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## Democratic Education

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### Introduction

Modern democracies need an educated citizenry to survive and to thrive. "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization," Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1816, "it expects what never was and what never will be" (Jefferson 1904–5: Letter to Colonel Yancey, January 9, 1816). Democratic societies are both enriched and challenged by a diverse citizenry. The fact of pluralism may generate a robust public debate of multiple perspectives from which all can learn, making the democratic whole even greater than the sum of its individual parts. But pluralism can also create a cacophonous fragmentation that divides a democracy.

In democratic societies, schools bear a dual responsibility to help develop in young people both the knowledge and skills that individuals need to live free lives and the shared values (including respect for the civil and political freedoms) that citizens need to support the institutions that enable them to live freely. Democratic education encompasses the varied institutional structures and curricular contents that are suitable for educating free citizens of democratic societies. "One size fits all" will not work because democratic education presumes a political context that allows for the representation of different stakeholders in the decision-making processes, which in turn influence the institutional structures and curricular contents of democratic education. This is also why the particular challenges in different societies and in different eras may justify diverse educational systems.

### Governance: Beyond Parental Authority

As a system of governance, democracy assumes that every person is capable of enjoying a set of basic liberties and opportunities, including the capacity to participate in democratic government and hold public officials accountable for laws and public policies. Democratic education aims to equip every student with the knowledge and the skills necessary to enjoy basic liberties and opportunities, including the ability to engage in the processes of democratic governance.

The opportunity to live a good life in a democratic society today requires many basic skills and virtues – such as numeracy, literacy, and toleration – and also more complex skills and virtues such as those that enable deliberation and respect for reasonable differences. The ability to deliberate about political matters is key to a diverse citizenry's ability to assess

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the laws that bind them, to hold their representatives accountable, and to respect one another amidst ongoing disagreement. Deliberation calls upon the skills of literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking, as well as contextual knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of other people's perspectives. The virtues that deliberation encompasses include veracity, toleration, nonviolence, practical judgment, civic integrity, and public mindedness. By cultivating these and other deliberative skills and virtues, a democratic society helps to secure the basic liberties and opportunities of individuals, the collective capacity of individuals to pursue justice, and mutual respect in the face of disagreement. The core value of deliberation is reciprocity: the willingness and ability to justify the laws and policies that mutually bind democratic citizens. Reciprocity among people conceived as free and equal individuals is therefore a key goal of democratic education (Gutmann & Thompson 1996: 52–94).

One feature of democratic education is its dedication to teaching the skills and virtues of citizenship. It does not follow that cultivating citizenship should be the focus of all educators or the exclusive mission of any educational institution. Parents, the primary educators of children, need not focus (and certainly should not be forced to focus their family life) on educating their children for citizenship. As long as primary and secondary schools are doing their jobs, teaching all children the skills and virtues of free and equal citizenship, parental education can take its own course. (Issues arise where parental and public education conflict, but this will be the exception rather than the rule when schools are doing their jobs well and including parents in their educational mission.)

Some critics of democratic education ask why, in a pluralistic society, any set of skills and virtues should be imposed on all children by a publicly mandated and funded education? Defenders of democratic education agree that parents are the primary caregivers and educators of their children. Advocates of parental choice argue that parents should be given both the constitutional right and the public (financial) support to inculcate their preferred set of values through the schools of their choice. They argue for the value neutrality of this way of structuring public education, since it does not appear to take a position as to which parental values are right to publicly inculcate in children. Why not let parents decide for their own children what values should have priority in their children's (publicly mandated and funded) education (Chubb & Moe 1990)?

Advocates of parental choice imagine a democratic society that cedes to parents the exclusive power to decide what their children will be taught in publicly subsidized schools. Milton Friedman (1955), who can be credited with introducing the school voucher idea in the USA, analogized schools and restaurants to make the case for personal choice in both. Following Friedman's lead, James Tooley (2000) disparages the notion of public provision of education by comparing it to the government providing all children with one choice of meals, and requiring that all families use this program to feed their children. Advocates of educational vouchers defend mandatory schooling and they therefore must defend some public standards and regulation to make sense of mandating schooling, but they argue that parents should be allowed to choose the form of education that would benefit their children, including education that is possible in some democracies only in private schools (such as religious education in the USA and France). Critics of vouchers reply that while parents are the primary educators of children, the democratic goals of education are legitimately furthered by a publicly mandated, accredited, and funded school system. Citizens and their representatives distribute public resources to parents for educational purposes; in a voucher system, parents then spend these resources on the schools of their choice. A political decision must be made about what should count as a publicly accredited education. Political neutrality with regard to values in educating children is therefore (both practically and logically speaking) impossible. Value-laden political decisions about the content of

schooling, its distribution, and the distribution of educational authority are unavoidable. Even the decision to constitutionally abolish mandatory schooling would be a value-laden political decision.

A school system that mandates teaching the skills and virtues of democratic citizenship – which includes teaching the values of individual freedom and nondiscrimination not only in the curriculum but also in admissions and other "hidden curriculum" practices of schools – can be justified to everyone who accepts the benefits of living in a democratic society. These are among the benefits that are secured by democratic education.

The failure of inner-city public schools has become a major source of the appeal of vouchers to urban poor and working-class parents in the USA, who are disproportionately members of disadvantaged minorities (Gutmann 2000; Ben-Porath 2010b). The problem with defending vouchers on grounds of fairness to poor children is that the logic of voucher proposals – and the aim of many proponents – is equal public financing of private and public schools, not a guarantee of good schooling for poor children. Citizens have an obligation to ensure that schools teach democratically defensible skills and values and prepare students for living the life of free citizens.

Schools serve essential public purposes. That is what justifies publicly mandating and funding education. Schools should ensure that all children – regardless of their socioeconomic status, gender, race, ethnicity, or religion – receive an education that prepares them to exercise their rights and fulfill responsibilities as citizens. The neglect of schooling's public purposes in a system of parental school choice may reflect the misapplication of the ideal of consumer sovereignty: the market should deliver what the consumers of its goods want. There are two problems inherent in applying the market model to a pure parental choice system in primary and secondary schooling. First, the market model is based on consumer sovereignty, but parents are not the consumers of education. Children are. Ardent advocates of the market model do not argue that children's preferences are the ones that should be counted in primary and secondary education. (Higher education is different, in this and other ways, such that some defining features of the market model – such as consumer choice – make far more sense in educating adults than in the schooling of children.) Second, the market model is based on the idea that "he who pays the piper picks the tune." But democratic citizens – the entire voting public, not only parents – pay the piper.

In an attempt to provide more good choices under a system that preserves its public mission to serve all children, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds, many more charter and magnet schools have been offered in recent years as parental choice-based options for children underserved by traditional inner-city public school systems. Recent studies have shown that these schools too are varied in quality, some of them serving disadvantaged children well, while others fail them (Bifulco & Ladd 2006; Witte, Weimer, Shober, & Schlomer 2007). This should not be surprising in light of the many factors – in addition to management structure and choice – that enter into making a good school, let alone a school system that serves all its children well.

School choice, including public school choice, is not a panacea; nor is it an adequate response to the problems of educating disadvantaged children. There is no single means of improving education. Rather there are many means, no one of which is sufficient. Pursuing "systemic reform" as a way to fulfill the democratic commitment to provide all children with access to quality education is far more promising than relying on a single remedy. Some promising improvements are mutually reinforcing. They include setting high standards for all students, recruiting and empowering strong principals, educating teachers well in their subject matters as well as in pedagogy, rewarding excellent teaching, ensuring that schools and classroom sizes within schools are manageable, expanding preschool programs, the school day and year

(especially for disadvantaged students), increasing social services offered to disadvantaged students and their families through schools, and providing incentives to the ablest college students to teach in schools that serve disadvantaged students (Rothstein 2004). The list can be made longer, but it cannot be made formulaic. As both a lifelong individual and social good, education is as complex as it is important. Schools educate by what, how, and whom they teach together. To assess a democratic society's system of mandatory schooling, we therefore need to ask: do schools educate children from many backgrounds together to a high level of (among other skills and virtues) literacy, numeracy, economic opportunity, toleration, and mutual respect?

## Education for Citizenship

What role should schools play in cultivating the civic skills and virtues of citizens in a democratic society? To sustain and advance democracy, citizens must have the tools that support the basic structure and practices of a democratic society. Democratic societies today face challenges to their ability to provide for the well-being of all their members that include social disengagement (Putnam 1993), lack of political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1997) and even the preference to remain politically uninformed (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002). Although these trends are common throughout western democracies, nowhere are they more evident and well documented than in the USA.

Recommitting primary and secondary education to the value of democratic citizenship could reduce this democratic deficit. The strongest public justification for a publicly funded system of primary and secondary education is to provide educational opportunity for all and to educate all to the skills and virtues of democratic citizenship. Public education is the institutional sector of democracies that is most directly and distinctively connected to equal opportunity and democratic citizenship. Moreover, in light of the decline in other civic associations and the rise of the two-career family, the social need for schools to focus on civic purposes is greater than ever in democratic history. While parents have the greatest influence over their children, they also have far broader responsibilities than schools to provide for their children while they are minors. Parents typically rely on schools both to teach key democratic values – such as mutual respect and toleration – and to provide their children with the full set of skills needed to thrive on their own later in life.

Some philosophers have argued that civic education in a democracy must include education for autonomy (or more minimally, autonomy-facilitating education), where autonomy means the effective freedom to reflectively choose one's own values and way of life (Reich 2002; Brighouse 2003). These philosophers view the autonomy of citizens as necessary to the legitimacy of the democratic state. If citizens are to participate in electing officials and affecting policies, they must do so autonomously, on the basis of their own views, values, and preferences. One way to facilitate autonomy is to have students encounter a variety of views, values, and visions of the good life, and encourage them to engage with each other about their differences (Ackerman 1980; Callan 1997).

Critics of making autonomy an essential aim of democratic education worry that it goes too far in the direction of requiring that schools subject all beliefs and values – even those religious beliefs and values, for example, that are not essential to a well-functioning democracy – to critical scrutiny. While encountering a variety of views and values in schools is important for the development of tolerance and as a way to learn to appreciate the diverse society in which the students live, educating students to evaluate even their parents' (along with other citizens') religious values (and other values that are not essential to democratic justice) can create an unnecessary rift between the worldviews of parents and students (Tomasi 2001). Focusing democratic education on autonomy in the broadest sense of the term – subjecting

everything to critical scrutiny on the basis of one's independent set of values – is particularly problematic when students come from cultures that do not value personal autonomy (Galston 1991; Ben-Porath 2010a). Critics point out that democratic education can both respect a wide range of cultures and teach mutual respect and toleration by focusing civic education on key democratic values and principles rather than by teaching autonomy as a comprehensive moral philosophy.

Publicly subsidized schools, like democratic governments more generally, are public trusts. One of their primary responsibilities is to educate future citizens so that they understand the importance of those civic values that make democracy work well over time. These values include toleration, individual freedom within the limits of constitutionally legitimate laws, basic opportunity for all (regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) and mutual respect for differences that accompany any diverse society. Citizenship education at its best addresses those differences by educational practices that cultivate tolerance and open-mindedness, address controversial issues in a mutually respectful way, and develop an understanding of different cultures that is compatible with toleration and mutual respect. These educational practices not only support the core values of a liberal democracy, they also enable students to practice them in a way that will position them as civic equals in their democratic society.

Democratically justifiable schools are ones that work toward a democratic ideal of civic equality: individuals should be treated and treat one another as equal citizens, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. More and less civic equality distinguishes more from less democratic societies. Democratic education – publicly supported education that is defensible according to a democratic ideal – should educate children so that they are capable of assuming the rights and correlative responsibilities of equal citizenship, which include respecting other people's equal rights. In short, democratic education should both express and develop the capacity of all children to become equal citizens.

Civic education – the aims of which include the ability to argue and appreciate, understand and criticize, persuade and collectively decide in a way that is mutually respectable even if not universally acceptable – is an important aim of good schools in a democracy. Schools that cultivate the capacity of citizens to respect each other and engage with each other beyond differences and to view each other as civic equals may be a democratic citizenry's best hope for the future of democracy.

Modern democracies are multicultural in the broadest sense of the term: just as their histories, if accurately rendered, combine the contributions of many cultures, so too do their citizens identify with many cultures (Gutmann 2003). Yet public schools in many democracies have taught their domestic history and civics curricula as if their society were monocultural. Many history curricula downplay, some even disparage, cultural identities other than the dominant one within a society. Many public schools in the USA, for example, once assigned American history texts that referred to Native Americans as savages, neglected the Spanish exploration of the New World, and were almost entirely devoid of voices of African Americans and women (Stille 1998: 15–20). School days commonly included Protestant prayers, readings from the King James version of the Bible, and Christian hymns. All children, whatever their religion, were expected to participate. When they were exempted, upon their (or their parents') request, they were made to feel like outsiders and dissenters to a publicly endorsed religion.

Practices like these illustrate three features of a kind of public schooling that is insufficiently attentive to the educational needs of a multicultural democracy. First, excluding or disparaging the contributions of members of nonmainstream cultures illustrates how a curriculum can disrespect minority groups, whose members are often disadvantaged in other ways as well. Second, pressuring students to

engage in religious and other sectarian practices constitutes intolerance of their beliefs and indoctrination rather than education. Third, exempting students upon request from sectarian practices, while an improvement upon intolerance, still constitutes a form of public discrimination against minority values.

These practices of discrimination and indoctrination are antithetical to democratic education because in a democracy all individuals, not only people who identify most with the dominant culture, should be treated as civic equals, and accorded the mutual respect that is due to civic equals. Public schools in a multicultural democracy are primary sites for modeling mutual respect and cultivating it among children from different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

There are two primary ways that schools can promote mutual respect among children who identify (and are identified) with many cultures. The first way reacts to historical exclusions from the curriculum by including the historical experiences and cultural contributions of groups. The second way reacts to historical intolerance by teaching children the virtue of toleration: democratic citizens can agree to disagree about beliefs and practices that are a matter of individual freedom. Toleration substitutes for imposing a single comprehensive system of beliefs and practices on all students, regardless of their religious or other relevant convictions. Toleration can also encourage forms of relationship and communication within the public sphere that would increase the opportunities of all individuals both to voice their views and to hear the opinions of others.

Public debates over how best to respond to the multicultural nature of a society often pose an all-or-nothing choice: Either citizens should tolerate their cultural differences by privatizing them, or the state should respect cultural differences by publicly recognizing the cultural beliefs and practices of all groups (for example through funding separate schools for their children). The first response is typically identified with liberal or individualistic values and the second response is often identified with communitarian as opposed to liberal (or individualist) values. This all-or-nothing choice is misleading. The two ways of responding to the fact that democracy is multicultural – public recognition and toleration – are compatible with each other and defensible when applied with discretion where they make the most moral sense. Any conception of democracy that is committed to treating people as civic equals needs to defend both public recognition (and respect for) cultural differences and toleration, depending on what is substantively at stake in education.

Public recognition and toleration are appropriate responses to different issues. Consider the teaching of history. To teach a country's history largely without reference to the experiences and contributions of women and minorities constitutes an intellectual failure, the failure to recognize the contributions of these groups to that country's history. This intellectual failure is also a moral mistake: democratic values – including the ideals of mutual respect and free and civic equality – are disparaged when public education conveys a false impression that women and minorities have not contributed significantly to making a society what it is today. When history textbooks exclude women's voices and experiences, for example, they convey the false impression that women have contributed little or nothing worthy of note to a democratic society. Conveying this historical impression imposes an extra burden on women today, making it more difficult for them to share as civic equals in shaping their society, moving forward. Something similar may be said about the exclusion of the contributions of other disadvantaged and marginalized groups from public school curricula. In the case of organizing the public school curriculum, public recognition and respect for the contributions of different groups is an important democratic value.

Public recognition of the contributions of different groups to a country's history is compatible with toleration of those differences – such as religious beliefs – that legitimately

compete for the allegiance of citizens. Competing religious beliefs and cultural practices can be tolerated without being publicly ranked or even deemed equally valuable. Religious toleration frees citizens to identify with different religions and to live together despite their religious (and other cultural) differences. Including students from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds in classrooms, where their diverse backgrounds are treated with respect, encourages the practice of toleration.

Mutual respect, which encompasses both public recognition and toleration of differences, is also an instrumental value in helping people who disagree to resolve some of their differences in a mutually acceptable way and to live peacefully with those differences that they cannot (and in some cases should not try to) resolve, by agreeing to disagree. By cultivating mutual respect, schools can address the challenge of moral pluralism on democratic terms, rather than trying to dissolve differences by either philosophical or political fiat.

Some matters – such as how to provide for the security and education of all citizens – are of mutual concern in a multicultural society. Many other matters – for example, whether and how to worship – are best left to individual choice rather than subject to critical scrutiny in public education or democratic deliberation. In other words, a democracy makes it a matter of mutual concern that citizens tolerate differences that pose no harm to others, not that they apply a common public standard to assess these differences. Mutual justification applies to the practice of tolerating diverse ways of worshipping (and more generally expressing one's personal values), rather than to the specific ways of worshipping (and the specific personal values) themselves. Democratic education tries to teach toleration of competing conceptions of the good life, not public agreement upon a single comprehensive conception.

Teaching children to agree to disagree about conceptions of the good life is essential to securing everyone's basic liberty. A democratic education teaches toleration of cultural differences on grounds of reciprocity: mutual respect for the dignity of all persons. A democratic education also teaches students the intellectual skills necessary to assess the merits and limits of toleration.

Skeptics challenge the public defensibility of teaching toleration in schools by noting that all notions of right and wrong, toleration included, are controversial in multicultural democracies. This challenge, based on the controversial nature of all ethical standards, either proves too much or too little. It proves too much if it doubts that publicly subsidized schools can defend the teaching of *any* values. Schools cannot help but teach values, even if they do so unconsciously, in the way that they decide who teaches and is taught, what is included and excluded from the curriculum, and how students are taught inside and outside of the classroom. The claim that teaching toleration is unjustifiable because the value of toleration is controversial proves too little if it simply calls attention to the lack of universal agreement on basic values. It is important to teach values precisely because they are not simply "self-evident." Were toleration and other fundamental democratic values simply "self-evident" or completely uncontroversial, schools would have far less reason to teach them.

## Higher Education and Democracy

Higher education cannot achieve its loftiest ambitions unless lower education also does. If elementary and secondary schools are not adequately educating students, then colleges and universities will not be able to make up the shortfall in educational opportunity.

Schooling does not stop serving students or societies when it ceases to be compulsory. Higher education has become an increasingly essential component to the well being of democracies and their citizenry. It is not only a gateway to the professions for individuals in modern democracies, it is also an institution that cultivates intellectual innovation, curiosity, and creativity, and in doing so protects

against ideological repression by the state and other powerful forces that may be motivated to repress ideas that are unpopular, offensive, or both. Higher education is an important institution to individuals, who are motivated to become lifelong learners and to advance their professional lives, and to societies, which depend on universities to propel innovation, economic development, and also to advance social goals such as civic equality and liberty.

One challenge faced by colleges and universities is how to provide adequate opportunities on a nondiscriminatory basis for as many students who are willing and able to benefit from higher education when primary and secondary schooling is inadequate. One controversy over the past several decades has focused on whether – and, if so, what kind of – affirmative action is justified (Cohen, Nagel, & Scanlon 1977; Fullinwider 1980; Hellman 2008). The strongest defense of affirmative action connects it to the widely accepted principle of nondiscrimination. Although no one has a right to be admitted to a particular institution of higher education, everyone has a right not to be discriminated against in admissions. Nondiscrimination as it applies to university admissions has two parts. First, qualifications for admission must be relevant to the legitimate purposes of the university. Second, all applicants who qualify should be given equal consideration for admissions.

Part of the controversy over affirmative action concerns what qualifications are relevant. Advocates of affirmative action argue that gender and race, for example, are relevant qualifications in university admissions to the extent that a society's institutional legacy of gender and racial discrimination still implicitly discriminates against women and racial minorities. Implicit discrimination operates through a set of "unconscious biases," both institutionally and individually (for example, in the differential way that male and female, minority and majority dossiers are read and evaluated) (see Steinpreis, Anders, & Ritzke 1999; Fiske 2002; Bertrand & Mullainathan 2004). Advocates do not argue that gender or race is in and of itself a qualification, but they claim that, when combined with evidence of a strong motivation and ability to succeed academically, these are relevant considerations for achieving more equal opportunity. Race and gender also can be relevant qualifications to the extent that the diverse experiences and perspectives of women and minorities can enrich the education of all students, inside and outside the classroom. Universities legitimately aim to contribute not only to "academic" learning but also to knowledge and understanding more broadly speaking. This is an important dimension of civic learning – becoming familiar with the diversity of the society one lives in, and developing the skills to negotiate the multiplicity of differences that characterize contemporary democratic societies. Universities legitimately aim to educate people who will use their broad knowledge and understanding to serve their society and the world well in leadership positions. Educating leaders for all sectors of society requires opening up higher education equally to women and men and to members of all ethnic, racial, religious, geographic, and socioeconomic groups (Anderson 1999).

Critics and supporters of affirmative action alike agree that it is not justifiable if it is used to admit students who cannot succeed academically. Critics point to its use in admitting less over more qualified students through quotas that do not even consider the qualifications of some students because of their group memberships. Advocates count this as an abuse of what could otherwise be a justifiable practice of counting the contributions that a diverse student body can make to three worthy aims of higher education: equalizing educational opportunity, enriching the educational experience of all students on campus, and educating leaders for all sectors of society. The abuses of affirmative action can be separated from these uses.

A second, related challenge faced by colleges and universities in democracies is determining the parameters of their institutional freedom from state regulation based on their intellectual mission. These parameters have come to

be called academic freedom. Derived from the German concept of *Lehrfreiheit*, the academic freedom of college and university scholars remains an important dimension of democratic higher education. It is still a challenge to decide how best to interpret and protect the academic freedom of faculty so that it protects not the narrow self-interest of scholars (which is not the purpose of academic freedom) but rather their scholarly freedom of inquiry, which is ultimately in service to society. Some of the most difficult controversies over academic freedom test its limits and the degree of freedom from governmental control needed by colleges and universities in order to foster the academic freedom of scholars.

Governments regulate colleges and universities in many of the same ways that they regulate other organizations, for example, by ensuring compliance with laws enforcing nondiscrimination in hiring. But there are also types of regulation that would be inappropriate to impose on universities because it would violate their academic freedom as institutions. Academic freedom at its core is best understood as a special right tied to the particular office of scholar, similar in form (but different in content) to the particular rights of priests, doctors, and lawyers. The core of academic freedom is the liberty of scholars to assess existing theories, established institutions, and widely held beliefs according to scholarly standards, which communities of scholars set for themselves rather than having them set by political authorities. Those communities also must be open to intellectually responsible dissent; otherwise they too would violate the academic freedom of scholars.

Universities also have institutional rights to academic freedom that derive from their responsibility to protect the academic freedom of scholars. In a 1957 US Supreme Court case, *Sweezy v. New Hampshire* (1957), Justice Felix Frankfurter offered a summary definition of institutional academic freedom that has been widely cited ever since: a university should be able to "determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study." This statement was cited in the landmark affirmative action decision, *Regents of the Univ. of California v. Bakke* (1978), which struck down quotas while permitting (but not requiring) universities to consider race as one among many factors in admissions.

Together the individual academic freedom of scholars and the institutional academic freedom of universities serve as safeguards against political repression, for the sake of not only of scholars but also of citizens. Academic freedom helps prevent a subtle but invidious form of majority tyranny. Democracies can most reliably foster freedom of the mind, which is an essential part of freedom of speech and conscience, by protecting the profession of scholars who defend unpopular ideas within universities that are free to decide who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study.

Scholars and universities claiming the right to academic freedom also should recognize correlative duties. The duties include avoiding influences that are likely to interfere with sound scholarly judgment. Financial influences that present a conflict of interest with pursuing the paths of knowledge and understanding wherever they may lead are the most obvious impediments. Not only individual scholars but institutions of higher learning should protect themselves against conflicts of interests with their primary academic mission. They should condition scholarly promotions, for example, not on popularity but rather than on the merits of a scholar's research and teaching. They should protect faculty and students against attempts to silence their ideas because they are unpopular. They should invoke academic freedom whenever necessary to protect the core academic mission of universities but not to protect themselves from legitimate external pressures that are consistent with, or conducive to, this mission. Academic freedom, so understood, serves important purposes that extend far beyond any single democratic society: stimulating the creation,

preservation, and dissemination of knowledge, critical thinking, and creative understanding throughout the world.

## Democratic Education in Transitional Societies

Democratic education faces many challenges in liberal democratic societies, but in societies transitioning to democracy the challenge and the promise are even greater. Becoming democratic citizens of a country transitioning to democracy is a familiar process for citizens of many nations around the world today. From the former Soviet bloc to Africa, South America, Asia, and the Middle East, the past century has seen waves of democratization with all the strife and promise they entail. Education can play an important role in this process in three key ways. First, education can promote support for emergent democratic governments in transitioning nations. Second, education can help citizens function more effectively and positively, advancing their own interests while maintaining an awareness of the public good and an inclination to be publicly minded. Third, education can help sustain and promote democratic practices during the process of transitioning to democracy.

The stresses of transition, often accompanied by civil rifts and sometimes with external pressures from neighboring states and (former) allies, can contribute to the development of belligerent forms of citizenship. Democratic education is a key measure in responding to the intolerance and limited public agenda typical to this form of citizenship (Ben-Porath 2006).

Recent empirical work (Barro & Lee 2000; Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, & Limongi 2000) provides evidence that higher levels of educational attainment lead to stronger democratic political institutions. Schooling itself appears to be a major causal factor in democracy (Glaesser, La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes, & Shleifer 2004), although additional years of education within a country do not necessarily equate with stronger democratic institutions or a greater tendency among the population to support democratic reform (Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson, & Yared 2005). A comparison of countries transitioning to democracy, however, demonstrate that (particularly in Eastern Europe) education and democracy are highly correlated. Moreover, higher levels of education within a given population raise participation in support of democratic regimes as more individuals choose to take part in the political sphere (Glaeser, Ponzetto, & Shleifer 2007).

In established democracies higher levels of educational attainments do not necessarily correlate with greater levels of active participation (Galston 2001), but support for democracy in the context of transition from authoritarian to participatory polities is correlated with higher levels of education.

This trend is further strengthened by government spending on education in democratizing nations. For example, in African countries transitioning to democracy, democratically elected governments spent more on primary education. Spending on universities appears unaffected by democratization (Stasavage 2005). Support for primary education during the transition to democracy, and especially in countries where literacy is less than universal, further strengthens the elected government's opportunity to attract popular support for democratic reforms.

Basic education, including literacy, is necessary to a functioning democracy, as citizens need to be able to communicate about the issues at hand and have the skills to participate in decision making, including voting. Basic access to education is necessary for the initial mobilization to democracy, but it is not sufficient to sustaining and advancing democratic institutions. Some direct forms of democratic education are required: those that foster an understanding among the citizenry of the benefits of democratic practices to individuals and to society. Citizens must also recognize the benefits of transition to democracy in their encounters with governmental entities and through the results of policies – government performance complements cognitive awareness

of public affairs, achieved through education, in the process of learning about democracy in transitional contexts (Bratton & Mattes 2007).

The vast majority of evidence suggests that education plays a key role not only in sustaining established democracies, but also in enabling societies to transition to democracy. Educating individuals for democratic citizenship therefore extends across the globe as it does across time.

**SEE ALSO:** Citizen/Citizenship; Civic Virtue; Democracy; Diversity; Equality; Liberal Democracy; Participatory Democracy; Pluralism

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**Abstract**

Modern democracies need an educated citizenry to survive and to thrive. "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization," Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1816, "it expects what never was and what never will be." Democratic societies are both enriched and challenged by a diverse citizenry. The fact of pluralism may generate a robust public debate of multiple perspectives from which all can learn, making the democratic whole even greater than the sum of its individual parts. But pluralism can also create a cacophonous fragmentation that divides a democracy.

**Keywords:** citizenship, democracy, education