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ABSTRACT

Learning democratic principles is an important component of education. Ways in which to equip students with the necessary complex knowledge and skills for full participation in a democracy are explored in this report. The text focuses on the distinction between education for democracy and education as democracy, and it explores ways that the democratic process within schools can be encouraged, boosted, and nurtured. It looks at the intersection of education and democracy and explores the balance needed with democratic rights, responsibilities, and restraints. Ways in which to attain democratic outcomes are offered. Interviews with three educational leaders whose research and experiences center on educating for democracy are provided: Linda Darling-Hammond, Deborah Meier, and Margaret C. Wang. Each is asked to reflect upon the meaning of educating for participation in a democracy, particularly how schools can ensure academically rigorous education for all students. Each educator offers an array of strategies that range from democratic school structures to strengthened teacher education, to the use of student diversity as a tool to obtain powerful learning experiences and culturally relevant pedagogy. Some of the key elements of democratic school practices for disadvantaged students, along with the essentials of democratic teaching in action, are offered. (RJM)

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In this issue, we turn our attention to the issue of educating for democracy—how best to prepare students for full participation in a democracy with the necessary complex knowledge and skills. We focus initially on the distinction between educating *for* democracy and education *as* democracy. We conclude that democratic conditions and processes need to be present and active in schools before educating for democracy can thrive.

In our opening essay, we ask: What does it mean to educate for democracy? In what ways can the democratic process within schools be encouraged, boosted, nurtured—with professional teachers engaging parents and community members to achieve high-performance learning for all students?

We then question three educational leaders whose research and experiences center on educating for democracy: Linda Darling-Hammond, Deborah Meier, and Margaret C. Wang. We ask each to reflect upon the meaning of educating for participation in a democracy—particularly how schools can ensure academically rigorous education for all students. From their answers, we discover an array of strategies that range from democratic school structures to strengthened teacher education to the use of student diversity as a tool to obtain powerful learning experiences and culturally relevant pedagogy.

In two sidebars, we provide key elements of democratic school practices for disadvantaged students along with the essentials of democratic teaching in action. We conclude with a checklist structured to allow you to reflect upon and evaluate the condition of democratic education in your own school or district.

Educating for Democracy—Democracy For Education

Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood

Most American citizens would like to anticipate the future without apprehension or dread—or the certainty that things are bound to get worse. In this future, the great majority of citizens have satisfactory, secure employment that challenges their abilities—employment that does not discriminate on any basis other than the ability to do the job. The threat of losing one's job through downsizing or other systemic actions is negligible. Employees are evaluated fairly on the basis of their job performance.

In this future, huge disparities between the wealthy and the very poor have been eradicated. Rather than being pitted against each other in fierce, Darwinian competition for scarce resources, citizens have learned to work cooperatively and collaboratively for the common good. Differences of opinion and the ideas of others are not avoided or barely tolerated; instead, they are found to be a source of stimulation and enjoyment. Citizens have become skilled in group processes that lead to resolution of differences.

Schools have changed as well. Rather than being the earliest discriminatory environments many children experience—in which their likelihood to gain economic security for themselves is often determined prematurely—schools now are places in which children learn substantive, relevant material. What children learn corresponds to the world around them and emphasizes problem solving, manipulation of complex material, and collaboration with others.

In addition to this new type of learning, which emphasizes understanding over coverage, students learn an appreciable amount of other skills: the ability to reason; to argue without hostility; to tolerate and respect other people's viewpoints; to be empathetic to others; to respect other people's property and personal rights; and to use the best evidence and information available to make informed, responsible decisions. Students' experiences and prior learning—no matter how diverse from that of teachers'—are validated in the classroom. Open-mindedness is not considered a flaw, but a strength.

Teachers are no longer isolated, but draw strength and ideas from each other through professional development that is ongoing and fluid, not disconnected and fragmented. School leaders do not feel powerless in the face of conflicting mandates from states, districts, and national commissions because educational policy has become more streamlined, coherent, and less intrusive on the business of teaching and learning. Parents and other community members have become skilled in group processes; their voices are heard in schools and what they have to say is not a source of additional tension and frustration for staff. Diversity is not feared because school staff have learned empathy and a fresh understanding of people's differences.

In this ideal future, there are other benefits. In addition to adequate and reasonably secure employment, the presence of violence and fear is greatly mitigated. Rather than fearing for one's safety in the workplace, at home, and in the outside world, citizens enjoy feelings of security and relative well-being. Citizens no longer read about random, pointless crimes such as murder to acquire a pair of running shoes. Rather, they have seen crime diminish radically as their economic and moral security has burgeoned. A new ethos begins to permeate society: trust between and among citizens—and the belief that there is a common good to which all citizens can contribute.

Finally, the political process has been invigorated by a new spirit of volunteerism and citizen efficacy. Citizens register to vote in increasing numbers and voter turnout in local, state, and national elections is impressively high.

Is this future too idyllic to imagine? Is it realistic to expect democratic education—and education for democracy—to transform our society? In this essay, we will attempt to answer those questions by probing the intersection between education and democracy, based on the assumption that most citizens seek an enlightened, democratic future for themselves and their children. We will discuss what it means to educate for democracy, exploring the democratic rights and responsibilities of children, parents, and educators. We will ask what conditions need to be present to ensure that the democratic process is not obviated by the whim of the majority. Finally, we will discuss the outcomes a democratic education could produce—and describe how we can engender these outcomes in our schools through a web of interconnected strategies that include improved teacher training and professional development, democratic school structures, teaching and learning for

understanding, networking with social service agencies, and democratic parental involvement.

The Intersection of Education and Democracy

What do we mean when we talk about educating for democracy? Why is it important to think about education and democracy in tandem, rather than as separate entities in a permanent state of disconnect? What might we do differently in schools if we make democracy an integral part of the educative task? Are there certain outcomes, dispositions, and traits we want students to possess that will help them function as full citizens in a democratic society? In what ways will these dispositions increase students' value as productive members of the workforce? Finally, why is it important to consider democracy when we think about educational outcomes—what we want our children to know and to do?

Before we discuss educating for democracy, we need to clarify its meaning. Currently it is a term that appears to have an almost infinitely flexible meaning—one key reason that the concept of democracy remains problematic, elusive, and estranged from the functions of daily life. Many people appear to associate democracy with a vague conception of "rights," the Constitution, freedom from oppression, and participation in the elective political process.

While this conception is not erroneous, a critical distinction needs to be made. Democracy is not simply government by the people; that is the meaning of a republic. Democracy is also a social arrangement in which the rights and obligations of individuals are significantly understood and respected.

To a degree, public schools are democratic—because they are subject to some local control. To ensure that citizens and parents have a voice in the schooling of their children, boards of elected representatives voted upon from the citizenry govern local schools. In this way, the input of community members and parents is assured.

Or is it? Do traditional school structures, rigid bureaucratic policies and rules, and administrative hierarchies flatten and deflate the democratic process within schools and districts? How welcome is parent input—if it is input that suggests that educators do something different from customary practice? What about the rights of educators to teach as they see fit? Is student input and participation in their own educations—beyond the limited and ritualistic experiences offered by student government—seen as necessary, or viewed as an annoying irritant? Too frequently, the press of time and tradition often work against the full realization of participatory democracy in schools.

Another critical ideal of educating for democracy is that every student has equal, unimpeded access to high-status knowledge and teaching. The reality, as almost any observer of contemporary education would note, is that children of different socioeconomic backgrounds, races, and ethnicities receive educations of widely varying quality. Although open discrimination is banned, children continue to be sorted by race, economic status, language, gender, and perceived ability. These classifications, often begun in the early grades and codified at the secondary level, can assume a caste-like status that determines the quality of the rest of their educational experience and prematurely narrows their futures (Oakes, 1986; Lockwood, 1996b).

A Balancing Act: Democratic Rights, Responsibilities, and Restraints

Given this understanding of democracy, what are the rights of children in the educational enterprise? The rights of adults who teach and lead them? The rights of parents who want to see their children adequately prepared for a productive

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To fully prepare future citizens for productive roles in a democracy suggests an educational experience in which students learn at an early age to work with others, especially those different from themselves because of their economic status, race, ethnicity, or gender. This type of education demands that students learn how to seek sophisticated information and that they learn to interpret this information to solve real-world problems—and it means that students develop a sense of community that extends beyond their own ambitions.

future—as well as participation in a democratic society? The rights of other citizens, who point to widespread violence, the deterioration of inner cities, and the polarization of America into an upper class that can obtain the best education available and a permanent underclass that takes what it can get? How do we instill hope in citizens who look at the outcomes of an increasingly polarized and undemocratic society? How do we combat their fear that we are raising, in Philip Wylie's memorable term from the 1950s, a generation of vipers: amoral, bent on pleasure, apathetic about the democratic process, driven by the superficial and fleeting, and incapable of empathy or respect for the rights of others?

Linda Darling-Hammond (1996) makes a critical distinction between education *for* democracy and education *as* democracy (p. 6). The latter, she argues, engages students in learning communities where they experience firsthand the pluralism of contemporary society, engage in discussion, and reach informed decisions. Deborah Meier (1995) agrees, pointing out that it is unreasonable to expect students to engage in democratic decision making and reasoning if the adults around them are incapable of modeling the process.

Darling-Hammond (1996) also argues for a democratic agenda of rights for children, rights that have not enjoyed a particularly successful history in American schooling. The most central right, she states, is the right to learn—and the right to a qualified teacher (National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996).

But to learn what and in what way? The goal for democratic education—and educating for democracy—is to serve the public interest. Currently, public attention to education has been displayed by enlightened leadership in the private sector, which also desires many of the qualities consistent with the ideals of democratic education. Employers who once might have emphasized narrow skills and obedience now place new emphasis on hiring employees who can read, write, and reason; who can work well with others; who have a developed sense of right and wrong; and who can contribute to a team with keen problem-solving abilities.

The report of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (1991) is typical of many lists of the skills enumerated by employers as highly desirable—skills that they do not see from many prospective employees. Five workplace competencies are emphasized. They include the ability to identify, organize, plan, and allocate resources; work with others; acquire and use information; understand complex interrelationships; and work with a variety of technologies. The report also points to "foundation skills," which include basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematical operations, listening, speaking), thinking skills (the ability to think creatively, make decisions, solve problems, visualize, learn and reason), and the presence of certain personal qualities (responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity, honesty). Clearly, these competencies extend beyond simple basic skills to include capacities that enable citizens to function productively in a democratic society.

To fully prepare future citizens for productive roles in a democracy suggests an educational experience in which students learn at an early age to work with others, especially those different from themselves because of their economic status, race, ethnicity, or gender. This type of education demands that students learn how to seek sophisticated information and that they learn to interpret this information to solve real-world problems—and it means that students develop a sense of community that extends beyond their own ambitions.

Parents have rights as well. Zeichner (1991) points out that the voices of parents in the educational process have been largely ignored by researchers, school staff, and

the reports of national commissions that urge reform of the nation's schools. Although many researchers, educators, and policymakers do call for increased community and parent involvement in schools, he points to the contradiction inherent in community *participation* without community *influence* (p. 369). In truly democratic school communities, Zeichner argues, parents as well as school staff play a role in setting policy and have a legitimate voice in school decisions that extends beyond traditional volunteer work and attendance at PTA meetings.

Other citizens who may not have children in school also have the right to a voice in the educative process, although currently—like parents—their input is usually limited to seeking information about the school and providing service to the school as determined by school staff (Zeichner, 1991, p. 368).

With schools as democratic learning communities, are educators subject to the control of community members and other citizens external to the school? What about the rights and responsibilities of educators to use their abilities and skills to educate children democratically?

Amy Gutmann (1987) has pointed to key restraints on the democratic process that are necessary to keep it democratic: nonrepression and nondiscrimination. The use of these restraints demands a delicate balancing act. Majority rule does not mean democracy, she contends—as a majority of bigots could decide upon discriminatory school policies that are inherently undemocratic and therefore undesirable. Nor should one group or constituency dominate in the true democratic educational enterprise (Zeichner, 1991, p. 371). The voices of parents should not be louder or proffered more weight and legitimacy than the voices of teachers—the expertise of teachers needs some credence.

Zeichner illustrates the dangers of the democratic process in education being co-opted by groups with a particular agenda. While local control is important, and the voices of local stakeholders need to have legitimacy and weight, he contends that this should not negate the authority of school districts and states.

Zeichner also indicts community empowerment without restraints, pointing to potential pitfalls such as the possibility that some communities may desire educational processes that conflict with the principles of a democratic society (1991, p. 370), or that teachers and administrators could be left out of the educational decision-making process completely in the desire to empower community members.

Another potential pitfall exists. If teachers manage to achieve increased professionalism, prestige, and societal status (recommended by most educational reforms as a desirable outcome), greater distancing from parents of color, low-income parents, and others traditionally on the margins of the educational process can be an unfortunate consequence (Zeichner, 1991; Lockwood, 1997).

How might these potential problems be resolved? An answer can be found in an examination of the democratic outcomes we seek through this approach to education.

How Can We Attain Democratic Outcomes?

Attaining democratic outcomes cannot be accomplished through any one strategy. For example, a narrow focus on curriculum without consideration of teacher training and school structures will yield little. An insistence on smaller class size without any consideration of what students will learn and in what manner is equally pointless. And if teachers do not know how to model the democratic process for the students in their classrooms, it seems certain that educating for democracy will remain elusive and distant to youth. Rather than a well-intentioned but limited approach, educators should envision and work with a web of interconnected strategies.

Democratic School Structures. Certain changes in traditional school structures can spur educating for democracy—and educating as democracy. These structures may include democratic governance that involves teachers, parents, and other community members in setting school policy; school councils that include teachers and students; smaller school size; and conferring decision-making power and authority to the school site.

Size in particular can facilitate other positive outcomes. In smaller schools, size is limited to a manageable number of students and faculty, thus ensuring that both faculty and students know each other and can work freely in small and larger groups. Smaller size also mitigates against dysfunctional bureaucratic structures.

The current restructuring movement has underlined the urgency of moving to different school structures, although their presence alone—without attention to other variables—will not ensure democratic outcomes and high-performance learning. Changes in class size or embracing democratic governance will accomplish

little if the pace and scheduling of the typical school day does not change. This is particularly true at the secondary level, where a frantically paced and fragmented day makes it difficult for teachers and students to use time efficiently (National Commission on Teaching, 1996). In addition, the plethora of services and programs administered by people who frequently have little or no interaction with each other presents another obstacle to democratic outcomes (National Commission on Teaching, 1996). All sorts of supplementary, "add-on" instructional services that contribute to this type of fragmentation of the curriculum pose additional difficulties for teachers and bleed resources needed for the core democratic curriculum. The presence of such services also can be viewed as an admission that the core curriculum does not adequately push children to learn for understanding and develop a democratic social conscience.

Democratic Professional Development. In democratic schools, professional development for teachers is ongoing and not a special event. It is guided by what teachers need to learn to carry out teaching for meaning. Democratic professional development relies heavily on teachers' knowledge and experience to construct meaningful experiences that will address whatever weaknesses they have—just as learning for understanding pulls directly from students' experiences and prior knowledge to build a line of inquiry. This type of professional development requires a school climate in which adults can work collaboratively and trust one another enough to reveal areas in which they need additional knowledge or work.

Rather than a series of disconnected, "one-shot" workshops offered by entrepreneurial staff developers, professional development—at its core—consists of sustained dialogue and discussion between teachers and administrators. This dialogue focuses on the educational task at hand, identifying barriers and obstacles to its success, and solves problems in productive ways.

So that teachers and other stakeholders do not sink into an unproductive quagmire of adversarial or dead-end discussions, they—along with administrators, community members, and parents—need to receive adequate training in group processes. Such training will equip them with the skills necessary to hear diverse points of view and argue without rancor or animosity. This training is built into the school's budget as are monies for adequate, substantive professional development for school staff and should not be cut if fiscal constraints need to be employed.

Teacher Education for Democratic Schooling. Arguing that "if every citizen is to be prepared for a democratic society whose major product is knowledge, every teacher must know how to teach students in ways that help them reach high levels of intellectual and social competence," the National Commission on Teaching (1996) identifies improved teacher preparation as one of the most critical challenges for the twenty-first century. The Commission argues that teacher preservice education needs to improve dramatically and change to accommodate the push to teach for understanding to a pluralistic student population. Central to their argument is the contention that schools cannot implement new reforms in education if teachers do not know how or lack the necessary skills to work with diverse populations.

The need for improved teacher training is especially critical given the fact that approximately two million new teachers will be hired during the next decade (National Commission on Teaching, 1996, p. 8). This infusion of new teachers into the teaching force is an opportunity to make a significant shift to educating for democracy.

Learning and Teaching for Understanding. Traditionally—and undemocratically—students considered to be at risk of failing in school have received the least challenging educations. Believing that their lives outside school are too chaotic for them to benefit from content that pushes them to solve complex problems and express themselves both orally and in writing, many educators have eliminated high-performance learning from the educational agendas of inner-city schools. Instead, a much more limited focus on basic skills, remediation, and tightly controlled classrooms has replaced challenging content and opportunities for students to discuss material collaboratively and democratically and to have an authentic voice in their own learning.

However, new research on learning and teaching for understanding or meaning has shown that those students traditionally considered the most at risk of failing in school because of poverty or other intervening factors benefit significantly from instruction that builds upon their experience and previous knowledge (Knapp, 1995; Fennema, Franke, & Carpenter, 1993). High-poverty students show gains in achievement when taught in ways that encourage them to solve complex problems, write and articulate their thoughts orally, and learn to reason.

Knapp and his colleague (1995) infer that teaching for meaning may be particularly appropriate for children from high-poverty homes because it helps them connect their experiences outside school to the world of school. For example, approaches to writing that focus on meaning and understanding allow students to express their thoughts about their daily lives and experiences.

Democratic Integration of Social Services and Education. Supportive social services, intertwined with schooling, are integral to educating for democracy. As the number of children in poverty, Limited English Proficient (LEP) children, and others with special needs continues to expand in dramatic numbers, the support that social services can lend to bolster their performance in school must be taken seriously and imaginative strategies must be developed.

Democratic schools, especially in predominantly low-income communities with high numbers of students with special needs, are seeing dramatic results with improved academic achievement and a lower dropout rate among populations considered especially fragile (Lockwood, 1996a). These schools have taken a proactive approach to dealing with the entire child and the system in which the child lives. Working entrepreneurially, school staff and administrators pull in community social services and establish good, collaborative working relationships with them. One person is assigned to a case and follows that case throughout, taking responsibility for communication with teachers and other school staff about the child's progress.

Families are treated with respect and enlisted in the educational endeavor. Imaginative strategies to involve families in their children's schooling include special English language classes for immigrant parents, GED classes so that parents can improve their marketability in the workforce, tutoring sessions (in languages other than English) to assist parents in the paperwork necessary for their children to receive financial aid when they graduate and attend college, and social activities for families using the school site as the hub for interaction with school staff and parents (Lockwood, 1996a). Special supports for families are scheduled at times when it is the most likely that parents can attend; attention is paid to whether parents have cars or must use public transportation as well as the timing of events to coincide with the safety of the school neighborhood (some events, for example, cannot be held after dark).

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This integrated approach to social services and schooling can be compared to a settlement house approach, where the school serves as the central institution in a community and is known as a place where families can connect to social services and other assistance necessary to keep their children in school and achieving at higher levels. Some comprehensive systemic reforms, such as Success for All and James Comer's School Development Program, realize the importance of integrated social services and build in a social action component, drawing upon the expertise of social workers, psychologists, and school staff designated as liaisons with parents and families.

Working systemically with children and their families also ensures that the school seeks democratic status with its constituencies, refusing to construct additional barriers that set it apart. If children see their parents and families interacting in a positive way with school staff, they recognize that their own experiences and cultures are respected and validated.

Fulfillment of the Democratic Ideal

Our society is increasingly tense and polarized, as America hurtles toward the twenty-first century. Divisions along racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural lines are pronounced. Traditionally, we have looked to schools to carry out the missions central to a democratic society: teach children the knowledge and dispositions they need to function as productive citizens.

Our agenda is much more massive than in the past. As information and technology change almost exponentially, students need to learn differently. They must be able to manipulate this sophisticated and fluid information—along with the technology that task entails—in ways we could not have imagined twenty years ago. In order to teach these new dispositions—and fulfill an expanded, democratic agenda in schools—teachers and school leaders need a more powerful voice in the decisions that affect schooling, along with dramatically different understandings of both the content they teach and the social needs of their students.

To fully realize the American dream, we have looked to our schools to carry out the important work of educating students for participation in a democratic society. As educational opportunities and access to high-status knowledge become increasingly stratified, it is critical that we institute and nurture the ideals of educating for democracy—and educating as democracy—in American schools.

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"If the condition of man is to be progressively ameliorated, as we fondly hope and believe, education is to be the chief instrument in effecting it."

Thomas Jefferson

Three Views: How Schools Can Educate for Democracy

Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood

What are the key components of educating for democracy? In what ways do the social and equitable aspects of educating students for full participation in a complicated democratic society demand that schools themselves need to become democratic learning environments? How can student diversity become a tool that enhances learning for all students? In what ways can teachers increase their knowledge, skills, and comfort with students different from themselves? We sought answers to these and other questions from Linda Darling-Hammond, Deborah Meier, and Margaret C. Wang. In the interviews that follow, we share their perspectives on this critical topic.

Linda Darling-Hammond: *Achieving Democratic Education*

Just as citizens in a democratic society have rights that are inalienable, undeniable, and absolute, a democratic education is one of the most certain and assured rights of all children, Linda Darling-Hammond maintains—and is the most powerful tool to securing their productive futures.

What does it mean to educate for democracy? What is its agenda? To Darling-Hammond, democratic education is sweeping, comprehensive, and powerful—and not limited to curriculum or pedagogy alone.

"A democratic education," she begins, "means that we educate people in a way that ensures they can think independently, that they can use information, knowledge, and technology—among other things—to draw their own conclusions."

She adds firmly, "It is an *empowering* kind of education."

Democratic education is also equitable, she emphasizes, which means that high-status knowledge is not the sole property of a privileged few, nor is access to this knowledge arduous and impeded by obstacles. "If we educate for democracy," she notes, "we give all people the tools to think independently and reach their own conclusions, not just a small minority."

Finally, democratic education uses diversity as a building block to a high-quality education: a very key—and potentially problematic—component. "Democratic education allows people to be able to understand one another and be able to live together in a social community," she points out. "This requires some appreciation for different points of view. It also requires some skills for democratic decision making and conflict resolution—all those things we need to be able to do to work through issues together and create community."

Achieving Democratic Education: Where School Staff Begin

The skills that assure an excellent education for students lie within the grasp of all school staff, Darling-Hammond emphasizes, and are not particularly ephemeral, elusive, or abstract. One significant—but frequently overlooked—way that schools can advance this type of education, she believes, is through high-quality, purposeful interaction offered within the classroom and school community.

She notes, "One of the very important lessons of good democratic education—which some schools do practice—is that when we focus on helping people learn social skills, when we create true communities, when we help people learn how to talk with and listen to each other, we resolve concerns and differences."

This agenda, she maintains, might appear totally social, but it places considerable academic and cognitive demands on school staff—and on students. "School staff need to help folks hear one another and appreciate one another," she says. "But they also need to figure out how to teach in ways that give people access to very powerful ideas. For teachers, this means developing both a set of pedagogical tools and some personal capacities that require a lot of stretching."

To be successful, teachers must steep themselves in certain habits of mind, persevering with difficult ideas and content in engaging ways that help students develop their abilities to reason, solve problems, and work together. "This kind of pedagogy," Darling-Hammond enlarges, "not only presents challenging content but also figures out a variety of pathways to that content so that learners who learn in different ways and come to the learning with different experiences can get hooked into the material."

Not merely tolerating diversity—but welcoming it as a tool that can build powerful pedagogy—becomes especially critical. In fact, Darling-Hammond maintains, constructing knowledge upon the foundation of what students already know and understand is the substance of educating for democracy. In order to do this, teachers need to hear what students have to say.

The Power of Students' Voices

"Teachers," Darling-Hammond observes, "need to listen to students in a variety of ways so that they understand how the students perceive the material and what they bring to the learning experience." To do this, she explains, teachers need students' journals, different ways for students to communicate what they are learning and thinking, and autobiographical tools to capture students' lives and experiences. She also stresses the need to "listen to students when they are discussing ideas in small groups or in the whole group."

According to Darling-Hammond, teachers have traditionally been taught to control their classrooms and maintain their positions as content authorities—especially at the secondary level. "Teachers need to listen diagnostically to what students bring to the conversation," Darling-Hammond continues. "Otherwise, the teacher cannot discover where the students are—and the teacher must know that in order to bring students into a more refined or disciplined understanding of the material.

"That," she states, "is a very different pedagogy from what students typically experience."

Teachers have to be willing to embark upon a life of the mind themselves, she emphasizes. This kind of intellectual life welcomes curiosity, relishes new ways of exploring the familiar, and arrives at novel, fresh understandings of students from diverse backgrounds—understandings that are especially key with the escalating numbers of students from impoverished or disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Rewards of Diversity

The ability to appreciate those who are different is a nonnegotiable part of educating for democracy, Darling-Hammond believes. "It is a challenge," she says with obvious empathy. "We all relate most easily to the familiar. That is why segregated communities are comfortable.

"In segregated communities, we can be around people who already understand us. We find comfort in the familiar. But teachers have to find ways to stretch themselves to understand the experiences and perceptions of human beings who come from very different backgrounds than themselves.

"For example, sometimes the students who are least easy to know—sometimes the least easy for the teacher to like—are students that the teacher has to learn about. In doing so, the teacher can come to an appreciation of some aspects of those students' strengths and aspirations so that they can be taught. You cannot teach well people whom you cannot appreciate."

Working With Diversity for High-Quality Education

What helps teachers achieve the cognitive and philosophical shift that enables them to appreciate students from backgrounds quite different from their own? How can teachers overcome a reluc-

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tance to engage with students they do not understand or find alien to them?

To Darling-Hammond, the path is clear—and it is built firmly upon the personal. People need to examine their own pasts, she suggests. "It helps to look back to a time when each of us had some experience where we felt misunderstood, out of place, or unable to connect with another person in a way in which we could explain our point of view. That is something that teacher education can help teachers with," explains Darling-Hammond. "Teacher education can help people think back to their own evolution—both to remember the experiences that were difficult and alienating and also the experiences that were supportive and nurturing."

Such personal recollections enable teachers to achieve their own understanding of helpful interpersonal interactions—as well as arrive at often startling realizations of how it feels to be the one who is "the other." Achieving this kind of empathy can be realized, Darling-Hammond maintains.

"Everyone has had the experience of being excluded, rejected, or set apart," she adds. "It does help to ask: What would *I* have wanted in that experience? What would others want?"

Another way to nudge understanding of others, she says, is to question young people about their lives and experiences. "This can be done in a way that opens up the classroom. Students and parents can bring their experience to the classroom in a variety of ways. This can be done through various kinds of volunteer activities or bringing cultures or customs into the classroom or simply opening up a discourse that allows people to share their experiences."

When teachers spend the majority of classroom time talking at students as a passive audience, other voices cannot be heard. "There is very little room for other voices when teaching is thought of as the sound of teachers talking," Darling-Hammond emphasizes. "Debbie Meier often notes: 'Teaching is not talking and learning is not listening.' In her most recent book, *The Power of Their Ideas,* she talks about the fact that learning may be talking and teaching may be listening. That is, learners learn a lot by having an opportunity to express their views and gradually refine their thinking verbally. Teachers learn a lot by listening to learners talk so that they understand what the learners think, what they bring, and on what they are operating."

Darling-Hammond adds, "If teachers do not listen, the act of teaching becomes: 'Look how smart I am. I understand stuff and I am going to tell it to you.'"

Although it can take a conscious act of will to relinquish that role, educating for democracy is relentless: it demands that students' experience and needs come first. "If you really want to teach for understanding," Darling-Hammond points out, "you have to put students' understanding on the radar scope and work from it to move them along. The teacher needs to be able to guide and direct learning but in order to do that well, the teacher also has to understand what the students are learning."

Professional Development for Democratic Education

Only heroic teachers—who frequently burn out because of a lack of structural and collegial supports—can accomplish these tasks alone. What role does professional development play in furthering democratic education? If teacher education programs haven't prepared teachers to deal with democratic pedagogy, in what ways should professional development programs develop new, democratic skills in teachers?

Darling-Hammond believes that both professional development and teacher education are equally important. "Teachers need to learn throughout their careers, because teaching is a lifelong learning experience. There is no end to learning to teach. Professional development will be strengthened if it is built on a stronger foundation.

"As teachers," she continues, "we work with the craft of teaching and have the opportunity for inquiry into questions such as: How can I be a positive force in the lives of my students in their learning across many dimensions? There is no end to the fascinating work to be done to figure out how to teach."

Professional development that furthers teaching for understanding—and thus, democratic education—possesses certain key characteristics. "Professional development has to connect to—and frequently should begin with—teachers' own questions," maintains Darling-Hammond. "As you teach, you always wonder how you should do something. When those questions are the starting point for learning, the learning is much more powerful. This doesn't mean that there shouldn't be opportunities for teachers to get access to ideas and knowledge that they themselves haven't thought about before.

"There should be that opportunity, but ongoing work is best supported in a professional community where teachers are learning in a democratic setting, they are learning with others, and they have a group of people with whom they can inquire and take up a variety of issues."

Resources for learning provide teachers opportunities to attend conferences, engage in study groups, read, or work with outside consultants or experts. "But those resources should also be hooked into the teachers' questions, their inquiries," Darling-Hammond adds. "Teachers need a lot of control over the design of the professional development. It should be continued and ongoing so that it is always embedded in and connected to working classrooms."

The recent report of the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future[1] recommends, she points out, that teachers have at least ten hours a week in their schedules for professional learning and journal planning as well as additional days throughout the year for professional development. "This creates a community of learning for the teacher."

Democratic Policy for Democratic Education

What role should policy play in enabling democratic schools to evolve? Are there general guidelines policymakers would be advised to follow? "Sometimes," Darling-Hammond says thoughtfully, "the best policy is no policy at all. It is not that policymakers always need to create more laws or regulations.

"But one area that policymakers *should* attend to is the preparation and hiring of very skillful professional teachers. There is a very long-standing idea that anyone can teach if the subject matter is understood. Sometimes even that idea is not honored. Policymakers need to get serious about standards for teaching that encompass—as many of the new standards do—this set of democratic values and the skills that go with those values. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, for example, and the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium[2] have embedded in their ideas about standards for teaching the notion that teachers should be able to teach all children for understanding, address the needs of diverse learners,

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[1] *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future.* (1996, September). New York: National Commission on Teaching & America's Future.

[2] A 32-state consortium that is developing standards for licensing teachers under the auspices of the Council of Chief State School Officers.

and build classroom communities that encourage the development of participation and responsibility."

If these standards, she argues, were embedded in teacher education policy and licensure policy, the capacity to teach democratically would be encouraged over time. "Policymakers could do that, and it would make a difference. They could also resist the belief that if they create very punitive discipline policies, they will solve relationship problems in schools or communities. Rather than giving folks in schools the tools to learn how to shape and govern behavior in a successful manner, they create all kinds of sanctions and think these will produce good communities and good schools. Instead, these provoke greater and greater tendencies for students to violate the rules and to ridicule authority."

Some draconian policies, she says, have "ridiculous outcomes. "We now see children suspended for kissing someone on the cheek," she notes. "This is the outgrowth of policy that does not allow people to handle the issues of their daily lives in sensible ways but creates rules that are misused, misapplied, and injurious to the children they are intended to help."

The Future for Democratic Education

What are the implications for our society if we continue to educate youth in a way that is exclusive, not inclusive, except in a small number of schools to which it is difficult to gain entrance?

Darling-Hammond's reply is quick and decisive. "We already see the outcomes of a system of schooling that is highly unequal and segregative," she says. "We see the outcomes of a system that is nonsupportive of social learning—an increasingly wide divide between the sectors of society. We have a growing underclass of people who are both unprepared academically and socially to participate productively in society. That growing underclass creates a bigger and bigger burden on the productive sector of society in terms of growing welfare rolls, prison populations, and crime.

She concludes with passion, "Any members of the more privileged sector of society who think that this will never affect them or their families—in very concrete ways throughout their lives—are just flat-out wrong. It is critical to think much less selfishly so that access to high-quality education is ensured so that everyone can have a good life and be a member of a good society. We have a very pressing need to put these issues at the forefront of our education agenda."

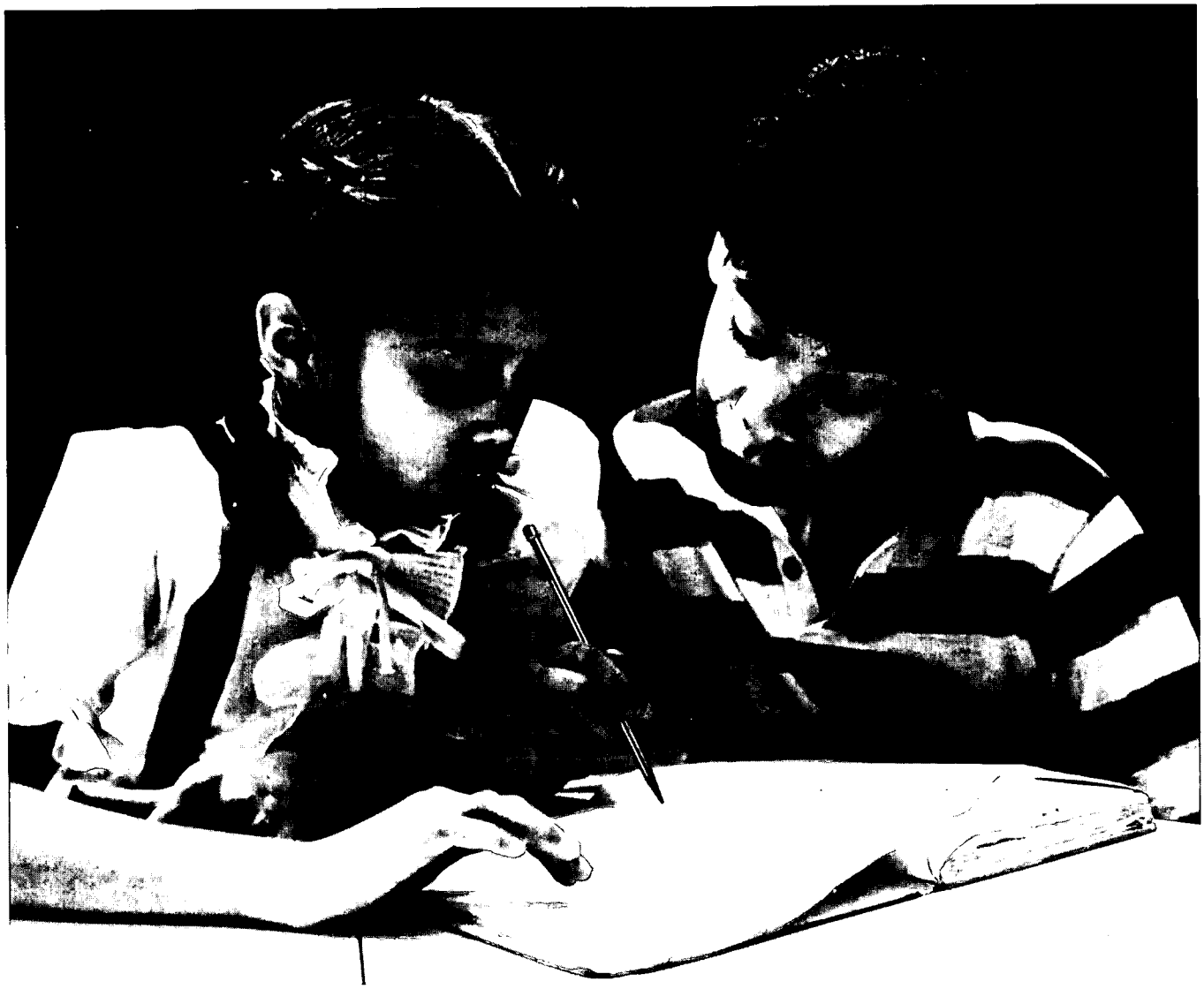
The Essentials of Democratic Teaching

What teacher actions and attitudes ensure that all children participate and succeed in truly democratic classrooms that are strengthened and not divided by diversity? What culturally relevant levers boost academic achievement for students of different races, ethnicities, languages, and cultures?

University of Wisconsin professor and researcher Ken Zeichner points out that effective instruction, particularly in urban schools, needs to be culturally congruent with students' life experiences. Zeichner has identified the following key characteristics of powerful teaching for ethnic and language minority students—which extend beyond the immediate classroom to include the families and communities of students in high-quality educational experiences:

- Teachers have a clear sense of their own ethnic and cultural identities.
- High expectations for the success of all students (and a belief that all students can succeed) are communicated to students.
- Teachers are personally committed to achieving equity for all students and believe that they are capable of making a difference in their students' learning.
- Teachers have developed a personal bond with their students and cease seeing their students as "the other."
- Students are provided with an academically challenging curriculum that includes attention to the development of higher level cognitive skills.
- Instruction focuses on the creation of meaning about content by students in an interactive and collaborative learning environment.
- The curriculum is inclusive of the contributions and perspectives of the different ethnocultural groups that make up the society.
- Scaffolding is provided by teachers that links the academically challenging and inclusive curriculum to the cultural resources that students bring to school.
- Teachers explicitly teach students the culture of the school and seek to maintain students' sense of ethnocultural pride and identity.
- Parents and community members are encouraged to become involved in students' education and are given a significant voice in making important school decisions related to programs, i.e., resources and staffing.

Source: Zeichner, K. M. (1993). *Educating teachers for cultural diversity* (p. 23). Special report. East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Learning.



"Democracy cannot flourish where the chief influences in selecting subject matter of instruction are utilitarian ends narrowly conceived for the masses, and, for the higher education of the few, the traditions of a specialized cultivated class."

John Dewey

Deborah Meier: *Democracy in Action*

Deborah Meier briskly turns the idea of educating for democracy on its head: Rather than asking why more schools are not engaged in an actively democratic educational enterprise, she points out that democratic education is an enterprise almost startling in its novelty.

"Educating for democracy is an extraordinary and new idea!" Meier exclaims. "Whatever makes us think we could undertake this most incredible task? Has there ever been a period in history where any complicated society imagined that ordinary people could be educated to the high levels of intellectual competence that democracy demands of all its citizens?

"It's a peculiar notion. And quite presumptuous when one considers our even quite recent history. When my mother was born, maybe one-third of the people in this country had the vote. We didn't think the other two-thirds—women, people of color, or immigrants—were fit to vote."

Placing the demands of democratic education within this type of historical context lends all-important perspective, Meier contends. "When Jefferson described the task as 'training people to use their discretion,' he was addressing a society in which the franchise was held by an even smaller minority of propertied white men."

Yet educating for our much expanded citizenry must occur, she argues, swiftly defining its essence. "We need to educate people with thoughtful habits," she says. "That is, we need to attain thoughtful schools. We need teachers who are engaging in thoughtfulness from the time they walk into the school until the time they leave. Teachers model the democratic process, making decisions, weighing complicated evidence, arguing and discussing their ideas, having ideas in the first place, discarding ideas, and then coming up with new ones."

If teachers do not model such democratic discourse, students cannot learn it, she adds. "We wouldn't send a child to a soccer camp run by people who don't know how to play soccer," she points out. "Why do we think we can produce thoughtful citizens in schools in which adults are not practicing thoughtful citizenship? We need teachers who are knowledge junkies, bursting with curiosity, eager to learn. How else can they pass these habits on to students?"

Moving to Democratic Practice

It isn't difficult to understand why a democratic education isn't readily available to all students, Meier maintains. The reason is clear: a lack of general conviction about the worth of democratic practice. "We currently don't have strong convictions that democratic practice is a good way to solve problems," she points out. "As soon as something doesn't work out quickly, we tend to forget about democracy, as though it were a luxury.

"Too often when we think about democratic communities, we address just the governance question. That is only a small part. The most critical part is the respectfulness with which people treat other people's ideas and each other."

Commitment and caring—at both the individual and group levels—make it easier to attain democratic practice in schools, she believes. "You have to believe in something deeply enough to persist, saying: This is our business. It is important. Where do you stand on it? What shall we do about it?"

A contributing factor to making sure that schools become democratic communities, she believes, is size. "Schools have to be small enough so that we can have easy access to each other's work, can easily meet around a table, and have control over most of the critical parameters of our tasks."

If schools are too large, their structure too complicated, hierarchical, and bureau-

Deborah Meier has spent more than three decades working in public education as a teacher, principal, writer, and advocate. Currently she is a Senior Annenberg Fellow at Brown University and the Vice-Chair of the Coalition of Essential Schools. She plans to work as the teacher/director of a new elementary school opening in Boston in fall 1997. Meier was the founder and teacher-director of a network of public elementary schools in East Harlem and the principal of Central Park East Secondary School in New York City. For several years she was the director of an initiative in New York to redesign several large failing high schools by breaking them up into small schools of choice serving varied age ranges. The schools she has helped create, serving predominantly low-income urban students—mostly African American and Latino—have long been considered exemplars of reform on a national level. Meier was a founding member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation. She is currently a board member of the Educational Alliance, FairTest, and the Association of Union Democracy. She is also a member of the National Academy of Education and the Cleveland Conference, among others. Meier was a recipient of the Catherine D. and John D. MacArthur fellowship in 1987. Her book, The Power of Their Ideas, *was published in 1995.*

cratic, she contends, teachers remain isolated and powerless. "It's not worth the trouble. Nobody ever gets to know each other well enough to hear each other's opinion, hear each other out. And when we do finally 'hear,' we haven't enough power to do much to solve the issues that surface. There is no point in hearing out one's colleagues or one's students if we don't have power over these matters anyway," she points out.

How small is small? "Small enough to sit around a table," she responds. "Probably under twenty per class is reasonable."

Learning How to Argue Democratically

Don't many adults feel uncomfortable at the prospect of arguing with their peers—even when the arguments are about professional concerns? How can school leaders make the discussion and argumentation process central to democracy equally central to schooling?

"You can make it easier to listen by requiring civility, but you can also train people to be a bit tougher," Meier says. "We don't have a lot of good models in the culture around us of how this might work. We don't know how to argue well as adults. Most of us haven't been brought up to do it. So it's time we taught it, explicitly.

"Arguing well takes training and toughness—and part of that comes from caring so much about what's at stake that you overlook occasional hurt feelings. If you don't care enough, or don't think that it's very important, then at the first sign of discomfort you back off or run away."

But argument is important, she asserts. "Schools need to train people how to hold up their end of an argument, how not to take the arguments personally, and how to reframe and revisit issues. Those skills that are sometimes taught as a means to reduce violence are equally critical to learning about mathematics and history! It won't happen if argumentation is always synonymous with polarizing confrontations," she points out.

The notion that adults must model what students need to know is hardly a new idea. "It is an old-fashioned notion," Meier observes, "that a teacher is someone who does something very well and shows you how to do it. We can teach how to be a democratic society—but the school has to be a place that helps that kind of teaching happen."

Schools by their very nature, as organizations that exist to serve diverse students, are ideally suited to the task. "Schools can be the actual instruments of their own transformation," Meier notes. "We have a wonderful opportunity in all our communities to create places where not just teachers and kids can build knowledge, but where parents, family members, and others in the community can learn as well. Our schools can become places where all learn to make sense of the world, where all accept the obligation to learn to see the world from more than one perspective, and even learn to vigorously disagree about what they see."

In the process, all members of the community can learn the most productive ways to work with information—and reach their decisions. "They can learn how to get better information," she says, "how to weigh that information more carefully, how to put it out there publicly, how to acknowledge the possibility they might be wrong, their information incomplete. They might even model how one changes one's mind in the face of other, more compelling evidence."

Involving Parents and Families in the Democratic Process

Involving parents and families in the school's democratic enterprise extends beyond rhetoric or public relations, Meier insists—it is simply shrewd common sense. "Five-sixths of children's lives are spent outside our direct control," she points out.

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"We need, kids to bring their hearts, bodies, and souls into school; not just come there with a little part of themselves. We need their parents as allies. What happens to their children is above all their business. Frequently, by the time kids reach adolescence we have helped play a part in estranging parents from their kids, making parents feel less powerful, and therefore we all end up with less influence on our kids."

"That is a powerful reason to take very seriously what we do in the mere one-sixth of the time that we have them in school."

She continues, "It is important to remember that the relationships we build with parents and the community determine a lot about what happens in that other five-sixths of children's time. The alliances we create will determine a lot about how children spend that other five-sixths."

Another shrewd and practical reason for forging relationships with families is to enlist them as allies in the work of school itself. "Kids don't let us influence them quite as easily as we might like to think unless they trust us. That goes for learning how to spell, or how to learn one's times tables as well as much subtler and more complex matters. Their resistance is not altogether a bad thing. In a sense, education is about changing people's mind about something, whether it is mathematics, science, or how to interpret a book. We're always broadening, complicating, and disturbing existing ideas."

She adds, "Kids aren't likely to risk such a change of mind about things of importance if they see school folks as enemies of their families and communities. So families need to have a lot of faith and respect in the work of the school or we're not in a position to have a very big impact on their children."

This attitude is very different from the frequent belief that the influence of families and neighborhoods is a fatal limitation—something that must be overcome or mitigated by educators. "We need," Meier adds with some vehemence, "kids to bring their hearts, bodies, and souls into school; not just come there with a little part of themselves. We need their parents as allies. What happens to their children is above all their business. Frequently, by the time kids reach adolescence we have helped play a part in estranging parents from their kids, making parents feel less powerful, and therefore we all end up with less influence on our kids.

"I would like," she continues thoughtfully, "to persuade parents that we can have an impact on what kids do in that other five-sixths of the time, but I need powerful parents if I'm to do that, or what difference does it make what they say or do? There are many ways in which we need each other, like it or not. If we figure out how to work as allies, rather than rivals, we could make each other's work a lot easier."

But even disagreement between school and home about how to proceed is educative if handled properly, Meier asserts. "We need to insist that the kids are always there with us when we meet with their families. That doesn't mean that we don't air disagreements, but it means acknowledging that if there's hostility between the teacher and the family the student knows it. What they don't know," she emphasizes, "is that we can find a way to work it out together. It doesn't do to pretend it is not there. But if we work it out together, we'll be practicing all the habits of mind we're teaching about."

Making Democracy Immediate and Visible

When democracy and the democratic process are cast in remote, abstract, bookish terms, students cannot be expected to feel a sense of profound, true engagement with its principles and goals. "Democracy is based on the possibility that you could be wrong and I could be right," Meier reflects, "or the other way around. It's a very fragile idea. It imagines that we are capable of reasoning things out together. These are not easy assumptions to hold. It takes a lot of practice until it becomes habitual. The academic disciplines are a great place to practice such disciplines. That's their most important function."

While it is not easy, it must become automatic, she argues—a habit as assured as brushing one's teeth. "It requires the habit also of stepping into the other guy's shoes for a moment and saying: Is this too

Meier becomes exasperated at the belief that habits of tolerance and open-mindednesss—so central to democracy—might be considered either too "soft" or too "sophisticated." They're at the heart of even the most advanced of the hard sciences, she insists—pointing to the temporary suspension of belief required to think about "as if" propositions. And as for sophistication, human beings are "wired" to handle complexity, she asserts.

uncomfortable to bear? What can I learn while I'm in these shoes? Am I asking something of others that is really not tolerable? These are the kinds of questions that we need to get in the habit of asking over and over, in all our daily interactions.

"What we call politics is the endpoint along a whole line of little interactions. We either signal trust and respect or we signal distrust and disrespect. Democratic life finally falls apart when disrespect and distrust predominate, when people won't listen to another viewpoint, when they can't imagine they could be wrong, when they are unwilling to step into somebody else's shoes. At that point we are all in danger."

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"Open-mindedness," she says decisively, "comes from rigorous training and lots of practice. I emphasize the word 'habit' because it is at times of stress that democracy is most in danger. A habit is precisely something you do even under stress."

School leaders can facilitate these democratic habits—along with the free, but sometimes painful exchange of ideas—by gauging how much is too much, when the argument becomes counterproductive, she says. In fact, Meier insists that such judgment calls are the stuff of which leadership is made.

"If meetings become completely polarized, it's time to rephrase what people are arguing about so that they can hear each other better," she says softly. "I sometimes forget this myself. But we need to know when to step back. We need to find ways to role-play the situation in a different way, find a different article to read, distance ourselves by looking at the issue from a different place. Sometimes we even need to drop it for a while, so we can revisit it later on.

"In fact, frequently the most unimportant policies are the ones people become the most heated about, such as whether to have school uniforms. People carry personal history and baggage into these issues. Sometimes a little distance is needed so people can hear how much more complicated the issue is, how a uniform that one person thinks of as a form of regimentation represents liberation to another person."

Those issues that are the most important demand the most open-mindedness, Meier adds. "It is precisely when things seem important that we need the habit of open-mindedness most. Little children are remarkably open-minded; they're far less dogmatic in those early years than they become later on. But all of us are capable of a good deal more open-mindedness."

Open-mindedness, unfortunately, has been maligned as an intellectual quality, she says. "Some people mistake it with not having any opinion, with empty-headedness, not taking a stand—an 'anything goes' attitude. But I'm all for taking very firm and strong stands. I'm also open to the possibility that the stand I'm taking is wrong. Still, I'll take that stand until I am persuaded otherwise. It's tough to change someone's mind," she observes, "and it ought to be tough. We need to know when and where not to do so."

Educating for democracy is demanding, she points out. "The elite schools have always been good at training their members to be rulers," she says. "In a sense, what we now are saying is that all citizens in a democracy need to see themselves as rulers. They all need that elite training.

"However, when only a small number of people were making all the decisions, you only had to train a small number of people well," she adds. "And you could afford to train them to think of themselves as better than other people. Democratic training has a double task: Training everybody well, but doing it in such a way that no one sees himself or herself as intrinsically superior to others, unable to learn from each other."

"Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery."

Horace Mann

Margaret C. Wang: *A Democratic Agenda for Schooling*

To Margaret Wang, educating for democracy first means full and unquestioned inclusion: children at all levels of achievement and from all backgrounds should be educated with state-of-the-art programs to ensure their success in school. Every student, she contends, must be educated with powerful information and skills in order to function effectively in a democratic society. To achieve this critical outcome, she believes, schools must be organized to respond effectively to student diversity. High standards of achievement must be upheld for each student—with particular attention to those students who require greater-than-usual instructional and related service support.

"For students to be prepared to actively participate in a democratic society," she begins, "they need to have the tools for self-directed lifelong learning and be able to make decisions based on information they already know—or know how to go about acquiring the necessary information to make informed decisions and continue to learn." She adds, "Effective education means getting every student to that point."

Wang believes that the current, too frequently undemocratic condition of education can be overcome with new, educator-held attitudes that accentuate the positive—thus supporting student success—and also through structural arrangements that ensure equity of access to high-status knowledge. "We need first a mindset that truly believes that every child can succeed in school," she maintains. "This mindset acknowledges that children, particularly children from a variety of adverse circumstances that place them at risk, are faced with multiple hurdles that they have to overcome in order to succeed in school."

External risk factors aside, Wang believes in the power of schools to educate all children successfully—but only if significant changes occur that are sustained over time. "We need to recognize that those hurdles to academic success are sometimes created by us, the schools," she points out. "For children who are in schools where less-than-powerful education is offered, schools become an added risk factor. Typically, we blame the victim rather than viewing ourselves, the educators, as another co-occurring risk in their life circumstances."

Educational Resilience and Democratic Structures

There is a tendency to blame the victim, she says, when educators are overwhelmed by the pressing, multifaceted needs of children from economically and educationally disadvantaged circumstances—and see no way that schools can effect positive change in the face of such odds. Given the presence of such serious, pressing needs, how can we change such common, pervasive, and pernicious beliefs? How can educators avoid demoralization and feelings of powerlessness?

In her reply, Wang focuses on how much researchers and educators already know—and on a concept central to her work: fostering educational resilience. "We need to use our knowledge on what works and target our energy," she suggests, "to look at how we *can* provide environments that overcome the risks and strengthen our capacity for resilience development.

"We know a great deal about what the problems are," she emphasizes. "What we need is a focused effort to address the question: Why do some children, some faculty, some schools, and some institutions succeed and do well in the service of children in spite of the seemingly insurmountable problems? What are the contributing factors in those situations upon which we can expand, that we can maximize? How can we apply these factors in situations where children are not benefiting and are not succeeding?"

Margaret C. Wang is Professor of Educational Psychology, and the founder and current Director of the Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education (CRHDE), the sponsoring institution of the Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success—one of ten regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education. She also directs the National Center on Education in the Inner Cities, originally established as one of the national research and development centers established by the U.S. Department of Education. Wang is recognized internationally for her research on learner differences and classroom learning, student motivation, and implementation and evaluation of innovative school programs that are responsive to student diversity. The developer of two major school programs, Wang is the author of 14 books and over 100 articles. Her recent publications include Educational Resilience in Inner-City America: Challenges and Prospects *(1994),* Rethinking Policy for At-Risk Students *(1994), and* School-Community Connections: Exploring Issues for Research and Practice *(1995). She received the Matthew J. Guglielmo Endowed Chair award from California State University at Los Angeles for her contributions to the field of special education, and has been a visiting scholar and guest lecturer at numerous universities abroad, including the University of Amsterdam, University of Leiden, Catholic University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, University of Calgary, National University of Mexico, National Normal University of the Republic of China, Universidad de Oviedo in Spain, and The Chinese University of Hong Kong.*

"Instead, we try to figure out the constructive ways of helping every student to achieve success. This constructive type of thinking goes far beyond a rationale that children cannot learn if they are from poor families or language minority backgrounds, or if they live in high-crime neighborhoods that are marked by street violence and drive-by shootings. Surely, schools cannot be responsible for solving all the social ills of our time. But schools can give all children the best and most powerful instruction; schools can mobilize community resources to their benefit."

Attitude, while not everything, is a large part of the solution, Wang maintains—and part of the empowerment school staff need in order to rise above demoralization and hopelessness. "A major step in the right direction is to believe we can do something about these problems," she says pragmatically. "If we focus on fostering the resilience and learning success of every student, we are not blaming anybody.

"Instead, we try to figure out the constructive ways of helping every student to achieve success. This constructive type of thinking goes far beyond a rationale that children cannot learn if they are from poor families or language minority backgrounds, or if they live in high-crime neighborhoods that are marked by street violence and drive-by shootings. Surely, schools cannot be responsible for solving all the social ills of our time. But schools can give all children the best and most powerful instruction; schools can mobilize community resources to their benefit."

While it is paramount to focus on the quality and content of what students learn, she believes certain structural supports are particularly helpful in achieving democratic educational outcomes. "Thus, we need to look at the support systems we provide: how to minimize the risk and accentuate the positive. Sometimes these supports are very straightforward. They could include arranging schools into small units where teams of teachers share responsibility for student success; restructuring school resources to effectively respond to student diversity; creating small learning communities within schools to provide collegial support; and establish a connected system of service delivery to overcome fragmentation and disjointed programming."

Resource Fragmentation

The ways in which categorical resources are tied to categorical programming contributes to polarization among students and teachers, Wang contends, and more immediately, to an inefficient use of resources. "We waste our energy and resources by providing separate categories and support systems for children who require greater supports, such as special education and other remedial or compensatory education support such as Title I," she says.

"There is nothing wrong with the concept of providing supplementary funding to meet the special needs of selected students in order to ensure equity in school outcomes—that is, schooling success of every student. It is the way in which the supplementary or categorically funded programs are implemented that has become a major barrier to improvement. There is little coordination between regular and specially designed programs or across the special programs."

Attending to the Needs of All Students

Although students at both the top and the bottom academically need special sorts of curriculum adaptations and supports, Wang is also concerned that there is little attention to the diverse needs of students who fall in the middle. These students, frequently overlooked, end up receiving little that is special or personalized in the course of their educational experience.

"Students who are not at the margins of the achievement distribution also differ as individuals," she points out. "Their needs and interests often are overlooked or not effectively accommodated."

Such unresponsive practices, she contends, provide clear evidence that the educational experience provided to all children must become more personalized. "Students who seem to require little special curriculum or instructional accommodation are not being educated in a way that could and should further their learning potential and better prepare them for active participation in a democratic society," she adds.

Undemocratic school structures and policies, too often unquestioned, contribute

to the outcomes lamented by society and employers seeking employees who can work well with others and who can use information to make intelligent decisions. "We focus so much on the bottom 20 percent—which we should—but we have not paid adequate attention to the need to nurture the academic achievement of all children.

"We fall short in other ways as well," she continues. "We often pace our instruction so slowly that it doesn't allow for the children who are capable of forging ahead of our expected rate of progress. As a result, many who are capable of more advanced levels of work tend to get bored or not reach their potential because they are not challenged. Not everyone gets an equal amount of support. Some children learn in spurts; at times they need more direction and instructional support. At other times they can move ahead with little intervention. When instruction is child centered and when accommodations are made to meet the needs of specific children, the benefit also extends to nontargeted children."

Support for Democratic Education: The Social Foundation

Teachers, Wang warns, need significant support to respond to diversity in ways that will benefit all children—a practice she sees as central to democratic education. "We must also rethink and redeploy our resources in ways that allow teachers to spend significantly more time on instruction," she states. "Teachers spend so much time on managing students and on paperwork to meet bureaucratic mandates that have no bearing on instruction. We need to find creative ways to allow teachers to spend time differently in the service of student achievement.

"Sometimes the most mundane occurrences in a classroom are the biggest time-wasters, she believes—and can be overcome with practical strategies to maximize the teacher's instructional time. "A lot of teachers have to stop their lesson to oversee management concerns which can be taken over by students when the classroom environment is structured to foster student self-management arrangements."

Facilitating Democratic Teaching

True democratic teaching, Wang maintains, stems from empowering teachers with an empirically sound knowledge base: High-quality information and knowledge, she argues, is the most powerful way to spur democratic teaching. "Sometimes in the name of empowering teachers, we forget that we have to provide them with the power of subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical expertise," she observes.

Recognizing that teachers differ in their knowledge and expertise is also crucial to furthering our vision of democratic schooling, Wang says. "Some teachers already know a great deal about how to implement what works in the service of student achievement. What they need is not more staff development but time to plan for implementation.

"There are others who need extensive staff development and ongoing technical assistance. For example, some teachers may not be able to manage multiple activities simultaneously occurring in their classrooms. But in a typical class of thirty students, one simply cannot be effective in addressing the needs of each student by having all children working on the same task. So instead of four or five different activities, the teacher may be encouraged to begin with having two different learning options and then increasing the number of learning options as the teacher becomes more at ease about making more than one learning activity available at a time. Some teachers need to be provided with more guided practice and knowledge-based staff development than others. Providing differentiated support to meet the individual needs of the school staff is not undemocratic. Ultimately, a staff-responsive approach to professional development of the school staff empowers the entire staff."

Securing a Knowledge Base for Democratic Teaching

Given the demands of teaching, how do teachers or school leaders secure an adequate knowledge base to ensure that democratic teaching will occur? What are the most pressing needs in teacher education?

To Wang, the current lack of interprofessional programming for preservice and inservice education contributes significantly to the fragmentation of service delivery. "We train regular and special education teachers in separate programs," she observes. "We train school social workers and school psychologists as separate entities. They may be trained in the same university but they meet in the field as strangers. Yet we need all of these professionals to work collaboratively in coordinated ways in the service of students.

"There is not an undergraduate or graduate course that provides training experiences that foster interprofessional collaboration among different disciplines. We view collaboration and coordination as key reform strategies, but we don't make the structural changes required for implementation."

Collaboration with social services is also necessary, even critical, Wang argues, and yet teachers lack adequate training to know how to engage in that type of collaborative process. "School staff need to know how to work with other educational and related social services providers such as through working on after-school programs or second-chance adult education programs with public housing, public libraries, and other educational and social services agencies. We need to take the scarce resources we have and pull them together in the most facilitative and efficient ways possible. We know what needs to be done to achieve the types of outcomes we want for all children. We even know different ways of achieving this vision. Implementation won't be easy—it takes hard work and resilience. We simply need to make the commitment to begin and persist."

Different and creative ways to reach parents and families are necessary as well, she believes. "We need to figure out and gain insights on the multiple best ways to reach the targeted audience," she says. "People often don't access services because they don't know how. Perhaps more importantly, we don't have the knowledge base or credibility for making our services palatable or accessible to those who may benefit from them. We need to build a knowledge base on how to involve parents and communities in nontraditional ways, such as linking school efforts to involve parents with the efforts of community organizations working on community revitalization activities."

The solution, she says, is not simple: It demands a multipronged approach to education and social services delivery. "My point, however," she concludes, "is that there are multiple ways of knowing and problem solving. We know far more than we use. What we need is a genuine commitment to take action and persevere. We need to commit to it. Once we have the commitment, we can chip away at the barriers and maximize what works."

Democratic School Practices to Maximize Student Success

In what ways can educators reshape their curriculum, instruction, and attitudes to ensure that those students considered the most disadvantaged—because of economic status, race, ethnicity, language, or culture—will engage in a high-quality education that will prepare them for participation in a democratic society? Current research suggests that the most effective instructional approaches draw upon the knowledge and skills that children bring to school with them—using this knowledge to build high student achievement through demanding, interesting, and culturally relevant classroom experiences.

Instructional techniques that emphasize cognitive approaches to problem solving do more than focus on basic skills, drill, and remediation: They bring about increased student achievement. Researchers Barbara Means, Carol Chelemer, and Michael S. Knapp suggest the following school practices for students targeted as disadvantaged:

Taking a New Attitude Toward Disadvantaged Learners

- Appreciate intellectual accomplishments all young learners bring to school.
- Emphasize building on strengths rather than just remediating deficits.
- Learn about children's cultures to avoid mistaking differences for deficits.

Reshaping the Curriculum

- Focus on complex, meaningful problems.
- Embed instruction on basic skills in the context of more global tasks.
- Make connections with students' out-of-school experience and culture.

Applying New Instructional Strategies

- Model powerful thinking strategies.
- Encourage multiple approaches.
- Provide scaffolding to enable students to accomplish complex tasks.
- Make dialogue the central medium for teaching and learning.

Source: Means, B., Chelemer, C., & Knapp, M. S. (Eds.). (1991). *Teaching advanced skills to at-risk students: Views from research and practice* (p. 8). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers.

"A large part of the art of instruction lies in making the difficulty of new problems large enough to challenge thought, and small enough so that, in addition to the confusion naturally attending the novel elements, there shall be luminous familiar spots from which helpful suggestions may spring."

John Dewey

Educating for Democracy: School and Classroom Practices

The following questions are designed to help you evaluate and reflect upon the concepts central to educating for democracy as it exists currently in your school.

Democratic School Structures	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
To what extent does my school involve teachers, parents, and community members in important decisions about resource allocation, staffing, and curriculum?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent does the size and structure of my school allow all staff to know one another, share concerns and solutions to common problems informally, and draw upon one another as a source of collegial support?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent do staff in my school have frequent opportunities—both structured and informal—to talk to one another about their *classroom practices?*	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent do staff in my school observe one another teaching and offer constructive feedback?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent is professional development an ongoing, continuous process rather than "one-shot" workshops with little follow-up?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent do staff have real authority to make decisions pertaining to curriculum and instruction, resource allocation, and professional development?	❑	❑	❑	❑
Culturally Relevant and Academically Rigorous Learning				
To what extent do staff at my school invite students to bring their life experiences, cultures, and languages into the classroom as a foundation for curriculum that will be relevant to their lives outside school?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent do teachers and administrators listen carefully and clinically to what students have to say, using that information to improve and refine the nature of curriculum and instruction?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent do teachers hold all students to the same academically rigorous standards and expectations for behavior?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent do teachers and other school professionals work collaboratively to solve students' special needs in an integrated, personalized manner?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent do teachers achieve critical awareness of their own attitudes about students from backgrounds different from their own?	❑	❑	❑	❑

Working With Parents and Community Members	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
To what extent do staff at my school want to hear what parents really think about school practices and their children's achievement?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what degree are there creative and informal mechanisms for parents and other community members to ask questions, offer feedback, share concerns, and acquire learning tools for themselves (e.g., after-school parent/family/staff potlucks in neighborhoods where evening meetings would be unsafe, parenting classes for potential dropouts, computer or GED classes for recent immigrant parents)?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent do school staff reach out to parents and other family members beyond formal, structured parent/teacher conferences (e.g., home visits, phone calls, radio announcements of school events in languages other than English)?	❑	❑	❑	❑
In addition to informal opportunities for parents and family members to interact with school staff, to what degree are there structured opportunities for family members to participate in decisions that directly affect the quality and content of student learning?	❑	❑	❑	❑
If parental feedback about school practices is not positive, to what degree do school staff respond in constructive, nondefensive ways?	❑	❑	❑	❑
The Quality and Content of Learning				
To what extent do students at my school learn content that engages them in the solution of complex, real-life problems, working both individually and collaboratively?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what degree do teachers treat different languages, socioeconomic backgrounds, races, cultures, and ethnicities as rich learning opportunities for all students?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what extent do assessments reflect the thinking skills and reasoning required of students as they engage with challenging content?	❑	❑	❑	❑
To what degree do students learn to present reasoned arguments and entertain different points of view, supporting their arguments with compelling evidence?	❑	❑	❑	❑

NEW LEADERS FOR TOMORROW'S SCHOOLS

Educating for Democracy

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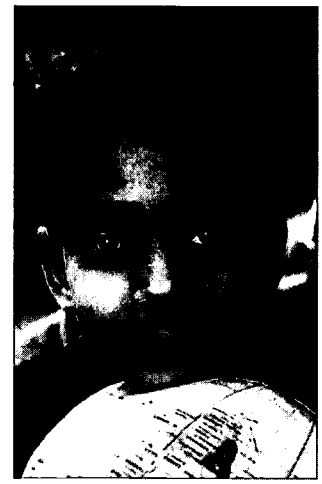

NCREL's Center for School and Community Development supports schools and communities as they undertake continuous, sustainable school development to improve learning. The Center identifies and organizes research information and best-practice models to help schools and communities improve their planning, decision making, and action so that students achieve at high levels. The Center also provides technical assistance, training, and consultation to help schools and communities invest in continuous growth while meeting today's needs.

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