

## **LONGITUDINAL DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL THEORY: Democracy and the classroom.**

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### Introduction

Presented is a cognitive democratic curriculum model. Presented are six attributes for consideration. Each was developed over a period of three decades developed from work in grounded theory; and characteristic of this work has been the application of democratic principles to action research. While intrigued by contemporary critical social analysis on democratic schooling, it is held to be inadequate for informing present policy and analysis. In general, critical analysis draws from abstract theorising, seldom from grounded theory, Knight and Pearl (2000 b, 197-226). The main purpose of grounded theory in this work has been the generation of theory from the data, Holloway, (1997, p 81). Students have been researchers (as have teachers) in the creation of school and program change. A central feature of this work is the preparation of students for solving individual and pressing social problems. Educational theory comes in all shapes and sizes. There are theories of knowledge, development, learning, instruction, discipline, management and organisation. What passes for theory in most classrooms is bits and pieces taken from all, or some of those cited. There appears for example little correspondence between the theory of knowledge, and theory of discipline and instruction. As a general theory of education it has a long way to go. The research holds that that an ideal democracy is an unattainable goal.

Democracy can only be a hypothetical vision used to measure progress, much as infinity does in mathematics. Whether any practice is an asset to a democratic classroom can be determined by how it measures on each of the the proposed attributes. Doubt is cast whether democracy is 'discovered', as per,

'Discovering Democracy', (1997, 1998a, 1998b,1998c, and Alexander, et al, 2000). These are 'top-down', Commonwealth Government directed mandates adding 'citizenship' education as a requirement to school curriculum. This doubt is expressed by (Finch, 1999); instead, advocated here is that democracy has to be constantly reinvented and reinvigorated, Pearl, (2000,2); Knight, (2000); Pearl and Knight (1999).

### **A longitudinal perspective.**

This work is guided by a particular philosophical stance, and influenced by a number of methodological principles. While the Australian school system has embraced democratic ends, it has rarely engaged the democratic means to achieve them. Important to this paper is that although the vote in Australia was being legislated as universally available, no parallel activity was being made to ensure voters were receiving the knowledge and experiences to perform as competent citizens. Citizen preparation in schools, the logical place for such preparation, was minimal and mostly directed to cementing an allegiance to the state and the economic system - later argued as social reproduction theories. In this paper the development of theory from data was systematic, and characteristic of this work has been the application of democratic principles to action research. The 'subjects' have been involved in designing programs and evaluating results, and the distinction between subject and researcher, teacher and student, had been deliberately blurred. Democratic theory was created and generated from the data, Holloway (1997, 81-87). Proposed here is that students develop citizenship skills through explicit theory and practice built into everyday school life. It was a democratic theory that was developed and tested from ground up. A host of projects were created in schools, prison settings and communities to continuously test idea and hypothesis on two continents. History and civics while important represent only part of democratic values, Jiminez (1999). There is a distinction presented here between what has been meant by 'civics', and an attempt to redefine citizenship education. Since founding as a nation, the history of Australian citizenship had serious omissions, in particular, the Aboriginal population. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, was administered to screen out non-white immigrations, was readily accepted as The 'White Australia ' policy and generations of Australians defined citizenship rights and entitlements as excluding 'aboriginal natives'. While granted 'citizenship' in 1947, and Australian citizens voted overwhelmingly 'Yes' during the 1967 Referendum that "aboriginal people" would be counted in the Australian census, aboriginals were systematically denied rights and privileges associated with Australian citizenship, Chesterman and Galligan(1997); Peterson and Saunders (1998, p.128).

### **Youth dreaming.**

The democratic 'attributes' presented here were developed through three decades of struggling with constructing a general educational theory. This argument presents a general education theory with democratic education as its base, and as such, provides a philosophical underpinning to education. Democracy is always new. It constantly has to be invented and reinvigorated. The primary work of democracy is in the future. The role of democratic citizenship is to invent the future. It is here that dreams will be realized or shattered. Democracy begins with dreams and visions of youth and the worst thing that a school can do is to discourage youth from dreaming. The reinvention of democracy may be the most important of all school projects. Not only should students engage in the invention of democracy, they should also put their inventions to test in classrooms, schools and

community. *They develop as problem solvers and researchers.* There is no blueprint in making the abstract concrete? However there are some guiding principles.

### **Democracy may be new, but its basic principles have a long history.**

Proposed is that democracy is an ever developing concept and that it needs to be continuously **invented**; yet at the same time, presented are precise almost prescriptive recommendations, Pearl and Knight, (1999). Furthermore, it is argued that democracy cannot be mass delivered to classrooms but must emerge in the classroom and develop from classroom to classroom. Students are researchers in this model. This is not as contradictory as it might appear. Democratic classrooms will be unique (as are authoritarian classrooms trying to meet top-down mandated curriculum). Each classroom will differ in important attributes, but a democratic education will also share some critically important values, principles, and culture. For democracy to be invented, it must grasp some of the thinking and history that developed those values. What continues to be a constant is certain principles and these can only be altered and refined after put to rigorous test. Every classroom will be a test of selected values and principles. Presented is a series of distinguishing qualities of a democratic classroom. Democratic education advances when adults (teachers) propose and defend and invite students to come up with counter defensible proposals. Democratic education is unlikely to occur when adult leadership is abandoned. To the contrary, democratic education and citizenship understanding will not develop without strong democratic leadership. Presented here are six critical attributes (an indication also of what democratic leadership looks like). They were developed through a mix of practical understandings of classroom life and democratic theory. It is through their entwining that students are provided the opportunity to install the necessary principles of a democracy.

These are: **1)** the nature of authority, **2)** inclusiveness, **3)** the definition of important knowledge, **4)** the definition and availability of rights, **5)** participation in decisions that effect ones life, and **6)** equality. There is an added attribute which is believed to derive from democracy - an optimal learning environment available to all students.

#### **1). Authority.**

Defining legitimate authority in today's schools has become of primary concern. Identifying features of a new culture where unpredictability, diversity and change are entwined, where exhaustion and demoralisation are key issues, redefining authority and maintaining democratic intent is critical. Advocated is that democratic authority is persuasive and negotiable. Such authority is distinguished from its two 'opponents', guardianship and anarchy, Dahl (1989). Arbitrary or capricious authority characterises an undemocratic regime; and students, particularly students currently ill-served by schools, bridle under one and are denied an education under the other. The democratic authority in the classroom is legitimate to the extent that it persuades students that what is being taught can be learned by everyone. Moreover, when challenged the democratic authority negotiates rather than imposes. Given the difficulties existing democracies have with authority, especially in the disenfranchisement of so many citizens and the widespread feeling of powerless expressed by youth everywhere; a distinguishing feature of a new democracy must be its leadership, and it is also an important feature of a democratic classroom. While authoritarianism and /or guardianship, is a preferred mode of authority in many urban and rural schools that serve the minority poor, student interests are neglected in a desperate tug of war between the authoritarian and the anarchistic. The primary test of authority in any community is competence and fairness. Complicating both competence and fairness are race, ethnicity, class, gender and religion. The legitimacy of authority is challenged where

long histories of inequity and oppression have been inadequately resolved. In Australia, the challenge of a new democracy will be in the way that the aboriginal population is included as first class citizens. Australia has a history of oppressive authority and indifference toward the indigenous population and has to be confronted. And then there is religion. A global society challenges a new democracy with its treatment of differences. Religious differences challenge and undermine authority as does ethnic and race differences, class, sexual preference and gender. Establishing authority will not be easy. There will be setbacks, but a clear sense of persuasive and negotiable authority is an essential characteristic of a new democracy in any community, and how it initially establishes authority in the classroom. The classroom becomes critical for the future of democracy and the preparation of teachers for legitimate authority in the classroom.

## **2). Inclusiveness and the democratic classroom.**

A democracy establishes its credibility by its ability in drawing all citizens to it. Would be that it was so easy. Societies claiming to be democratic find many ways to exclude. Schools are no exception to this process.

Exclusiveness is found in the hierarchical education that has been powerfully reinforced over the past century, Kirk (1986). This hierarchy is manifest formally by tracking, ability grouping, banding, setting, via classroom and subject selection e.g., Oakes (1985, 1992); Oakes, Oraseth, Bell, & Camp (1990); Teese (2000) Gillborn & Kirton, (2000).; and informally by differential encouragement given students by classroom teachers e.g., Cooper & Good (1983); Good & Brophy (1984, 1991); Valencia, (1997); Slee (1995); Lewis (1999: pp.269-285). Exclusiveness is also maintained by residential patterns, the structuring of work, and various policies and practice that segregate by schooling choice, class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference and gender.

Exclusiveness is the logical consequence of centrifugality, and this spells the demise of community. Argued here is that a classroom democracy must be centripetal, pulling all toward the centre. At the centre is the democratic classroom developing loyalties and relationships with community building projects, across an increasing and diverse population. Attaining inclusiveness in the face of historical resistance requires a powerful argument supported by coherent theory.. For example it will not be found by doing 'archaeological' digs in libraries. Inclusiveness cannot be imposed, a persuasive case must be made for it, Knight, (2000 a).

## **3) Knowledge for all - Important knowledge..**

A newly defined democracy must emphasise important knowledge. A democracy is a learning community. It grows and is sustained by logic and evidence. Knowledge is developed and used by all, it is not knowledge by an elite few who make decisions ostensibly for the public good. Knowledge developed and utilised in a school should at minimum meet four goals, Pearl and Knight,(1999). a) the preparation of an informed, responsible and involved democratic citizen, b) an active participant in the economic life of the community, c) the meaningful participant in the development of a democratic culture, d) the development of a healthy human being capable of fulfilling the responsibility of parent, mate, friend and contributing member of the community. The challenge is to find a way to define important knowledge consistent with those goals. Public discussion and debate over important knowledge is the important debate that needs to occur. In the current climate, world wide, important knowledge appear to be reduced to whatever standardised tests measure. Student opinion of what is important knowledge is arbitrarily dismissed, Mellor (1998), Lewis (1999). In a democratic classroom student opinion is given serious consideration. Student desires for a better world, a fulfilling culture, an opportunity to engage

in rewarding work, to live harmoniously with self and neighbours, to preserve the environment, these are matters that should be treated in depth in the curriculum. Not adequately considering such issues in a school, will mean students graduating from secondary school are most likely unprepared to deal with important social or personal problems. At all levels of schooling defining important knowledge impacts in two ways. One involves the kinds and depth of knowledge taught; and the other determines which students receive how much of such learning. These two issues are connected. Very little is gained if equality is achieved in useless, destructive or trivial knowledge - such as substantial improvement by historically underachieving populations on some standardized test. Nor can democracy be sustained if knowledge is rationed by race, class, gender or alleged capacity to learn. All students **need** specific knowledge that can be used to solve (what to them) are important problems, Knight (1982).

**a. Preparation for responsible and democratic citizenship.** This area is given little regard in contemporary schooling. Instead, meeting subject standards, issues of discipline, TER scores, and a distribution of Commonwealth finance to private schooling, consume present interest. History is neglected, a countries great accomplishments are sanitized, and reconciliation has a 'black armband'. It is not suprising that students are leaving school with little enthusiasm for citizen responsibilities. New democracies are only new to the extent that the citizen is revitalised. The revitalisation of citizenship requires not a lack-luster interpretation of history, but a vigorous debate of history in the light of present controversy. Understanding the history of oppressive treatment of Australian aboriginals may produce an apology, but little else; unless significant change in life conditions are produced in policy and practice, that is guided by sound evidence and powerful logic.

#### **Students as researchers.**

For there to be remedy, students must work in cooperative learning groups ( as distinct from individual competitive learning), engage in meaningful research, leading to debating various proposed solutions, and propose what are often difficult solutions. For example, The Youth Advocacy Report, (Knight,1982 a) involved students from five Melbourne primary and two Secondary Schools. Students were part of a State Vandalism Task Force. The purpose of the project was to involve youth in the analysis, research and policy formation in the prevention of vandalism toward Public Property in their community. Similarly for economic planning, long term transportation and housing needs, old age security, etc. Students learn to be responsible and responsible democratic citizens by **being** knowledgable and responsible citizens. They use their results and inventions to analyse existing government operations.

#### **Leadership and important knowledge.**

It is the responsibility of a democratic teacher to suggest, propose, and defend curriculum. It is also the responsibility of a democratic teacher to negotiate with students that do not find teacher arguments for the importance of a proposed course of study persuasive. A democratic community is a self reliant community that learns to solve its own problems.

To argue that schools should or cannot be involved in such education is to assume some other agency will, or that some benign minority can and will make fair and competent decisions in these vital areas. History provides us with a myriad of more recent examples that neither is likely. Common social concerns need to be taught with centrality in mind. Students must be encouraged, even exhorted to common understanding. They need not, and, on important problems should not, reach consensus. While decisions are made by informed majorities, students in the minority have the responsibility to be persuaded by the majority argument, or to continue to use logic and rules of evidence to move others to

become the majority. Within this context, school academic subjects assume meaning - both personal and social. Mathematics provides a way of thinking - a means of deciphering, ordering and manipulating complex relationships and presenting evidence. Language provides a means for communicating what is important. Science is a process for accumulating evidence and determining lawfulness. History is a quest for understanding and solution. Through the range of arts, students give expression to to what they perceive to be important. The classics provide perspective. The basics ('essentialism') are not educational ends, but means to ends that give day to day directions and meaning.

When the issue of important knowledge is conceived as something that is democratically determined, every student is encouraged to become researchers; to evaluate, to weigh, to investigate, to debate. There is a possibility that present critics of education will contend that important knowledge made universally available is beyond the capacity of present schooling. However only when we try the concept of important knowledge will we ever know what is possible.

### **b) An active participant in the economic life of the community.**

Economic destination for students has become a preoccupation for contemporary subject-based schooling, Teese (2000). That cannot be the whole story. In a democratic school, choice of career resides in the individual and the schools acts not as a guardian, but fulfills its responsibility by providing accurate information about the full range of careers and pathways, by discouraging premature closure on choice, and assuring every student that they have every right to consider any and all occupations. However this is not sufficient. The encouragement of students to think about future occupations must be entwined with an in-depth study of economics to enable students to participate in economic planning, and particularly in employment development policy. It would also include debate on changing forms of work such as the 'new' economies as 'risky' enterprises, and the movements of fashion and taste as they condition the 'planning' of youth, Ball et al (2000). This study in employment would also bring into analysis the environment, to ensure that economic plans do not come at the expense of liveability.

### **c) Developing a democratic culture.**

At this time work and citizenship take a back step for youth, they are more concerned with culture. Youth derive from 'their' culture, language, commitment, understanding, taste, values and style. Culture is a powerful influence on youth, it cannot be ignored in schools. Inadequate understanding of youth and culture is largely responsible for lack of public success in the so called war on drugs. The effect is also found on youth violence and teenage sexuality. Culture is an important curricula component in the democratic classroom. A goal of a democratic classroom is to **reconstuct** culture. The reconstruction would move in the direction of a democratic school culture, Knight (2000). Not only do youth and adult authority in schools have fundamentally different understandings of culture, increasingly adults are acrimonious amongst themselves over what should be included in the treatment of culture. Neither the culture wars or PD programs have had a significant impact on youth. Popular culture may be popular but it is not empowering. It generates no important knowledge, it makes no case for persuasive leadership. It divides more than unifies, and it tends to be dystopic. Importantly, for this to change, it begins with the welcome of diversity, and where there is a centre to which all feel an attachment. That centre cannot be imposed. It will not be forced on students. It must be negotiated. The test of the persuasive teacher will be able to maintain a negotiation that at times will be heated and confrontational. The centre will most likely start small, ie, no put downs between students, that is no students should have their feelings hurt by others. The interests of classroom is served if the centre grows through more meaningful discussion, debate, research, and a variety of cooperative

ventures leading to an expanded sense of agreement. The content of the centre will be different in different schools, but the process of patiently and with humour, negotiating common ground and building on that, is essential in the development of a democratic culture.

#### **d) Healthy personal development.**

In the study of development and personal relationships students are instructed in

psychological and physical development. An important goal of the democratic classroom is to graduate a person who knows how to be healthy and fit, and is capable of warm and wholesome relationships as neighbour, ally, mate, parent and friend. A democratic education helps students with the widest range of personal problems, which would necessarily include the use of control substances, school violence, the treatment of students who violate school rules, homophobia, race and gender relations, sexually transmitted disease, and responsibility for children born to them. Currently, all of these problems tend to be taken out of student's hands and given to adult authority, whose decisions are increasingly draconian, Power (1996). The more students resist current 'thou shalt nots', the more we increase school punishments and 'at risk' programs, the more we magnify student problems into case study approaches, the more powerless they are personally, and the less they are involved in inventing social change with others. In a democratic education, these problems are included in the curriculum for students to study and solve by developing understandings, and ways of living that are agreeable for self and others, Knight (2000).

There is no magic formula to guide teachers in this debate over knowledge, but the more the teacher understands democracy and the more democracy is incorporated into schooling, the more likely students will understand the importance of what is taught. The guiding concept for a democratic plan of study is recognition that knowledge is neither handed to students as non amendable commandments, nor something that merely needs unfolding, but is instead, a dynamic process involving everyone in debate, leading to decisions made on the basis of accepted logic and evidence.

**4) Rights - student and teacher.** Individual rights are the foundation for the classroom. While the UK has included human rights in its constitution, Australia is still debating the issue, Williams (2000). However several Melbourne school-based experiments have adopted a 'rights and responsibilities' model as a school code of behaviour; and found school and community agreement, Knight (1985, 1996); Gill et al, (1988).

In this version of a democratic classroom, students are guaranteed a finite number of very specific rights. If the foundation for a democratic education is to be established, student rights will be few in number (at least originally), will be universal and inalienable - everyone in the school is protected by them, and they cannot be taken away by whim of adult authority - and while there is a necessary connection between rights and responsibilities, in a democracy rights precede the responsibilities. Students enter a democratic classroom with rights established, and then learn to be responsible. In the authoritarian classroom rights are subordinate to responsibility. Only the responsible are allowed rights. We believe this reversal of a logically appropriate order contributes unnecessarily to classroom disruption and inequitable treatment of students, Hyman, et al (2000, pp, 489-501).

Only four rights have stood the test of time: (1) the right of free expression, (2) the right of privacy, (3) the right to a special kind of due process, (presumption of innocence, right not to testify against self, right to counsel, right to trial by independent and impartial jury, and protection against cruel and unusual punishment) and (4) the right of movement (i.e., not to be a captive audience).

The few must be fully understood and scrupulously protected. Drawing on Tawney's use of 'practical powers' (Tawney, 1964), the determination of appropriate knowledge and the quality of participation depends on the rights that each individual possesses. What is troubling is the extent to which current school practice fosters disregard for the underpinning of our cultural and legal definitions of democracy.

**Defining Rights. What precisely is a right ?** This is a conservative position on rights. A right is defined as *any unabridged activity that does not restrict the activity of others, or, require from others some special effort*. With such a definition, freedom of expression becomes a right because one person's expression does not prevent another from also expressing him-or-herself. By the same logic, respecting one person's privacy does not invade another's privacy; due process for one does not come at the expense of the due process for another; and one person's freedom of movement does not inhibit another's.

. But rights, like all democracy, are not simple. Each right has a fuzzy boundary and can be recinded in a state of emergency. For that to happen rights should be considered from two perspectives: one, rights are an important curriculum issue to be defended, refined and extended by students and two, rights should exist prior to student entrance into school and thus define the nature of relationship between adult authority and students (as well as between administration and teachers).

The older students become, the less power they have in school, Lewis et al, (1991); Lewis, (1996). As students grow and are enrolled in schools with larger numbers of students, the more they are perceived as potential threats, and the more the school adopts policies to limit student power to make decisions.

School Charters and discipline codes, calling for inhibiting the expression of homophobic, patriarchal and racist views, and silencing unacceptable voices, do not change attitudes, nor does such oppression help build a democratic community. Democratic teachers try to persuade all students to critically examine their views and develop ground rules by which open interchanges can occur across the widest range of difference. This is no easy task. It often requires small-group inter-changes. It becomes easier to the extent to which students are guaranteed rights of expression, privacy, due process and movement. Rights are a necessary assurance for those reluctant to express their opinions. It is difficult to conceive of a democracy without established rights, and it is difficult to understand how proponents of any perspective that opposes oppression, do not highlight the importance of rights as the first line of defence against oppression.

**5) Establishing optimum environments for learning.** Democracy is more desirable than either of its opponents because only under democracy is everyone encouraged to reach her or his potential. Democracy is preferable to a guardianship that stifles growth through constraint, control and commitment to established hierarchy. Democracy is preferable to an anarchy that inhibits growth through the removal of persuasive leadership. However, democracy can only establish itself to be preferable when the conditions of optimal learning are identified and made universally available. Here is encountered what should be a remarkable phenomenon. As important as optimal learning environment is to democracy, there is not an impressive body of knowledge to serve as foundation. One reason for the lack of an emphasis on the learning environment in education has been the preoccupation on individual differences and voices. In fact, one definition of democratic education is its capacity to match a particular education program to the assessed educational potential of the learner. That kind of thinking produced the multiple track secondary school system where only a fraction of the student body is deemed to possess the capability to succeed in the university - others have an attributed intellectual deficit. The great bulk of debate has centered on the etiology of these attributed deficits. Are they genetic? Burt (1972; Jensen

(1969); Herrnstein & Murray (1994). Accumulated environmental? Deutsch (1967); Hunt (1961); Inadequate socialisation? Moynihan (1965); or cultural? Lewis (1961, 1966). That there is a very high correlation between deficits, regardless of imputed origin, and class, race, ethnicity and gender should come as no surprise. It is the differential education that students receive on the basis of attributed deficit that leads to the phenomenon of social reproduction rightfully and regularly condemned by critical pedagogy.

The attribution of deficits, and organizing education formally and informally on that basis becomes a real challenge to those striving for social inclusion and equality, and therefore toward democratic education. The literature on student motivation tends to mingle individual characteristics (i.e., deficits) and the social environment and thereby does more to confuse than enlighten. However, it is possible to isolate and define aspects of the environment that correlate with high student performance. Students achieve more if the classroom is designed to encourage a sense of competence, a feeling of belonging and a sense of ownership (See Wigfield, Eccles, & Rodriguez, 1998, for a summary of research literature on student motivation). Although indicating the importance of the environment to student learning is an encouraging step in the direction of democratic education, we believe it is insufficient. Democratic education should bring together in a coherent and integrated fashion a number of encouragement's. Here identified are ten, that when integrated, provide students with as close to optimum learning environment that is currently possible.. These are:

**a) Encouragement to risk.** Decreasingly the classroom has become a place where students take chances. There is too much to lose and not enough to gain when students risk opinions and challenge authority. Good and Brophy (1991), review the literature and summarise the differences between students who are expected to be capable and those who are not. The emphasis on high stakes testing (misleadingly defined as standards) and increased effort to control student behaviour only serves to discourage risk.

**b) Relief from unnecessary pain.** Classrooms are not very comfortable places for particular groups of students, it is far more uncomfortable for those students finding subjects deadening and school boring, Goodlad (1984); Teese (2000). What can and should be eliminated is unnecessary pain. In school, unnecessary pain takes the form of humiliation, blaming and shaming, boredom, imposed silence and loneliness. Teachers and administrators are not the only ones to inflict unnecessary pain. Students do to it each other. Some discomfort is unavoidable, but the concern here is with those discomforts that are avoidable and routinely become part of classroom practice - public humiliation, boredom, loneliness, and lack of belonging.

**c) Meaning.** Meaning is an important gratification. It is not sufficiently understood in our society. Humans struggle to make sense of their world. Meaning has two definitions. One deals with utility, how can I use what I am being asked to learn. The question, 'please Sir/ Ms 'why do I have to learn this?', is mostly ignored or given unsatisfactory responses. The other is student understanding what is expected of them in the classroom. Current efforts to persuade students of the utility of school derived knowledge is perfunctory and unpersuasive, particularly for those who are not encouraged to consider higher education. Here insufficient attention is given to the latter consideration, and again this is most true for the students deemed to lack promise. Corbett and Wilson (1998), make clear for student assessment of making instructions clear, and how rarely that occurs.

**d) A sense of Competence.** Developing in students a sense of their own competence is a vital component of an optimum learning environment, White (1959). Currently only a select few are encouraged to that sense. A good part of the teacher's life is devoted to establishing a ranking of competence, but competence is too narrowly and arbitrarily defined, and often is tangentially related to academic performance and often becomes instead a reward for

docility. With competence, it is not so much what students have done, but more what they are encouraged to believe they can do that determines student performance. In other words, with research that has been conducted with 'competence', so much is now believed to be an individual attribute, and this may be more a function of the learning environment.

when individuals have a positive sense of their ability and efficacy to do a task, they are more likely to choose to do the task, persist at it, and maintain their effort. Efficacy and competence beliefs predict future performance and engagement even when previous performance is taken into account. (Wigfield, Eccles, & Rodriguez, 1998, p.75).

**e) Belonging.** Belonging is a vital human need. Humans are a gregarious species. If the school does not take pains to welcome all students as full-fledged members of a centripetal learning community, students not so welcomed will search elsewhere to gratify a need for belonging, Knight (1997, 79-97). One quick glimpse into any secondary school shows where students go for belonging. A small percentage is part of a learning community. Some students are acceptable as athletes (but that has its problems), some strive to be popular. Some other groupings are indifferent to schooling, and some are overtly hostile, for example, gangs, drug cultures and truants. Recent data, Sommers (2000, pp. 59-74), indicate divisions between male and female students learning patterns. Data on 'boys' suggest disfunctional behaviour and loss of school achievement when compared to 'girls'. An optimum learning environment is one that welcomes every student equally, and one in which all students are encouraged to be part of the effort to make the classroom an inclusive community.

**f) Usefulness.** Uselessness is a dreaded condition. Enforced uselessness is cruel. In the democratic classroom Goethe's oft-quoted "A useless life is early death" is taken seriously. Enforced uselessness is cruel punishment and yet enforced uselessness is the essence of existing classrooms. Schools are organised for future usefulness. Students are asked to put their life on hold as a kind of promisory note. In a democratic classroom activities are organised for immediate utility. The problems' students solve are problems students perceive to be real and important. All students are recruited to help with the instruction and serve in many different capacities. All engage in cross age tutoring, all share the results of research to the class, all have valuable roles to play in co-operative education projects. All engage in community service that is integrated within the curriculum. Usefulness in school is meaningful. All students are part of a socially inclusive curriculum.

**g) Hope.**

It is because modern education is so seldom inspired by a great hope that it so seldom achieves a great result. The wish to preserve the past rather than the hope of creating the future dominates the minds of those who control the teaching of the young. (Russell, 1927, p. 110).

Hopelessness now comes at us from many directions. Pessimism is reflected in opinion polls and loss of confidence in one's ability to influence one's future Morin, (1995). Pessimism and social exclusion are becoming the one common characteristic in modern post-industrial life -middle class and poor, Black and White alike fear the capitalist dream is not for them. In a democratic classroom serious effort is made to equally encourage all students to be hopeful. But it is more than mere optimism. In a democratic classroom all students are given reasons to be hopeful, they are encouraged to dream and keep their options open. Problems are presented as opportunities for the creation or discovery of solutions. All students are encouraged to be problem solvers, rather than be overwhelmed by problems.

**h. Excitement.** Excitement is a legitimate and important human need. Excitement is not a term students associate with classrooms. Excitement is another hallmark of the democratic classroom. Classrooms can be designed to be exciting if teachers are willing to relinquish control, and students are encouraged to participate in activities where they generate important knowledge, make important discoveries and participate in important decisions.

**i. Creativity.** Humans are, by nature, a creative species. Each generation creates a new world. In a democratic class all students are encouraged to be constructively creative and to use creativity for community building, i.e., to make the class a far more interesting, exciting and creative place than is currently the case; and, far more interesting, exciting and creative than any of the proposed highly advertised "reforms."

**j. Ownership.** In an optimum learning environment students attribute to their own intellectual development. They do things for themselves and their community, and not for established authority. Students are motivated to learn if they believe that learning is in their or their community interest. If everything done in the class is done to please or impress some external authority, performance suffers. Students are motivated to question in whose interest is their learning. There is powerful evidence in support of the extent to which students are motivated to invest in education when they 'own' their schoolwork. Au and her colleagues (Au, 1997; Au, Scheu, Kawakami & Herman, 1990) find ownership to be especially important for underachieving minority students.

**6. Equality.** Perhaps the ultimate test of any society is its ability to be fair. Here and elsewhere, various minorities, women, the handicapped, the aged, gays and lesbians have launched campaigns to eradicate bias, and less than equal treatment in the workplace, the schools, the courts and in public accommodations. Effective social movements in Australia for example have been organised to make the society more equitable, Lopez (2000). Here, race gender, class and sexual orientation have been prominent. In the 20th century the campaigns for women's suffrage, the organisation of industrial workers and indigenous rights in Australia are progress toward equality. Sadly, history teaches us that progress made can also be lost. Despite all these efforts the world remains unequal and the gains have been painfully slow., often reversible and , often illusory. However one might assess progress toward a more effective reconciliation, it is generally acknowledged that at our best we still have a ways to go.

The position forwarded here, is that whether equality is attainable is a political question that cannot be ascertained in advance. Moreover, while absolute equality is beyond reach, progress toward such a goal is realistic and that is what a democratic education strives to achieve. Progress toward greater equality can only be made if the processes by which inequality are maintained, can be precisely identified, and specific action taken to reduce their effect. Encouraging results have been produced with programs focused on the elimination of deficit meaning, the ten conditions for optimal learning previously mentioned, and when they are made available to all equally. Equality thus is interpreted as equal encouragement. With programs conducted over a period of three decades, Pearl and Knight (1999, pp. 245-289) have found that when they tried to equally encourage all students, much of the differences by race, ethnicity and class disappeared. Work done by Hollins (1991) with 'at risk' programs confirmed similar results.

It is our position the differential denial of access to optimal learning environments are a major cause of differential school success. For example, by differentially inflicting unnecessary pain, schools unequally encourage. The 'good' students suffer unnecessary pain much less frequently than do students with 'deficits' who find themselves routinely humiliated and isolated. Attempts to avoid the infliction of unnecessary pain can explain continual lateness and absenteeism far more convincingly than attributed deficits, Valencia

(1997). What passes for discipline is often nothing more than public humiliation. Forcing students to work alone on meaningless problems, imposing silence, ridiculing effort, giving praise for inferior work, Brophy and Good, (1991), are other forms of unnecessary pain inflicted disproportionately on poor and minority students. Preparing for a credential future carries with it a kind of meaning not available to basic or vocational students. Therefore, it is not surprising that 'low ability' students find vocational education more meaningful than 'English', 'Maths', Chemistry.

### **Lessons learnt**

This longitudinal study was the culmination of more than three decades of investment in the evolution of theory. The initial studies were small scale, then developed into a larger range of experimental work and education programs. No one has welcomed democratic education with open arms. The story is replete with hard won successes and heart wrenching setbacks. There has been coaxing, pushing and persuading. Many mistakes were made; in retrospect, we ask ourselves how could we have been so stupid. Our understanding of education and democracy has grown considerably over time. A theory that was disjointed and fragmented has come together as a general theory. As a general theory it still has a way to go.

A newer democracy begins with recognition that democracy is an unattainable ideal. What is possible is significant movement towards an ideal. A newer democracy is a continuing process from less democracy to more democracy. For that to happen democracy must extend beyond abstract philosophy to the application of principles to inform practice. It can begin anywhere at any time. It needs no official policy. While it is certainly true that no teacher can walk into a classroom and instantly transform it into a democracy; it is also true that every teacher can walk into a classroom, and take a meaningful step toward making the class more democratic by applying any or all of democracy's democratic principles. Teachers can move in the direction of a persuasive and negotiable authority, make the classroom more inclusive, orient curriculum to important problem solving, guarantee students inalienable rights, bring students into decision making process, establish a more optimum learning environment and provide all students in the class with equal encouragement. This classroom extends to the community. Teachers will need support. They need to work collaboratively with other teachers in the renewal of democracy. In fact they will be doing all the things they ask their students to do: work cooperatively, participate in the invention of government, and participate in community building activities. What is probably new in all of this is the recognition that if its to be done, we will have to do it. It was always thus.

Notes: For a further insight into the longitudinal history of this study see: Art. Pearl and Tony Knight (1999) *The Democratic Classroom: Theory to inform practice*. Hampton Press, Inc. Cresskill, NJ.

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