocratic nature. We issue a call for the transformation to democratic schools. We specifically argue that current efforts at reform are maintaining historical inequities, while also depriving those that enjoy social and economic advantages of the education needed to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. The democratic education proposed is based on three goals: c*itizenship preparation, inclusion, and an optimum learning environment*. Seven well established principles of democracy and their relationship to schooling are presented. These include; the nature of authority, inclusiveness, equal availability of the understanding required for deliberating the most serious challenges to democracy and livability, equal access to centers of political decision-making, guaranteed inalienable rights, equality, and universal access to an optimum learning environment. We offer a fundamentally different approach to educational reform: calling for a reassessment of the role of public schools in a democracy that recognizes the importance of citizenship preparation, and a "bottom up" reform model that starts in the classroom and can be implemented by individual teachers.

Keywords Democratic education · Education for democracy · Ecological education model · Inclusive education · School reform

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> Promote then as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion be enlightened.
>
> George Washington, Farewell Address 1797

> Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe, their minds must be improved to a certain degree…. An amendment of our constitution must here come in aid of the public education. The influence over government must be shared among all the people. If every individual… participates of the ultimate authority, the government will be safe.
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> Thomas Jefferson Notes on Virginia 1781–1785, Query 14.

> A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And, a people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.
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> James Madison, Letter to W. T. Berry, August 4, 1822

The first presidents of the United States all understood that a society that placed ruling power into the hands of its citizens required a public education that would prepare citizens to use that power responsibly.

Over the years public education in the U.S. has been consistently challenged to define itself in relation to our democracy, forming and reforming from colonial times through today. It is fair to say that public education is the rag doll pulled on by all the forces that have shaped the political landscape of the United States. As colonies developed on this continent various rudimentary schools emerged. Despite limited goals and limited resources it evolved into the huge complicated bureaucracy it is today.

In this article we explain how current efforts at what is advertised as "reform" are actually misguided, not only maintaining historical inequities, but also depriving those that enjoy social and economic advantages of the education needed to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. And probably most significantly how the mad dash to add obstacles (standards) and centralized control (accountability) destroys the hard won vestiges of democracy in education and by so doing seriously undermines the societal democracy that has been hard won over the past two centuries.

Democracy has many meanings. We support a strong (Barber 1984) and deliberative democracy (Cohen 1989). We derive from these formulations seven well established principles of democracy: the nature of authority, inclusiveness, equal availability of the understanding required for deliberating the most serious challenges to democracy and livability, equal access to centers of political decision-making, guaranteed inalienable rights, equality, and universal access to an optimum learning environment (Pearl and Knight 1999). We understand that such a democracy is unattainable, but we believe democracy is served as progress is made toward implementing fundamental democratic principles. Moreover, it is our belief that each of these principles can be applied in differing degrees in any classroom to the benefit of both students and society.

We propose a fundamentally different approach to educational reform. We return to the visions and admonitions of our founders and discuss the historical effort to define purposes and establish control of schools in our democracy. That history, we argue, has been a continual struggle for the creation of schools that address relevant societal needs, provide broad access, and, in the later last half century, attempt to provide equal opportunity. We provide a critique of the current school reform movement and propose several approaches toward democratized schools within the context of current school and social conditions. We propose an education that is democratizing and democratized: democratizing in that it creates many opportunities for students to practice citizenship and in those processes hone important citizenship skills and develop a sense of the responsibilities inherent in democratic citizenship, democratized in that it offers equal opportunity and encouragement to all our citizens.

The current school reform movement does not move us in the right direction. It represents a radical departure from the relationship the federal government has traditionally had with the states on educational matters. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the reauthorized version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, is the primary engine of the national school reform movement.

That movement and NCLB have been adequately appraised and criticized elsewhere and we will not repeat what others have done. Our brief analysis focuses on our concerns regarding the un-democratic nature of the act. NCLB makes demands on the states that consume substantial amounts of the all too scarce funds for public education. Virtually every state is concerned about its ability to support the demands of the act. It has been estimated (Mathis 2003) that public school spending in the U.S. may increase by at least 20% to produce the kinds of outcomes demanded by the act. More than a dozen other states have passed laws or resolutions challenging the federal law or commissioning studies of the costs of carrying it out. The federal government has appropriated what has historically been a state responsibility.

Our criticism is less a concern about abandoning tradition than about what should be a more prevalent concern, the undermining of democracy. We believe that the more remote the government the less democratic it is. We should be most concerned about threats to democracy because so much of the vitality of democracy rests on the preparation of democratic citizens and public schools have that responsibility. We believe the federal government should intervene in schooling when the school violates constitutional protection (e.g., Brown v. School Board 1954) and should sound the alarm if and when local schools are remiss in the preparation of citizens. NCLB neither prepares citizens nor does it provide constitutional protection to those denied such protection. Rather, NCLB sanctions have escalated to the point that they dictate the reorganization of local schools and authorize students to leave their neighborhood schools in search of higher performing schools.

NCLB's inappropriate ideological bias and its lack of support by credible research has been noted by many scholars (McLaren 2006; Orfield 2002). NCLB is increasingly considered a product of the control that the conservative movement has exercised on public policy and the culmination of the efforts at school reform movement initiated in reaction to *A Nation at Risk* (1983).

Many educators (e.g., Apple 1996; Berliner and Biddle 1995; Bracey 2002; Kozol 2005; Smith 2004; Spring 1997) have criticized the current reform agenda for

its faulty premises, namely: (1) public schooling has failed us and should be made more competitive through privatization; (2) inadequate schooling is responsible for the lack of "competitiveness" of American workers; (3) more good paying jobs await us if we prepare appropriately for a postmodern "global economy."

Historian Lawrence Cremin offers the long-term view of the use of school reform as a solution to our lack of economic competitiveness. He states:

> American economic competitiveness with Japan and other nations is to a considerable degree a function of monetary, trade, and industrial policy, and or decisions made by the President, Congress, the Federal Reserve Board, and the federal department of the Treasury and Commerce and Labor. Therefore, to contend that problems of international competitiveness can be solved by educational reform, especially educational reform defined solely as school reform, is not merely Utopian and Millennialist, it is at best foolish and at worse a crass effort to direct attention away from those truly responsible for doing something about competitiveness and to lay the burden on the schools. It is a device that has been used repeatedly in the history of American Education. (Cremin 1990, p. 103)

The last decades of the twentieth century saw a shift in public education in the U.S. from a drive for equal opportunity in schools to a backlash that rejected forced school integration and multiculturalism. The opposition to integration and multicultural education helped the ascension of the conservative political movement that dominated U.S. politics until 2006.

The imposition of conservative ideology is present in the intent and application of NCLB. Some of the main solutions to school underperformance advocated by the act, "accountability," "flexibility," and "choice," have been transmogrified to fit conservative thinking. Accountability to conservatives is achieved through the use of tests to assess the performance of students and their schools. This is one of the driving forces of the current school reform. The assessments are "high stakes" because test scores have serious consequences for students and schools. Schools and students that come up short on those assessments are required to change, to be reorganized, or to offer transfer options to their students. Students are targeted for remediation based on test performance; curriculum, instruction, course options, and even high school graduation are affected by test performance. These policies are widely applied in the face of previous research that questioned their efficacy. The National Academy of Science asked the National Research Council to study high-stakes testing and make recommendations to policy makers. The council concluded that "[n]o single test score can be considered a definite measure of a student's knowledge" and that such tests can both harm the individual and "undermine the quality of education and equality of opportunity…" (Hubert and Hauser 1998).

The sanctions imposed by the act have fallen especially hard on minority and integrated schools. The market and choice oriented policies imposed on under-performing schools (in need of improvement) consume resources and administrative time, but have little impact and are not being seriously evaluated. Teachers are being asked to prepare students for the tests instead of teaching school district devised curriculum, in other words there has been as explosion of "teaching to the

test." NCLB's accountability policies fail to reward schools making progress and unfairly punish schools serving large numbers of low-income and minority students (Orfield and Sundennan 2004).

The Children's Defense Fund (the creators of the slogan "leave no child behind") expressed concern about the misuse of tests because of the NCLB requirements. Other organizations that advocate for civil rights and equality in education have expressed similar concerns. The National Conference of Black Legislators and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) both oppose high stake testing for individuals.

Another noted pillar of NCLB is "flexibility," a feature designed to grant school districts more local discretion in the use of federal funds. Federal regulations requiring strict oversight and compliance with the expenditure of Title I of ESEA and other federal funds for needy students have been weakened in favor of increased flexibility for school districts. Districts have used this "flexibility" to use funds for other than intended purposes.

There are other important critiques of NCLB and the current school reform movement. One of them is the seeming unwillingness of the reform movement to recognize the role that social conditions play in school performance. Mounting evidence substantiates that unless the hardships related to poverty can be alleviated, little will change in the character and quality of urban schools in particular. Concentrated poverty severely limits the ability of a community to improve the quality of their schools. The long history of urban school failure should make this point obvious. The call to leave no child behind will remain a slogan without the political will needed to realize this goal (Noguera 2003).

NCLB and the reform movement have also systematically excluded the perspective of minority educators and equity advocates. Those with the most experience and interest in school improvement for minority and low-income students have been marginalized, ignored, maligned, and overwhelmed by this heavily conservative and anti-civil rights political wave. NCLB and the school reform movement promote an agenda which is mostly antithetical to the political economy of minority communities. While minority leaders and scholars argue for an opportunity and support agenda the NCLB, by contrast, calls for what many think is a misguided accountability agenda.

Despite its flaws, some argue that the act contains some major breakthroughs. And that by flagging differences in student performance by race and class, NCLB shines a spotlight on longstanding inequalities and triggers attention to the needs of students neglected in many schools. Also, by insisting that all students are entitled to qualified teachers, some suggest the law has stimulated recruitment efforts in states where low-income and minority students have experienced a revolving door of inexperienced, untrained teachers (Darling-Hammond 2007, p. 11).

We believe this commendation is misplaced. Promoting a goal when there is no intention for achievement actually lays the foundation for the next round of attacks on both public education and the essences of democracy. Once an unrealizable goal is clearly not to be attained, those who are determined to destroy public education can announce "we tried and found the objective to be unattainable so we now realize the only hope is to replace public education with a privatized system."

But even more importantly these so-called reforms undermine the most critical aspect of education: the nature of the relationship between the teacher and student. It is this relationship that determines whether there will be investment and growth or whether there will be dreary days of boredom. It is here, and not in meaningless test scores, that the evidence is most damning. A survey of 81,000 students in 26 states found two-thirds of high school students complain of boredom, usually because the subject matter was irrelevant or their teachers didn't seem to care about them. "They're not having those interactions which we know are critical for student engagement with learning," said Ethan Yazzie-Mintz, who led the annual survey by Indiana University researchers (Reuters 2007).

The lack of engagement cuts two ways. The reform undermines teacher morale and teacher initiative, both of which are fundamental for a positive educational experience. In 2005, "three-fourths of high school teachers had unfavorable views of No Child Left Behind" (Broder 2005). It has not gotten better since. According to Barbara Keff, President of the California Education Association, "No Child Left Behind is the worst thing that's ever happened to education. It's punitive. It's the scourge of many of our teachers" (Asimov 2007).

NCLB and the reform movement are undermining the role of schools in the preparation of citizens. Educators are alarmed that the new reformers dismiss the idea that public schools can and should be the extension of our democracy. The push to increase test scores is refocusing school curriculum toward test preparation and pushing out the teaching of History, Civics, and Social Studies throughout K-12 schools at a time when we need more citizen involvement and the improvement of civic skills.

We Need Citizenship Preparation

> Education in a democracy, said Alexis de Toqueville, 'is an apprenticeship in liberty.' It promotes the attitudes, values, and skills needed to live in freedom. Democracy is not inherited. It is constantly learned and experienced. We create freedom sustain it, grow from it, embed it in our families, communities, and institutions, and claim it as our heritage.
>
> (Kelleher and Van der Bogert 2006, p. 149)

The preservation of democracy is the most fundamental obligation of our citizens and our institutions. Only an educated citizenry can preserve and advance democracy in the face of the challenges of today and the even more ominous challenges of tomorrow. The approach to citizen preparation based on the recognition of our founding fathers and historical leaders requires rigorous study of history, but that alone is insufficient. Our citizens must be conversant with democratic values in order to protect them. The need for citizens' active participation becomes more evident as we analyze the degree to which representative democracy can be eroded without a knowledgeable citizenry and become controlled by special interests. The wealthy and the political action committees created with their money have made it almost impossible for those who are not connected to them to aspire to represent the interests

of the populace. The influence of wealth has been felt deeply in all of our pubic institutions, including our schools. Citizen support continues to be essential to public policies in our democracy. Only an informed populace can guard against undemocratic forces like plutocracy and theocracy.

Democracy demands that citizens must continue to pursue the goal of equal opportunity. The most significant obstacles to educational equity are not in the school buildings, but in the body politic. National educational policies and the current political climate have significantly altered the focus on educational equity. This trend is occurring at a time when the children of the poor face unprecedented social and economic pressures in the course of growing up. One job of the schools is to give them personal and intellectual resources to cope with these challenges. It therefore becomes critical to develop an alternative perspective on educational policy based on democratic values.

The erosion of public schools, which are traditionally expected to cement our democracy by preparing the young for democratic citizenship becomes a bigger concern in the face of other antidemocratic tendencies. Lasch (1995) sees damage to democracy arising from, among other things the decline of self-governing communities, racial separatism, and the virtual disappearance of public debate. He blames the "elites who control the international flow of money and information, preside over the philanthropic foundations and institutions of higher learning, manage the instruments of cultural production and thus set the terms of public debate—that have lost faith in the values, or what remains of them, of the West" (p. 25, 26).

William Greider is more concerned, as are many others, about the effects of corporate domination of U.S. politics. In his book *Who Will Tell the People* (1992) he asserts that American democracy is in much deeper trouble than most people wish to acknowledge. Besides the reassuring facade, the regular election contests and so forth, the substantive meaning of self-government has been hollowed out. What exists behind the formal shell is a systemic breakdown of the shared values we call democracy. This, he claims resulted from among other causes the decline of the political parties, a socially irresponsible mass media, and the impact of corporate "fixers" in diluting and circumventing the laws.

More recently Kevin Phillips expresses serious concerns about the dangerous politics that go with excessive concentration of wealth. In his book, *Wealth and Democracy* (2002) he explores how the rich and politically powerful work together to create or perpetuate privilege, often at the expense of the national interest and usually at the expense of the middle and lower classes. As the twenty-first century gets under way he sees:

> the imbalance of wealth and democracy in the United States as un-sustainable, at least by traditional yardsticks. Market theology and unelected leadership have displaced politics and elections. Either democracy must be renewed, with politics brought back to life, or wealth is likely to cement a new and less democratic regime-plutocracy by some other name. (p. 422)

Similar concerns have been expressed in the popular literature by others (Klein 2007, Wolf 2007, Johnson 2007, Hobsbawm 2007).

Introducing the Principles

Our proposal for a democratic education differs from others in its theoretical and comprehensive approach. It is organized as a general as well as a testable theory. Preparing democratic citizens is its main purpose. While we desire Civics and Social Studies to take on much more important roles than is now the case, we also believe that classroom organization, informed by democratic principles and the opportunity to develop citizens through active participation in school and community affairs are very important. So are a revitalized school government whose basic units are the classroom, cooperative learning, and community development projects.

Teachers have a crucial role in our vision of educational change. The only way education can move to be more democratic is through bottom up change with teachers demonstrating and documenting the impact that democracy has on education and education has on democracy. In his *Handbook of Teaching and Policy,* L.S. Shulman notes:

> The teacher remains the key…Debates over educational policy are moot if the primary agents of instruction are incapable of performing their functions well. No microcomputer will replace them, no television system will clone and distribute them, no scripted lessons will direct and control them, no voucher system will bypass them. (1983, p. 504)

The democratic education that we propose is based on three well established goals all of which are applicable to classrooms: c*itizenship preparation, inclusion, and an optimum learning environment*. These principles are not sacrosanct. They provide a launching pad for discussion and debate. It is in the experiencing of these principles that students develop an understanding of democracy and, if adequately discussed, an understanding of a variety of democratic theories and concepts. It is not unreasonable in a society that claims to be a democracy that a central feature of its education should be helping students understand what democracy is with a variety of interpretations of its meaning.

We are not alone in recommending a more democratic education. Walter Parker proposes five subject matters for the core curriculum for diversity and democracy: (1) historiography; (2) comparative constitutional studies; (3) comparative ethnic studies; (4) comparative poverty studies; and (5) deliberation (Parker 2004). In *Teaching Democracy*, Parker (2003) suggests deliberation and discussion of public issues as ways to teach democracy and prepare citizens. There are considerable areas of agreement between what we propose and what Parker proposes.

Citizenship Preparation

Larry Diamond (1997) argues much as we do that one learns to be a citizen by practicing citizenship.

> What makes democracy work is civic engagement. This is a habit, a practice, a set of skills, and a way of life that we must nurture from an early age and

> foster in everything we do as citizens ourselves, both in politics and outside it. In the schools, from an early age, let students learn the art of politics and the responsibilities of self-government and collective organization. Student government can be a valuable training ground for democracy, but it must evolve with a set of values and ideals that nurture commitment to the public good, foster open and respectful debate, and cultivate accountability. (p. 249)

For students to appreciate democracy they first must know what democracy is and that is no easy accomplishment because there is no universal agreement on definition; in recent years it has come to mean whatever any one wants it to mean. The understanding of democracy should be the basis for preparation for citizenship responsibilities.

One aspect of citizenship preparation is to encourage all to think independently and to learn how to solve difficult problems with logic and evidence. But citizens in a democratic society are only effective if they act collectively. That will require mastering citizenship skills including: presenting a coherent argument, listening to the arguments of others, persuading others, being open to the persuasion of others, negotiating differences, and mobilizing support for a particular proposal. This is the heart and soul of deliberative democracy and this kind of citizenship is learned through practice. That practice should occur in every classroom from kindergarten through the 12th grade.

Students learn to be citizens through a revitalized student government that exists in every classroom, cooperative learning, and community development projects in which students work together to make the world, the community, the school, or the classroom a better place. In Project Citizen, middle and high school students deliberate on how to change policy and then create a poster to indicate how they decided what to change and what they would do to make the change (We the People. *Project citizen*. Calabasas, CA). Something like Project Citizen is a necessary component in preparation for citizenship. Also necessary is the implementation of *community development projects*, a concept that requires policy involvement and change and is therefore different from *service learning* which may not require any policy involvement. As students move up grade levels they should take on ever more involved community development projects, complete, and evaluate them. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to practice democratic citizenship at every grade level.

Democratic citizenship emerges in part because of the protection provided by inalienable rights. The United States would not have come into existence without the amendment of the Constitution to include a Bill of Rights. These ten amendments provide protection to everyone from the excesses of government and include: rights of expression (freedom of religion, press, expression, assembly, and rights to petition); privacy (found under a penumbra of rights); a due process system that includes the presumption of innocence, the right not to testify against oneself, the right to counsel, a speedy trial before impartial jury, and protection against cruel and unusual punishment; and rights of movement. These fundamental rights, on which the foundation of the United States' democracy was built, are constantly endangered because students not only do not understand them, but in every Gallup poll since the 1930s a large percentage of students oppose them. The threats to

rights come from insufficient understanding and in the case of schools, their systematic denial. Teachers can make sure that students know and understand the Bill of Rights and make sure this is not a meaningless exercise by implementing them in their classrooms.

Inclusion

Although discussed briefly above, both race and class have been far too significant in education and had too great an impact on democracy and education to be treated superficially. According to DuBois (1901), "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line." It is also the problem of the 21st century, although now much more complicated. Race and class prejudices have at least three manifestations: *de jure*, symbolic, and systemic. *De jure* racism has vanished almost to non-existence; not so for symbolic racism. Deep seated prejudices are prevalent and provide the basis for deficit thinking. Ironically, the most insidious exclusion is systemic, built into the system that is maintained not by prejudice, but by policies of inclusion that presumably do not discriminate by race, class, and gender.

Equal encouragement becomes all the more important because we have become a "credential society." It is here we find systemic racism (actually race and class bias). An entrance requirement to the credential society includes a college diploma; this means that well over 50% of African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics who don't graduate from high school will never be the movers and shakers of a society that requires college graduation for participation in its economic and social life. What makes the situation increasingly hopeless is the continuous elevation of admission "standards" by institutions of higher education coupled with yearly increases in tuition which puts a college education out of reach for a very large percentage of the population. Any serious intent to not leave children behind would begin with equal funding for all public schools linked to a marked increase in investment in higher education. In both, the current movement is in the opposite direction (Kozol 1985).

The struggle for inclusion is the hallmark of America's rise of democracy. It is an unfinished struggle. One place where the struggle for inclusion continues is in our schools. Students are excluded when schools place students in different learning tracks (Oakes 1985). But an even more dangerous form of exclusion occurs when teachers engage in "*deficit thinking*." Deficit thinking is the insistence that students are limited in what they can learn because of factors outside of the school, e.g., genetic, accumulated environment, cultural deficiencies. Such thinking has a long and shameful history (Valencia 1997).

There will be no serious elimination of the achievement gap until deficit thinking is eradicated. And deficit thinking cannot be eradicated until all students are equally encouraged to succeed. For students to be equally encouraged to succeed all students must have access to an optimum learning environment in which teachers can make a conscientious effort to include all students as valuable members of a learning community.

Structural reform, the elimination of deficit thinking and the incorporation of the life experiences and perspectives of the various cultural groups that form our

population (Banks 1995), are all important elements of a democratic education and a requirement for the completion of our dreams to create an inclusive society and educational system.

An Optimum Learning Environment

> It is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modem methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry…. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty. (Einstein 1970, p. 70)

We agree that many elements must be addressed to improve public education; our suggestions here are addressed to teachers and teaching because we believe that fundamental reform in schools cannot be achieved without the comprehensive involvement of teachers. The importance of teachers to healthy and productive schools is well recognized. For school reform and restructuring, teachers are the lifeline of education. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) proclaim the following:

> Educational reform has failed time and time again. We believe that this is because reform has either ignored teachers or over-simplified what teaching is about. And teachers themselves have not yet taken the initiative to build the new conditions necessary for reversing a trend that has overburdened schools with problems, and ironically added insult to injury by overloading them with fragmented, unworkable solutions. Teachers have been too busy responding to the latest forays to steer a bold and imaginative course of their own. (p. xiii)

Newmann and Wehlage (1995) in a report for the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (CORS) synthesized 5 years of research from more than 1,500 elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the United States and conducted field research in 44 schools in 16 states. They present evidence that structural reforms can work, but only when human and social resources are organized to provide particular forms of support for schools and students. They conclude that the recent education reform movement gives too much attention to changes in school organization that do not directly address the quality of student learning.

Reformers have not been able to achieve consensus regarding the best approaches to deliver education, especially regarding curriculum, instructional techniques, and the organizational design of the school (Berliner and Biddle 1995; Cohen 1995; Elmore and Burney 1997; Tyack 1991). However, a current wave of literature is based on the premise that significant improvement in student learning in public schools will require a systematic restructuring of these schools, wherein educators re-conceptualize the school organization, the roles of the individuals involved, the outcomes to be obtained, and the practices they use to accomplish their goals (Elmore and Associates 1990; Murphy and Hallinger 1993).

Others have called for new teachers (Apple and Beane 1995) who will follow in the foot-steps of progressive educators who have resisted spending most of their time on administration. An education that is both disciplined and caring does not

impose formulas for students, teachers, or administrators. Rather than spending time developing curricula, teaching, and evaluation that are disconnected from their students and from the communities that they serve, our tasks as educators are to keep the river flowing on course and to enable all of the children of this nation to participate in this process.

Rigorous intellectual work is not prized for the sake of symbolic standards or agreeable publicity, but because this approach involves putting knowledge to use in relation to real-life problems and issues. Noguera (2007) suggests that of all the factors motivating students of color, teacher efficacy ranks highest. The value of teachers' encouraging students to stay in schools and become motivated to learn cannot be overstated. He has found that large numbers of students have teachers they don't understand, and with whom they do not identify and from whom they will not learn.

We are advocating bottom-up change without recipes, but guided by a theoretical and philosophical position from which curriculum development and teaching practice can be devised. The classroom of today is not organized for maximum learning. The effort to improve the environment has been largely cosmetic or enhanced by technology and modernized devices. Far more important are psychological factors. We present the following eleven components as key elements of an optimum learning environment. We propose that their presence in all classrooms would provide an appropriate setting for learning:

1. Encouragement to risk.
2. Elimination of unnecessary pain, boredom, humiliation, and loneliness.
3. Emphasis on the meaning of learning: why what is being taught is important to know.
4. A sense of competence, which encourages all students to believe they can succeed and participate.
5. A sense of belonging to something very special, as an equally valued member of a learning community.
6. Usefulness, putting to work what has just been taught.
7. Hope, which helps students' aspirations for a gratifying life.
8. Excitement, the opportunity and the encouragement to engage in the thrill of discovery.
9. Creativity, the opportunity and the encouragement to be creative,
10. Ownership, doing things for self and community, not for the teacher or the system.
11. Empowerment, gaining a sense of power when engaged meaningfully in a project that "changes the world."

All of this is consistent with findings from brain research, and other theoretical and philosophical analyses of learning (Amabile 1996; Goleman et al. 1992; Jensen 1999).

Currently some select students are actively encouraged to learn. A select few are actively discouraged and many, if not most, are neither encouraged nor discouraged (Boaler 1997; Brophy 2004; Goodlad 1984). Nothing will do more to eliminate the notion that a student cannot learn than to observe the bursts of achievement in

students who heretofore had not demonstrated such capability. One major form of teacher leadership in democratic education is the creation of an optimum learning environment and making that environment available to all. Teachers can begin to establish optimum learning environments in their classrooms, determine whether they have succeeded in creating these environments, and evaluate their effectiveness.

Teacher authority is a crucial part of an optimum learning environment. We advocate that teachers serve as democratic authorities. Democratic authority is legitimate authority, obtained by consent of the governed. It is a crucial, but amazingly overlooked, aspect in current school reforms. Schools are places were students are compelled to submit to an authority not established by their consent. Classrooms are undemocratic places in which teachers are supposed to "assert their dominance over students." That is neither a new finding nor one that generates much concern, (Pace and Hemmings 2007, p. 4). Nor is the revelation that many students will resist and a few will openly defy classroom authority.

In the 1960s and 70s this changed with a series of challenges to classroom authority that has made classroom authority a contested terrain. Over the past decade a series of studies of classroom authority indicate both widespread resistance and defiance and a variety of teacher efforts to establish authority through compromise, capitulation, negotiation and subterfuge. The "standards" and "accountability" "reform" movement is an effort to turn back the clock and through governmental mandates reestablish traditional authority (Pace and Hemmings 2007). Moreover this new authoritarianism from afar has come at the expense of equity and meaningful student (and teacher) investment in education. It has effectively halted serious effort to eliminate the achievement gap. Perhaps of equal importance is that the mandated curriculum comes at the expense of real life problem solving that is needed by citizens if they are to participate meaningfully in complex decisions.

Classroom authority earns legitimacy through persuasion and negotiation. Persuasion encompasses a powerfully convincing case for the importance of that which is being taught. Negotiation takes place when the case is not sufficiently persuasive and counter proposals are considered on the basis of the logic and evidence of its importance. It is not an authority that waters down curriculum or curries favor by rewarding students with unearned grades. None of the problems facing schooling or the public at large will be solved in the absence of democratic authority. And the logical place for students to learn about democratic authority is to experience it in classrooms. Teachers can begin to earn legitimacy by making persuasive cases for the importance of what they teach. If they do they will become more effective teachers, either by convincing students or by changing how and what they teach.

In today's rapidly changing world students need to master the tools of education not to fit into the world or to meet expressed current employer desires; students now must know how to use knowledge to change the world. If they are not provided such knowledge that change will be made by a small number of privileged elites. Democracy in our world is knowing enough to meaningfully participate in the important decisions of the society. If we lose our democracy it will not be because it

is overthrown or because a small group of terrorists destroyed it. It will be because the citizen, the person who had the benefits of at least 12 years of education, didn't know enough to preserve it. Before a student reaches the voting age of 18 she must know enough to participate in debates about war, poverty, environmental challenges, social justice, and other existing or emerging problems. It is because so little of this is now part of the curriculum that two-thirds of high school students find school boring and irrelevant.

Hope for the Future

The failure of the current school reform agenda, and the impending environmental crisis may provide an opportunity for increased public discussion of the role of schools in our democracy. Until recently educators have been largely ineffectual in combating the onslaught against all levels of public education. If they are to incite positive changes they must plan a more active and influential role in the political arena. As concerned individuals, as members of professional associations, and in various community organizations, educators need to become involved in defining and proposing to various constituencies the educational programs that will best serve students and prepare citizens.

An education that exposes students to the fundamental principles of a democracy and prepares them to be enlightened and responsible citizens must confront ideological controversy in schools, the impact of globalization, and the very fast emerging impact of climate change and other environmental crises. The ideological issues are both in the school and the broader society. Clearly a democratic education must address efforts to impose religious dogma on curriculum that can take the form of an attack on evolution, sex education, and science itself. Ideology continues to play a major role in efforts to achieve racial, gender, and class justice. The issue of peace and war, never adequately discussed in school, takes on greater complexity when religion becomes a major justification for war.

Globalization has influenced every aspect of public life. It has transformed the nature of the economy. Globalization of the economy has not only concentrated wealth in ever fewer hands, it has also markedly reduced the options of everyone else. It has produced an erosion of the middle-class and that has serious consequences for education, for social stability and for the American dream, Globalization makes a mockery of an education whose major preoccupation is preparation for the work world when the work that ostensibly students prepare for is being outsourced to the farther reaches of India and China. Globalization not only impacts work, it has a serious impact on democracy. The major multinational corporations make the important political decisions including major economic policy decisions. Education decisions in state capitals and in Washington do not reflect the thinking of ordinary people; student input is nonexistent and as a result burning issues are never addressed in classrooms. Moreover a globalized economy is a major contributor to climate change. Such an economy is not ecologically sustainable. It is not politically sustainable. It is not economically sustainable. Programs that do not prepare teachers to deal with globalization and teachers who

are unwilling to find ways to encourage discussion, research, and analysis of it are not prepared to deal with the educational issues of the 21st century. It is crystal clear that only massive shifts in public understanding can prevent environmental catastrophe.

The principles of democracy and the means by which students are prepared to be citizens presented here can be applied in stages in any classroom. How democratic treatment of these issues is addressed in classrooms requires not only teacher collaboration in schools and school districts, but also a shift in emphasis in teacher education. We owe this not only to our students, but also to the preservation of our democracy.

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