

Educating for Democratic Societies: Impediments

Stephen LAFER¹ & Hasan AYDIN²

Abstract: *The paper offers a robust definition of democracy that focuses upon the decision making processes of democratic societies that are dependent on the ability and willingness of citizens to enter into a democratic dialectic in which informed opinions contend with one another in the public forum so that the best possible decisions can be made in regard to public policy and action. Opinion, informed and justified in reason, is to be respected in such societies and cultivated through a proper system of education that teaches students how to determine the respectability of opinions offered and to formulate and articulate opinions worthy of respect. Impediments to the development of skills, knowledge, and dispositions essential to the development of opinion worthy of respect and the critique of opinion for its respect-worthiness are considered, particularly those generated by forces of economy (business), religion, and notions of state and nation. The conclusion argues for schools that are respectful of the individual capacities of students, particularly their ability to formulate unique understandings of the phenomenon that come before them and to offer to society novel ideas, in the form of opinion, that deserve the consideration of others in the democratic decision making process.*

Keywords: *Democracy, schools, impediments*

Introduction

The world needs democracy because, as Dewey argues, (1937), it is only democracy that, at this point in history, offers forms of governance that allow people to find their way to realizing their human potential. According to Thomas Jefferson, the first author of the American Declaration of independence, a profoundly capable thinker himself and a product of the Enlightenment, a movement that reflected understanding and

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr., University of Nevada-Reno, lafer@unr.edu

² Assist. Prof. Dr., Yıldız Technical University, aydinh@yildiz.edu.tr

a profound respect for the capacity of human beings use reason to come to understandings about the world that, in turn, allowed for reasoned decision making. Most basic to the philosophy that generated the Declaration was the reasoning that led these fathers of modern democracy, to conclude that Nature and Nature's Laws made it impossible for them to do anything else but declare their rights and do what was necessary to secure these rights through whatever means necessary. To not do so would be patently *inhumane*, a violation of the very laws that reason says work to define what it means to be a human being.

The writers of the Declaration, in determining a form of governance that would comport with the laws of nature were forced by their convictions, convictions based upon reasoning into the essence of being a human being, developed the framework for the modern forms of democracy, forms that would take into consideration "certain inalienable rights," granted not by men but by a nature that had provided human beings with the capacity to reason. Reason led Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin to conclude that amongst the inalienable rights of beings in possession of reasoning were the right to life, liberty, and freedom to pursue happiness. Thus, such a society would need rules that would allow individuals with such rights to live together in ways that would not interfere, too much, with individuals asserting these rights. Thus, governance would have to be *of the people*, the "keynote" of modern democracy being, according to John Dewey, "the necessity for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together." Such participation, argued Dewey, is "necessary from the standpoint of both the general social welfare and the full development of human beings as individuals" (Dewey).

The primary goal of the American Revolution was the creation of the humane state, serving to provide conditions that allow for ongoing growth and development of individuals as they work toward actualizing the fullness of their humanity. Paulo Freire deems this process "humanization," and claims that humanization is the "vocation" of human, or, in other terms, the essence of human existence. This vocation, Freire (1993) argues, causes people, at some point, as they mature as human beings, to discover ways to free themselves from oppression, that which prevents them from engaging in activities that move them toward realization of their potential. Human potential, in the context of a

being amongst other beings in a properly humane society, is expressed most humanly by the formation of *opinions* based in reason, this reasoning transmittable to others in the forums of democratic discourse for the purpose of swaying societal decisions in a particularly individualistic yet reasonable way. Democratic forms of government, to use Dewey's words again, "rest back upon the idea that no man or limited set of men is wise enough or good enough to rule others without their consent; the positive meaning of this statement is that all those who are affected by social institutions must have a share in producing and managing them," this because "each one is influenced in what he does and enjoys and in what he becomes by the institutions under which he lives, and that therefore he shall have, in a democracy, a voice in shaping them."

Schools, if are to operate as legitimate institutions of democracy, must offer students the education that prepares them for effective participation in the dialect that characterizes democratic process, in which opinions, respectable opinions, are shared and debated so that the best of them are allowed to give shape to the realities citizens experience. Students must know of the high quality life so that this is understood to be the criterion for developing public policy that exists to provide for an environment in which debate over the quality of opinions leads to societal decisions that provide for a common good that exists to insure individual freedom. The quality curriculum allows students to experience the life around which they can shape their opinions, be it in the mathematic course, the art course, or through the debates that allow students to test opinions as they work to build the more perfect school.

Such schools are dependent upon their people as democracies are dependent upon their citizens. Order is generated through adherence to certain principles that are understood in such a way that members of the school society are willing to give up some freedom to serve good principles. Rules are not imposed or forced upon some by the will of others. People consent to the rules because, as they do in the democracies *they own*, they understand that the rules, such as those found in the Constitution of the United States of America, to be of a kind that actually preserve individual freedom, providing a degree of orderliness that is liberating and never oppressive. If that societal order becomes oppressive, then the patriotic citizen, of a school, of a society, has both a right and an obligation to rebel to insure that individuals are treated properly, as per the laws of

nature. The proper educational system, the properly democratic society, is focused, at all times, on the rights of individuals and the quality of their lives. The good school is about life and liberation and the pursuit of understandings that make happiness a real possibility.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to discuss features of democratic schools and to highlight some of the impediments that exist to developing schools that serve the *most basic needs* of democratic societies. Education for such societies has to be about educating people in the art of exercising, in a *proper* manner, in a properly rational manner, the freedoms such societies afford them. Its fundamental purpose is to help individuals develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions essential to living in a free society amongst other people who are also free. As such, it must educate for understanding of self and self as one citizen amongst many of a democratic society. Education must help to grow individuality, reverence for individuality, and an understanding of why human beings are worthwhile beings, their individuality rendering them capable of making unique contributions to the health of the good society. Good is not demanded nor enforced. It results from human understanding of goodness of being human and the potential good that resides in every liberated being human.

As idyllic as this may sound, the belief in the goodness, the innate humanity of people, it is a profoundly essential belief and, in the good school it is made real through the development of deep understandings of the disciplines and through engagement with others, fellow beings who are contributors to the disciplines, astute teachers, and intellectually competent, articulate fellow students. The capacities of the human mind come to be understood, appreciated, even cherished and this is how people are brought up properly to serve and maintain the properly democratic society. Idyllic it sounds, but democracy is viable only if people understand that they are good enough, as a people to govern themselves *properly*.

The Problem

Schools for democratic societies celebrate freedom and help their students to grow into active and effective citizens of the democracy. Understanding what this entails deserves serious consideration, from the inside out, from understanding self and self amongst others, all free to remake the world, all limited by the fact that no *one* exists alone. The problem of schools for democracies is the same infuriating problem that is built into any system of self-governance, that there has to be a degree order for freedom to exist and that order imposes constraints upon individuals, freedom curtailed. How this is all managed is a problem that democracies struggle to solve and will struggle to solve throughout their existence. There really is not answer or, an answer that is far from satisfactory, that the tension will always exist. However, this is not a bad thing and schools have to help students learn to cope with the tension and participate in a delightfully futile process of finding ever better answers to the problems that independent life amongst other independent souls poses. Democracies never realize their full potential but they strive for that potential, for the “more perfect union” the framers of the Constitution of the United States set as the goal for the American nation.

Striving toward perfection with the knowledge that perfection will never be achieved sets in motion the dynamics of true democratic process and the value of the process is that, along the way, better ways are found to improve the society so that it ever moves closer to its humane goals. To find joy in this endless process, one must engage in the process and, in the process, become a working member of the society, a problem-solver interested in solving the problems that stand in the way of the perfect society. “Within history,” says Freire (2005, p. 4), “in concrete, objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompleteness.” And the uncompleted being recognizes both the value of being such a being and of being a member of a society that celebrates its incompleteness because such a state is the mother of invention.

Schools, therefore, good schools, sponsor invention. They teach that the world is not settled, the natural world and the world of our being as human beings. They do this by employing problem-posing/problem-solving curricula that bring together students and teachers to engage in the dialect of democracy, in the decision making processes by

which citizens of democracies decide upon the best answers for the problems the world places before them. But the schools of which we know are not of the type but rather engage what Freire (2005) calls “the banking method” by which students are assumed to be empty vessels to be filled with the knowledge generated by others and without much knowledge of the beings who created the knowledge, how they created it, why, and what for. Worse, they are rarely helped to understand that these knowledge makers are very much like themselves, incomplete beings, students themselves, facing very much the same problems they do. The key ingredient in schools that truly serve the cause of democracy is humanization, the realization that knowledge is of human creation and that as humans, they too are not only capable of but also obligated to participate in the knowledge making process, a qualification for citizenship in a democracy.

Interfering with the development of such awareness and the kind of participation in meaning making that such awareness encourages are a number of factors present in most, if not all, societies working toward democracy and trying to build school programs that sponsor true democratic citizenship. Part of the reason is that democracy is quirky, dependent upon those who participate in it who have been educated by the system people so educated have developed. As James Moffett argued, if democratic societies are to survive and prosper, “One generation of teachers has somehow got to bring through one generation of students who will have thoughts we have not had before.” He goes on to say that,

It is clear that the nation’s and the planet’s problems cannot be solved by just thinking along the lines we do now according to our heritage. Societies relying on conventional wisdom are doomed... The next generation must have an education creative enough to survive its inheritance. (1992, pp. 31-32)

Instead of filling them with the wisdom of the past, schools must help students to develop abilities and attitudes that allow them to push beyond what is so as to be prepared to deal effectively with what is to come. He says elsewhere that,

Any institution may dispirit the individual if it plans its activities so specifically as to drive out spontaneity and vitality. This is especially devastating for children if they have no other resources to fall back on, as increasingly few do today. Schools need to treat students far better, to take seriously their human rights, and

even become their advocates. More than any other change, honoring the democratic ideal in deed will help them learn better. (1991, p. 6)

Yet, in America and elsewhere, nations have built school systems that are dispiriting, that do “drive out spontaneity and vitality,” to the point that far too many students go to school against their will, not to engage in the excitement the disciplines should generate, but in order to fulfill government and parental mandates that they learn what they are told to learn as they are told to learn it.

This single factor, of students attending school because they have to and not because they want to, should be an indicator of just how problematic the modern systematic approach to education is. But instead of nations with democratic intentions working to build schools that respect the intellect of students in ways that cause students to respect the qualities of their minds, students are forced to engage in a process that has little to do with praxis, with creating knowledge from what comes to them through interaction with the world. Praxis goes beyond taking in to develop ideas and to *take on* meanings conveyed, processing them through application of the intellectual powers to determine real meanings and viability. Instead, the many are told what to know and how it is to be known, the criterion for success determined by some test maker whose notion of intellectual efficacy can be determined by machines reading tiny dots that represent something other than original thought and hard won notions of what is true and what is not. This is not a minor problem or procedural error. It is the crux of the problem that we see as systemic disrespect for the opinions, for the intellectual integrity of the human beings who are forced into and through the school systems. We will spend the remainder of the paper describing what we understand to be the forces that cause the education students receive in today’s schools to be inhumane and, thus, terribly undemocratic little potential for helping students become that one generation that will serve as the foundation for building democracies into the future.

Findings and Results

Business

Over the years it has become apparent that business has become a significant force in shaping the process of educational decision-making. James Moffett, back in the

1970s, realized what big business had realized, that the education infrastructure, particularly in nations such as the United States where educational systems are extremely large, could be plumbed for huge profits and that, in *market* economies, schools could be used as tools to serve the market by insuring that students receive proper training for the *job market* and “ideals” and attitudes consistent with the needs and desires of capitalists. Bowering from Dwight Eisenhower, Moffett declared that there existed, along with a military-industrial complex, an educational-industrial complex that did indeed make schools *safe for capitalism* by doing what was necessary through lobbying and sales to influence what schools would teach and the commodities they would purchase in order to teach a business friendly curriculum.

If one were to examine educational policy documents developed to guide the educational process in the United States, he or she would find statements much like the one found in the mission statement of the Common Core State Standards, a set of goals advocated by the federal government to guide curriculum development in school districts across the country, that reads, “The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.” Nowhere in this statement of mission is there communicated a concern for growth and development of individuals’ intellectual abilities, or dispositions or values related to democratic imperatives, to effective citizenship in a democratic society.

While this statement, and others like it, do, in places give mention of the relationship of education to democratic aspirations, they are not prominent and both curriculum and the materials used in support of curriculum rarely reflect deep and abiding concern for much other than developing a citizenry that can serve well the economic interests. When business it exerts force upon the education system, it does so to insure that those who are educated are educated to its specifications for worker and consumer and it seems obvious that, to a high degree, desires have been met, an *educated* populous highly susceptible the less than rational pitches of advertisements for products and politicians, the brilliantly cultivated hunger for the things business has to sell, that can be sold on policies that undermines its quality of life for the sake of a relative few

who reap profit from thoughtlessness and educationally manufactured ignorance. One needs only to spend time watching American television for a few hours or to follow the typical American political campaign to attain a sense of a public miss-educated by its educational system.

According to the University of Southern California Rossier College of Education Online Staff (2011), the United States spends eight hundred and six billion dollars a year for education. Some of this is, of course, spent on teachers, teacher training, and other elements that are not for profit in nature. At least seven billion dollars of this is, spent on textbooks, “testing resources and reference materials” (Barnes and Chozick, 2012) In addition, considerable amounts go for testing services, computers, software, white boards, projectors and the like.

In recent years, for profit companies have increased their potency in the educational realm by operating elementary and secondary schools at public expense under charter laws and through the operation of for-profit colleges whose students receive considerable amounts of aid money from public agencies to pay tuition. Beyond the profit making incentives for business involvement in the American educational system is the desire of corporate entities to influence educational policy, the Eli Broad Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation being amongst the most potent, providing considerable amounts of charitable donations to gain the attention of high ranking educational policy makers (Barkin, 2010). Fusion of the corporate and educational is nowhere more clearly illustrated than by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation’s hiring of recently retired New York City Schools chancellor Joe Klein (Stelter, B. & Arango, T. 2010) as executive vice president at the same time that News Corporation, “in partnership with AT&T...will offer digital learning tools to kindergarten through grade 12 students, part of the media company’s strategy to tap into the multibillion-dollar public education market” (Chozick, 2012).

As public schools in the United States have gotten poorer, partly as a result of the lobbying by business for lower taxes to be offset by budget cuts in the public sector, hunger for such donations has increased and, as noted before, there is hardly a set of standards, school goals, or school curricula that does not feature prominently the necessity of graduating good workers for a workforce that is being pushed to work harder

(worker productivity in the United States is an all time high) for lower pay and fewer benefits. Corporate largess is prominently displayed on banners that fly in many schools, on pencils and erasers imprinted with the names of companies that supplied them, and in television advertisements costing millions of dollars to run that tell the public of major corporations' concern for education and their generosity. While some would argue, particularly the corporations themselves, that the donations are signs of good corporate citizenship, one would have to ignore the agenda corporate America brings to the table, corporative motives, and the effect corporately proffered changes in education has wrought.

Schools effectiveness, as we alluded to earlier, is measured ever more on scales related to workplace readiness rather world savvy citizenship, a citizenry able to understand, amongst other things, business agenda, motives, and machinations. Those agenda, always linked to concerns for profit serve well, perhaps, the needs of the modern capitalism, but too often, despite corporate patriotic rhetoric, have only a nominal relationship to concern for common good or the strengthening of the public voice in the affairs of government.

Corporations exist to make profits and they do what they have to do in order to succeed in their pursuit. On the other hand, what corporations do to make their investors wealthy is not necessarily what is for the good of a society or its individual members. Robert Reich, Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley and Secretary of Labor during the Clinton administration, in his book *Super Capitalism* (2008), argues that during the 1950s and into the 1960s, a relatively comfortable balance existed between corporate power and the power of the people to participate in the democratic decision making process. Beginning in the 1970s that balance was distorted when companies grew into the mega-corporations that dominate the world of business and use their massive wealth to influence governments around the world to insure that policies are enacted that suit corporations at the expense of peoples in nations around the globe. In the United States, the peoples' power to influence political decisions has been greatly diminished while corporate power to influence has grown tremendously. Reich argues that capitalism has trumped democracy and that measures need to be taken to restore a reasonable balance.

The way forward to restoration of the peoples' power to govern themselves necessitates a public capable of understanding the situation and its ramifications and in possession of the abilities allow people to fight the battles that must be won if their power to govern themselves is to be restored. Since the 1970s schools in America, according to most indicators, have been steadily losing their ability to provide citizens with a proper education, for many reasons, amongst them what seems to be an unwillingness on the part of politicians to do what is necessary to provide resources and to develop policies that would strengthen schools programs so that graduates would possess the intellectual prowess essential to wresting and managing power within the framework of democratic governance.

Not all business initiatives are anti-democratic, but still, educators need to be vigilant against educational policy dictated by business interests that work to inculcate students in anti-democratic ways, in ways that fail to help students discover the proper sense of humanity that comes from discovery of the power of the intelligence that resides in the human minds. In a capitalist society built on consumption, business must somehow encourage people to consume, to be interested in material goods and not so much in the goodness of being human (and humane). Students are inculcated in the *goodness* of predatory forms of competition. Collaboration and cooperation may be given acknowledgement, but the ultimate goal of such activities is not a communal goal but an individual goal in the form of grade or test score. If there is something of value created through the collaborative work, there is no way to credit the collaborative value of the accomplishment to the individual students educational account.

In the sane school, the school that exists within the context of the democratic imperative, it is an understanding of the value of the individual for the success of the collaborative enterprise that causes individuals to value one another and to work for others. Such an environment nurtures understanding of the fact that in doing something for the whole, much that is good is derived for the self. Humanization comes of prizing that that is human and much the is humane is made possible through understanding the value of the human intellect, one's own and others'. Ultimately, democracy is that environment, an environment that facilitates appreciation and admiration for the capacity of people to think and the gifts bestowed by such thought. Not only does one with such

understanding not wish to do harm to another, he or she is also apt to make decisions and act in ways that protect that other by protecting the environment that allows the thought of the individual in the collective to thrive. This is the force that generates morality and leads to ethical behavior.

Businesses sometimes are collaborative, those collaborating doing so to enrich the owners and share holders but not necessarily the individuals doing the work. Workers know this and they know that they are expendable as practices such as downsizing and offshoring have shown. Good numbers of workers labor for others to get by, not to do or create something they value or understand to be worthwhile, and this is a particularly potent factor in how one values self in the context of the broader society. Herbert Thelen argues that “laboring, unlike dancing or work, has no consummatory value.” “Labor,” he says,

...is directed by someone else, for his reasons, according to his procedures; the basis of these reasons and procedures in insight or tradition may not even interest the laborer... Labor is easy to direct because the tasks are cut and dried. This is the genius of mass production. The laborer is not psychologically involved enough to ask genuine questions about the task (only about the conditions of employment). (pp. 112-113)

Perhaps the reader hears students asking questions of “how many points,” or “how many pages,” or what do I have to do to get a high grade”? Thelen contrasts labor with work, work being based upon understanding of the value of the activity. “A worker,” he writes,

makes a difference...changes a situation, solves a problem, produces some useful object, develops a new insight. Work is guided or directed by one’s understanding of the demand structure of the situation one is trying to cope with. Work is not only creative, involving the organization of ideas and making judgments: One is truly coping. (p. 112)

The life of the laborer is the life too many now live as corporations subsume greater portions of economies around the world. Individuals work, not for the gratification that comes of the work or what it produces, but to put a meal on the table or pay the rent. The joy of work, and the social bonds that come with working with others to produce something good and meaningful and useful do not exist; the richness of life

produced of collaboration is not experienced and a strong sense of community does not grow. We ask our readers to consider whether the classrooms they know model the laboring or the working ethos just described. While we will not make reference to work in the area of student engagement, we do feel comfortable saying that for schools to serve the growth of abilities tied to the democratic imperative, students will have to engage in meaningful work in order to feel the meaning of the individual intellect so that they come to appreciate in visceral ways, the real meaning of being human. As we have argued above, it is discovery of the potency of mind that is prime cause for strengthened sense of empathy and it is empathy that allows truly free beings to respect others, fellow human beings at once endowed with the same kind of mindfulness, appreciated for this and also those other beings potential for providing self with valuable perspectives on cannot conjure on his or her own. Peace in a democratic society, in any society in which it is for the people to decide how they are going to get along, in truly free societies, comes about through development of mutual respect that authentic and not enforced, that grows as understanding of the self as intellect comes to be understood as it exists in relation to the intelligence of others.

Thus, the conditions of work have a profound effect on community, particularly the democratic community, where common aspirations and a sense of interdependence causes pushes one to think of community as a force that ultimately serves self. Without strong notions of common bonds, *decency* is not of the type that arises in humane communities. Instead, decency must be enforced, often in heavy-handed ways, by those hired to *enforce* the law. It is pitiful, but true, that the United States of America, which sees itself as the beacon of democracy there exists a strong sense that decency cannot exist except through coercion, that, in a terrible sense, people are not capable of governing themselves. For this reason, in the United States of America, democracy exists only in a weak sense, the perceived need for harsh laws and harsh enforcement of these laws so wide-spread as to suggest that good numbers of Americans do not truly believe in the efficacy of democracy.

Religion

Self-respect, in its truest sense, is the cause of *respect* for others and for that respect to be sincere rather than forced, one has to hold appreciation for the other as a human, endowed with the capacities that make human beings human. But there are forces other than business that push people away from such appreciation and, sadly, education accedes too often to these forces. The most potent of these forces is religion, particularly in its institutionalized forms, curious institutions that in too many societies are shuttered off from sensible scrutiny. Because religions do now participate rather directly in public policy debates and do exert force in determining how education is delivered in nations around the world, it is absolutely essential that nations with a democratic bent begin to take a serious look at both the consequences of religion's dalliance at the policy level and in regard to how the learning processes of individuals are affected by religious training.

Religion, for the most part, is not about self-respect or the powers of the human being to use his or her intellect to make sense of the world and find meaning in one's existence. Instead, most religions offer pronouncements of truths that arise from inscrutable dogmas out of the reach of reason. To reason with religion is to demean for religion depends on something other than reason to reach the truths it sponsors. It is impossible to reason one's way to a deity unless one is willing to accept as evidences that which would never pass as evidence in realms outside of the religious. It is pretty much impossible to argue in a rationale manner with religious premises because its premises are not rationale, and it is dangerous in many places to assert irrationality as reason for dismissal of religious premises because to do so is considered disrespectful or, in too many instances, blasphemous.

In the United States, for the few hundred years of its existence, the force of religion has been acknowledged and given a place in the democratic culture that causes such high degrees of dissonance as to distort the democratic dialectic in profoundly disturbing ways, so disturbing and so difficult to speak of in an honest manner that it is rarely discussed and patently ignored in American schools. For example, while the debate over how evolution should be handled in American schools has raged for decades, most schools do not discuss in depth the reasons for the debate. It is treated as a

disagreement amongst sensible people with the real *sense* of the matter never considered. The manner in which the *issue* has been handled in courts is not the manner in which students are *helped* to understand the issue for the courts, by law, adjudicate with reasoning supported by evidence made tangible through the application of rationale proofs, a good example of this being the trial that took place over a Dover, Pennsylvania school board's attempt to force biology teachers to teach "intelligent design" as a theory equal in to the theory of evolution (PBS/Transcripts). Earlier in the history of science teaching in the United States a teacher named John Scopes was relieved of his teaching position for teaching science based in Darwin.

There is nothing wrong with religion asserting its "truths" in the sanctuary or in public places as long as the logic of its pronouncements is open to legitimate questioning by those affected by those pronouncements and this includes the children whose religious educations will, in good schools, be tested through the introduction of ideas that exist in contention with, if not in opposition to, those pronouncements. For schools not to encourage students to consider the meaning of such things as resurrection and stories of creation that are not compatible with scientific understanding of such *phenomenon* is to deny students and the society a means for coming to sensible understandings of the world that can be used to ground public discussion. Religion need not be banished or berated; it does need to be studied in the same way any influential set of ideas needs be studied in a school system that is charged with preparing its students to participate effectively in the discussions that shape the policies that regulate the lives of free peoples. To say such things is not to say things anti-religious but, rather, to call for fair treatment of a set of ideas that have led to predictions for the end of the world and to the banning of many a book and many an idea over the course of history.

By avoiding honest scrutiny of religion, schools fail to help students overcome the effects of what might be intellectually crippling notions and, perhaps more damaging, *emotions*. We do not think that it can be denied that religion has and does cause many to avoid thinking into and about certain aspects of existence, to often out a cultivated fear for retribution by a god or the God. If fear is not the mechanism used, notions of goodness and evil are used to the same effect. Democracies cannot mature unless individuals are free to inquire and, as Freire argues "Any situation in which some

individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (Freire 2005, p. 85),” objects because they are bereft of volition to come to understandings on their own, pushed off the path to achievement of genuine praxis. “Apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (2005, p.72).

These affect of such inhibitions/limitations on an individual’s consciousness is incalculable but reason would tell us, terribly debilitating. For an individual to be coerced or even convinced to not think for him for him or her self , is inhumane for it absolutely prevents one from finding self and, in regard to the democratic society, it denies that society a basic element of the democracy, a particular kind of mindfulness with potential to contribute something original to the democratic decision making process. Terribly so, in the United States there are no laws to sanction religion from interfering with the freedom that allows individuals to think for themselves, to form opinions and express those opinions so that others may consider them. Religion is protected, but people are not protected from religion.

Many argue that religion is a force of good and something that should not be questioned by the “outsider” who cannot possibly understand its teachings. However, if religion interferes with the full development of free thought, then it must become a topic of *honest* discussion. While one can argue that religion is a benign force in the lives of humans, it can only be treated as such if it allows or, at least, does not interfere with, human beings realizing their humanity. We do not argue for abolishing religion, but we do believe that it needs to be treated *fairly* so that people can be treated fairly, in the sense that they are allowed to exercise their intellects freely. Schools should not be forced to teach religion as religion teaches religion, and this is pretty much accepted practice in the United States. On the other hand, schools do need to teach about religion as religion does exert a potent force on many aspects of the culture and the society and they must discuss religion in an open and honest manner whether or not some protest against such for reason precludes the legitimacy of such demands. And, most

importantly, that which counters religious dogma and religious beliefs cannot be ignored or disputed in ways that run counter to good sense and critical thought. To allow for such would be to accede to the notion that because there are things that cannot be understood one should not try to understand them.

The State

It is the state that, in most nations, is responsible for operating the school system and this is a very good thing in a democratic state for, one would think, such a state would work to insure that students acquire abilities necessary for participation in a democratic society. But democratic states, for the most part, have yet to fulfill the promise of democracy, too often influenced too much by the forces discussed above and by a penchant of nations to be, to differing extent, more nationalistic than democratic. While to some, the recitation of a pledge to flag and country, such as that demanded of American children as young as five years old, may seem innocuous, the requirement that anyone anywhere be *required* to recite as a pledge words of which they do not know the meaning, is at once a command for the acceptance of servility, the students being told that there are truths beyond their comprehension with which they must thoughtlessly comply. While an adult may choose to utter words the meaning of which he or she does not know, perhaps for the sake of politeness, there is a degree of choice that in the matter. With children, this is conditioning for blind obedience and, because it occurs in the school room, it is something of an induction ceremony into a cult of susceptibility that most likely does have the effect of orienting to a kind of learning that we would label bogus, here the banking of forms of patriotism and nationalism that operate in contradiction to the kind of democratic education we have argued for throughout this paper. We need to go no future that to point out that students of ages five, six, seven, and older can be counted upon not to know the meaning of such concepts as “pledge,” “allegiance,” “United States of America,” “liberty,” “justice,” and so on, but can be heard to be uttering such words on a daily basis in the institutions that should be helping them to do the necessary things that citizens of a democracy need to be able to do, one of them being to recognize acts of submission to demagoguery as they exist in opposition to self governance and democratic decision making process.

Let it be known that we do not care to argue that a pledge of allegiance is necessarily a bad thing, but for it to exist in abidance with basic principles of democracy, those asked to recite it must be encouraged to do so *only* when they know and truly believe in the meanings the pledge is meant to convey. There is nothing wrong with loving one's country *if* one knows a great deal about that country and finds it to be lovable, something truly worthy of praise. To accept orders to praise blindly is to capitulate to tyranny. Schools that demand such acceptance exist in opposition to the democratic imperative. An interesting discussion of mandatory recitation of the pledge can be found in Green (1995) where it is argued that the mandate is unconstitutional. Green, however, ignoring the anti-democratic force the reciting of the pledge exerts on those not ready to interpret its words for themselves, goes on to sponsor the amending of the Constitution so as to make the mandate lawful.

Again, we reassert our claim that the unlawfulness of mandates to recite anything at anytime of which the person being asked to recite has little grasp of its meaning is problematic not because it violates civil law but, rather, because it violates natural laws by which humanity must be defined, that opinions are sacrosanct within a democracy and that schools for democracy must allow students to develop opinion and never asked to accept opinion without doing what is necessary to determine truth value of an opinion.

Schools that we know of, be they in the United States, Turkey, or in Nigeria do not work well to help students attain what Howe (1992), via Gutman, determines to be the "democratic threshold," freedom at its most basic, the ability, as a human being to "deliberate effectively," the ability to make good use of the opportunity to choose in such a way that there is good chance that one will choose well. To broach this threshold, there must exist, in the choice making process, degrees of "voluntariness and intent" coupled with the ability to "identify and weigh alternatives and their consequences to choose the one judged best from among them" (pp. 459-460). For one to possess freedom he or she "...must have the opportunity to exercise it. The opportunity to exercise it, in turn requires (1) that information necessary for deliberation is available and (2) that the social conditions do not impose a burden for acting on the results..." Following orders to recite the pledge or understanding *learning* as *taking in* rather than *making something of* the information, concepts, and ideas that come one's way, is to misunderstand learning in the

its humane sense and this inhumane sense is too often what is proffered as real learning in schools be they in nations that call themselves democratic or not.

We do not ask that nations do not teach what is good about the nation, nor is it our hope students will come to dislike or become hostile to a nation. But, in truly democratic societies supporting truly democratic schools, students would come to know their nation well enough to love it or to love it well enough to do what is necessary to make it truly lovable. And, if properly inspired to do so, they would be excited to write their own pledges and patriotic songs because their inquiries have led them to understand the goodness for which the nation stands. This is a critically important proposition for, how schools treat the notions of state and country has much to do with how an individual orients him or herself to the world, as a player or shaper or one who is to fit into a given reality over which he or she can exert no control, for which there exists no impetus for participation. If students come to think of themselves as passive beings, good because they are accepting of what they are told, who do not really know or care to know, individuals who do not question those said to be *in the know*, then their education is destructive for democracy and for the kind of growth toward humanization, the vocation of which Freire speaks.

In dealing with issues of nation, students must come to understand the *nature* of history, how it comes to be written and by whom and for what purpose. Perhaps not in all nations with aspirations for democracy, but true in the school in nations where we have been, a telling sign of non-democratic, anti-democratic approaches to education is the fact that neither teachers nor students know much, if anything, about the authors of their textbooks, whatever the subject may be. This may be a minor consequence if authorship is ignored on some occasions. However, when authorship is rarely discussed, students probably come to see information as what it often is not, fact, or worse, *the truth*. This process, based upon lack of understanding of process, is amongst the most debilitating consequences of undemocratic miss-education because it teaches people how not to see but to believe in spite of one's blindness to the realities upon which the beliefs are based, if, in fact, there is basis in reality. Recent critiques of practices generated by the No Child Left Behind act provide evidence that American education is leading

children to a type of literacy that O'Neil once referred to as "illiterate literacy. "Make a distinction," he writes,

being able to read means that you can follow words across a page, getting generally what's superficially there. Being literate means you can bring your knowledge and your experience to bear on what passes before you. Let us call the latter proper literacy; the former improper. You needn't be able to read to be properly literate.

The real problem with this "improper literacy" is that those trained in it read only surfaces, what they hear said is what is. Thus, they are rendered unable to distinguish the legitimate authority from that which is not legitimate. What they read, what comes to them via school sanctioned, and later societally sanctioned, authorities is unquestioned because school has not only failed to teach them how to question but has told them in so many ways that sanctioned authorities are either not to be questioned or, worse perhaps, that they cannot and/or should not be questioned for their word stands not for an opinion but for the truth.

That such hide the identity, render authoritative approaches to literacy instruction and instruction related to learning *how* to learn exist, we offer Fair Test's assessment of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) test used under the auspices of the No Child Left Behind Act to measure attainment of comprehension abilities. Gerald Cole, author of *Reading the Naked Truth: Literacy, Legislation and Lies*, tells us this about the test:

Administered throughout a school year, DIBELS is supposed to ascertain a student's reading progress from kindergarten through sixth grade. If you're wondering about comprehension, that's in the subtest "retell fluency," which follows "reading fluency." After a student reads a story aloud for one minute, a teacher asks, "Tell me everything you just read," and then silently counts the words produced within one minute, a number that translates into a "comprehension" score. Fast thinking is a must: a second brief pause that goes beyond five seconds ends the subtest. (Coles, 2012)

As a result of instruction based upon the measures used to determine whether or not proper outcomes have been achieved, the typical student graduates,

Lightly armed with his new, counter-intuitive way of dealing with experience and reading superficially, the child is now forced into re-viewing what he already knows and learning anew surfaces of knowledge. Geography is reduced to a catalogue of names and capitals and products, history to a linear succession of dates and events, literature to a chronologically ordered set of the best thoughts man has best uttered – nothing of the systems of beliefs that underlie his uttering or the child’s comprehending, nothing of what passes or doesn’t pass from mind to mind. Science is reduced to taxonomy. Properly literate children are reduced to uncomprehending adolescents, improper literates.

The *storyteller* becomes an oracle whose credentials no one thinks to scrutinize.

The fruit of miss-education is the misreading by citizens of a democratic society of that which goes on around them and, inevitably, decision making that is the result of something other than effective deliberation. Surveys over the years of citizen understanding of the facts behind the issues debated in political campaigns or claims made to advertise consumer goods point to high degrees of ignorance and inability to reason out the truth value of what politicians and advertisers say. Again, we will make the claim that there is good reason to believe that the miss-teaching that contributes to the miss-education of citizens who must make decisions of consequence in democratic societies prevents nations claiming to want democracy from achieving it. For a good taste of how democratic process is undermined by schooling that renders people likely to make choices that are the result of something other than *effective deliberation*, facts known and treated reasonably, we suggest that our readers review the speeches of political candidates, advertisements that accompany campaigns, and the level of success companies have selling their products with pitches that appeal to aspects of human character other than ability to think to reasonable conclusions about the meaning of things that come before them. A particularly poignant rendering of the problem is offered in the film *Buying the War* (Moyers, 2007), a documentary that explains in detail how citizens of the United States of all levels of education were brought to believe that there was good reason for the country to engage in a war with Iraq.

Schools, to serve democracy, then, must allow students to participate in the making of knowledge and educators must be knowledgeable of that which prevents full

student involvement in making meanings for him or herself within the context of a collaborative of fellow learners who help in the process of making the knowledge generated whole and right. The individual, engaged in the process of sense making, generates *opinion* and, in the democratic collective, opinion is tested against others' opinions and the evidence that serves as the basis for opinions and this process continues until there are good enough opinions available upon which to base actions. This is the democratic process.

Conclusions

We have touched upon three categories of impediment to education that is proper for democratic societies, these three, in our minds, being the most pervasive and detrimental, detrimental because they affect student understanding of the role of self in society and the manner in which one, oneself, goes about making sense of the things that transpire in the world and about which citizens are required to deliberate. Such understanding is critical to effective citizenship because is the process by which opinions are generated and assessed so that societal decisions can be made based, upon collective understandings that arise from rigorous scrutiny of a multitude of sensible opinions, respectable opinions that are the product of the magnificent tool that is the human intellect.

It is respect for opinion and the powerful mechanisms of mind that generate opinion that produces a proper morality for democracies, a morality that is based in respect for self as thinker and, through empathetic extension, respect for others as meaningful beings who are essential to the societal decision making process and, thus, worthy of individual respect and concern for their the desires, and aspirations. True democracy is humane because it is based on understanding of what it means to be a human being. It is of and by human beings who recognize the humanity of all other human beings, particularly as individuals capable of thoughtfulness. People need to learn about their capacity to think so that they can think about the worth of that capacity and enter into a dialectic that seeks truths that allow for decisions that are good for the whole of which each individual is an essential part.

Morality must come of such understanding, so that it does not need to be enforced, so that moral behavior does not necessitate infringements upon freedom. The individual who can understand his or her own humanity is the being capable of celebrating life for its goodness, human life for the opportunities it offers. It is in this way that one comes to understand the true value of what it is that is taken from others when others are mistreated. This understanding is the product of effective democratic education, a type of education that has rarely been practiced in our world. One cannot be told to respect another or forced to respect another in a free and democratic society. Respect is of attitude not information. A pronouncement such as “love thy brother” is but a piece of information. *Loving* one’s brother results from understanding that brother, or sister, or whoever it may be by understanding well the properties of self.

We will end here, with one final note. What we have discussed is perhaps, and most probably, of the impossible. We assume that many who read what we have said will find it to be unrealistic. That is because what is “real” has yet to have been harnessed to fuel the democratic. This is not a problem with democracy. It is an effect of democracy, a form of governance that finds its real meaning in an ongoing process of creating an ever more perfect form of government for free people who must live together and who can be truly free and human *if* they govern themselves properly. It *must be* unrealistic because it can never be a real “thing;” it is process and what that process renders is of but the moment, susceptible to change for the sake of infusions of new opinions that must be taken seriously for they come of the governed engaged in a humane process of making things ever better, ever closer to perfect. The projects of democracy, including its educational programs, are always in the making and, because this is so, those programs are always about things that aren’t yet but could be, unrealistic yet true.. This is the work of humanity and the proper role for education is to help people become more effective in their exercise of their humanity.

Schools must become less didactic and more the dialect with, as Freire suggests, teachers becoming students of their students as their students are students of their teachers. The content of schools must be taught, but the meaning of that content must be negotiated rather than imposed. Freire calls for schools in which the primary work of students and teachers is that of solving problems, of taking on the world and finding in it

the meanings that can be applied to make things happen, democratically speaking, for the good of the one and the good of the whole. Learning of this kind takes place in the collaborative environment of the dynamic educational setting, one that complicates rather than simplifies things for spoon-feeding. Moffett and Wagner (1993) said have said, school must be harder and more fun, the fun arising from engagement with challenges, the problems that demand solutions because they are meaningful and, as such, give value and meanings. Learning, one learns, is good because it *is* useful.

This paper cannot begin to describe all of the particulars of such schools and we feel it unfitting to attempt such. Our readers, by taking it upon themselves to use the principles offered here to discover particulars, will find themselves engaged in the kind of intellectual activity in which students must become engaged. There is no particular democratic education as there is no particular democracy for both democracies and democratic education take their shape as a result of the work of those involved.

Our closing story that is offers more than a hint at what the dialectic of the democratic classroom might sound like. Josie, eleven years old, comes home from school and tells her parents of a discussion in her classroom that was rather perplexing for her. The class had read an article describing a situation in Ecuador in which oil companies were beginning to explore for oil and gas in areas covered by rainforest. The article was followed by a set of question that asked of what should be done; should the oil companies allowed to drill at the cost of the forests or the forests preserved at the cost of the people of this region of Ecuador, already poor, remaining poor.

Most in the class, according to Josie's reporting, were against the drilling and for the preservation of the animals and plants and trees that would be disrupted and probably destroyed by the intrusion. Josie said that the article, in a nature magazine, was biased in this direction making little mention to the possibility that the people of the region could climb out of poverty with the help of oil discoveries, but even so, she felt that the question could not be easily answered because neither answer was without drawbacks. She then wrote a paper that she began by saying that, while it was easy to tell the people of the region to not give up the rainforest for the sake of the beasts and the plants and other things ecological, there were people to think about who have much less than she and her classmates do, whose lives need to be considered. Thus, she had *no good answer*

and then went on to explain the pros and cons without finding a way to make a determination as to which of the two possible answers to the problem was the best. Despite the bias of the article and, probably, the teacher who had assigned the reading, Josie had thought the thought that led to a response that reflected understanding of the complexity of the issues involved. She felt somewhat reluctant to offer up her *at odds* reading of the situation because she had good reason to believe, from her reading of the situation in which she found herself, that she was at odds. Whether or not she spoke her mind she did not tell us. The proper teacher for the good and democratic classroom would have encouraged her to do so.

References

- Barkan, J. (2011). *Got Dough? How Billionaires Rule Our Schools*. Retrieved on May 29, 2012, from <http://dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=3781>.
- Barnes, B. and Chozick, A. (2012). Media Companies, Seeing Profit Slip, Push Into Education. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/23/news-corporation-forms-new-brand-for-education-division/>.
- Cohozick, A. (2012). News corporation forms new brand for education division. *New York Times Media Decoder*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/20/technology/discovery-invests-in-digital-textbooks-in-hopes-of-growth.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- Coles, G. (2012). *Comprehending DIBELS*. Jamaica Plain, MA: National Center for Fair and Open Testing. Retrieved from <http://www.fairtest.org/comprehending-dibels>.
- Dewey, J. (1937). Democracy and Educational Administration. *School and Society*, 45, 457-67.
- Feire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Green, A. S. (1995). The Pledge of Allegiance problem. *Fordham Law Review*, 64, 2. Retrieved November 9, 2012 from <http://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3204&context=flr>.

- Howe, K. (1992). Liberal democracy, equal educational opportunity, and the challenge of multiculturalism. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29(3), 455-470.
- McMaster, J. (2007). Judgment day: Evolution on trial. *Nova*. In McMaster, J, Gary Johnstone, G., and Tovell, V. Boston, WGBH for PBS.
- Moffett, J. (1992). *Harmonic learning: Keynoting school reform*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Moffett, J., and Wagner, B. J. (1991). *Student centered language arts, K-12*, 4th edition. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook.
- Moyers, B. (2007). Buying the war. *Bill Moyers journal*. In Moyers, B. NY: Public Affairs Television.
- Reich, R. B. (2008). *Supercapitalism: The transformation of business, democracy, and everyday life*. Great Barrington, MA.
- Stelter, B. & Arango, T. (2010, November). *News Corp. Reels In a Top Educator*. Retrieved on May 28, 2012, from <http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/09/news-corp-reels-in-a-top-educator/>.
- Thelen, H. A. (1981). *The Classroom Society: Croom Helm Curriculum Policy and Research Series*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons Publication Inc.
- USC Rossier Online Staff. (2011). U.S. education spending and performance vs. the world. Retrieved November 10, 2012 from <http://rossieronline.usc.edu/u-s-education-versus-the-world-infographic/>.