

2008

Schooling as if Democracy Matters

Lorraine Kasprisin

Western Washington University, lorraine.kasprisin@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://cedar.wwu.edu/jec>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kasprisin, Lorraine (2008) "Schooling as if Democracy Matters," *Journal of Educational Controversy*: Vol. 3 : No. 1 , Article 1.
Available at: <http://cedar.wwu.edu/jec/vol3/iss1/1>

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by the Peer-reviewed Journals at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Educational Controversy by an authorized editor of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

EDITORIAL

Schooling as if Democracy Matters

Lorraine Kasprisin
Editor

On November 1, 2006, John Goodlad was invited to speak as the Third Annual Distinguished Speaker at the Woodring College of Education at Western Washington University. His lecture provided the impetus for the theme of this issue, and the journal is dedicating this issue to John Goodlad's lifetime work in helping us to think about the kind of education that is required to sustain a vital democracy. John Goodlad wrote the prologue to this issue. The journal is also devoting a special section on a description of some of the schools that are part of the League of Democratic Schools, a project that was started by Dr. Goodlad. Woodring College of Education partners with one of these schools, the Whatcom Day Academy, in an effort to create a model school that is a laboratory for democratic practices.

Despite the historical association of public schools with the life of a democracy in our long national debate, our schools have often not reflected the ideals expressed in our sterling documents. But what did we mean -- indeed, what do we mean -- by *democracy*. Our attempts to create democratic schools depend, of course, on our understanding of the concept of democracy, a concept whose meaning is not at all clear. Often the contradictions and tensions inherent in the concept are ignored or covered over in our public debates. And recently, I have noticed a new phenomenon occurring -- subtle, hidden, almost invisible -- among university administrators, teacher preparation programs, think tanks, foundations, political rhetoric and mainstream publishing firms - a fear and avoidance of the use of the words, *democratic* or *democracy*, altogether when talking about the public purposes of schools. But, more importantly, on those occasions when it is used in our public debate, it is often co-opted and appropriated in ways that fit the current ways of thinking. A number of our authors allude to this in their articles. As one put it: "'Schools Today' reveals the current 'state' of democracy, presupposing its importance but emphasizing its absence." This phenomenon should give us pause to think that something much deeper is occurring beneath the surface. Our aim in this issue is to probe beneath the rhetoric and platitudes, the tensions and contradictions, the invisible and the submerged that underlie our talk about the role of public schools in a democratic society. We framed our controversy, therefore, around the following scenario that was sent out in our "call for papers."

Controversy Addressed in this Issue

In this issue, we consider how we are to fulfill the traditional moral imperative of our schools -- to create a public capable of sustaining the life of a democracy. How do we do this in an age of the Patriot Act and similar anti-terrorism legislation in other countries, NSA surveillance, extraordinary rendition, preemptive wars, enemy combatants -- all likely to involve violations of civil rights and liberties and a curtain of government secrecy? What story do we tell our young about who we are, who we have been, and who we are becoming? How do we educate children about their identity in this global world? What sense are they to make of the "imperial" democracy they are inheriting? Is our new political environment a fundamental break with the past or an extension of longstanding trends?

What are the implications of these forces for the education of the young on the foundations of our democracy and our collective identity?

This issue of the journal has several sections – a prologue, an introductory section, articles in response to the controversy, a section looking inside the classrooms of the League of Democratic Schools with videotapes as well as articles, a special section on the U.S. Supreme Court's most recent decision on student rights and our first book reviews. Check out also our new feature, "Talking with the Authors" Video Series, where you will be able to view videotaped interviews with some of our authors. We have also provided a link to our spring forum, the *10th Annual Educational Law and Social Justice Forum*, that featured PowerPoint presentations by three of our authors on the theme of this issue. Our aim as always is to make each issue a total experience on the topic for our readers.

PROLOGUE

Because of his commitment to democratic schooling, the journal invited John Goodlad to write the prologue for this issue. In his article, "Agenda for an Education in a Democracy," Dr. Goodlad writes, "As silence in the face of controversy grows, democracy declines." His comment resonates with the intent behind our journal. Goodlad suggests that a complete transformation in the way we educate our teachers and the way they live out their lives in our institutions is required to combat the forces of economic utility, the restrictive mandates that narrow our concept of education, and the lack of a common public purpose.

SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS

Our introductory section is intended to provide some perspective to the discussion that follows in subsequent sections. In this issue, we provide the reader with two types of introductions. First, we take an historical look at one of the figures in our history who has long been associated with the notion of democratic schooling -- the American philosopher John Dewey. In a provocative essay, "Speculation on a Missing Link: Dewey's Democracy and Schools," Lynda Stone suggests that our conventional ideas about John Dewey may indeed be misguided. She suggests, instead, that the relationship of democracy to schooling is a missing link in Dewey's canon of works. We will be interested in seeing our viewer's reaction to this thesis.

Our second introduction looks at the state of civil liberties in the United States today. First, we provide the reader with a general account of the legislation passed after September 11th. In "Are We Targeting Our Fellow Countrymen? The Consequences of the USA Patriot Act," Brett Rubio and Bridgid Baker discuss some of the ways that the Patriot Act has threatened our civil liberties and its potentially destructive effect on schools and university environments. The authors are particularly concerned with the way the Patriot Act and other aspects of the war on terror are most likely to be used against certain ethnic groups leading to racial profiling and hate crimes, even if the law itself does not set out to do so. In our second article, "Closed Borders and Closed Minds: Immigration Policy Changes after 9/11 and U.S. Higher Education," M. Allison Witt looks at a more specific example of the policy changes that have quietly affected U.S. higher education in the wake of September 11th. The author argues that these changes have led to increased isolation, threats to academic freedom, and the "decreasing potential for diverging views and counter perspectives within academia."

SECTION 2 – ARTICLES IN RESPONSE TO CONTROVERSY POSED

This section brings us to the papers written in response to our controversy. Walter Feinberg and William Ayers write short essays pondering the obligations each of us has to the events of recent times. In "Teaching for Democratic Values Under Political Duress," Feinberg points to the lack of open-minded discussion and deliberation about such crucial concepts as "sovereignty" and "just war theory" in our public schools today. "It is not even clear," writes Feinberg, "that many American leaders understand that schools even have a role in preserving liberal democracy. It is almost as if democracy is thought of as something that has been placed on automatic and allowed to run by itself. As if education and democracy were independent of each other."

In "Singing in Dark Times," a title drawn from a line in a poem by Bertolt Brecht, Ayers starts by distinguishing between personal virtues and social or community virtues. Ayers' distinction reminds us of the way schools too often tend to focus on the inculcation of personal character traits with some attention to social traits of a conventional nature -- "let's all try to get along with each other." But the deeper questions about our collective responsibility to each other are often not addressed. Like Feinberg above who argues for "an idea of citizenship education as taking responsibility for the decisions of one's leaders," Ayers also asks us to "to think about how we behave collectively, how our society behaves, how the contexts of politics and economics, for example, interact with what we hold to be good." A new "pedagogy of questioning," Ayers suggests, is required to get at this deeper level that enables a student to live a life of agency that opens new personal and social possibilities.

In "Education and the Crisis of Democracy: Confronting Authoritarianism in a post-9/11 America," Henry Giroux writes an extensive introduction to his chapter from *The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear*, which he has granted us permission to reprint. In his introductory piece, Giroux describes four "powerful antidemocratic tendencies," whose threat, he believes, has grown since the book first appeared in 2003. Giroux has us look at our controversy as "part of the broader crisis in democracy itself." These threats to our democracy, he argues, "now threaten to empty American democracy of any substance."

Influenced by and sensitive to Giroux's ideas, William Lyne, nevertheless, argues that Giroux has not gone far enough in his social critique and capitulates subtly to the forces of power. In "Beautiful Losers," Lyne starts by taking issue with some of the assumptions that he believes underlie the way we have posed the controversy in this issue of the journal. Lyne suggests that our question ignores the long history of civil rights and civil liberties abuses in our country, and he begins his article by placing recent events within this historical account. Against this historical pattern, writes Lyne, recent events begin to look "a lot more like just another patch in a patterned quilt of traditional U.S. government behavior." Lyne also takes issue with our assumption that the traditional moral imperative of our schools was to create a public capable of sustaining the life of a democracy. In arguing that schools have always been much more about ideological control, he takes issue that there ever was a time when schools were more democratic or socially conscious. Of course, there always exists a discrepancy between the beliefs we profess and those on which we operate, as well as contradictions, tensions, and ambiguities in our practices and our motives with conflicting goals often existing side-by-side. But Lyne makes a case for considering a counternarrative about "both the pervasiveness of oppression and the function of schools as ideological state apparatuses." It is against this narrative, that serious questions arise about how we are to live lives of integrity without becoming complicitous with the oppressive aspects of the institutions in which we live our lives. This is the question that the author addresses.

While readers of this journal will probably be familiar with the work of critical theorists like Henry Giroux, deliberative theorists like Amy Gutmann and historical thinkers like John Dewey, our next author suggests we look at this question from the lens of an author perhaps not as familiar to our readers. Claudia Ruitenberg draws on the work of French radical philosopher of democracy Jacques

Rancière. In "What if democracy really matters?," Ruitenberg poses these intriguing questions: "What if Rancière compels us to think quite differently, even controversially, about democracy? And what if, as a result, we reject the very possibility of 'schooling as if democracy matters,' not because democracy does not matter, but because it is fundamentally at odds with the institution of schooling?" We will leave our readers to ponder on their own responses to these questions.

Our next authors from Sweden also challenge "one of the cornerstones of a democratic education." In "Democracy, Education and Conflict: Rethinking Respect and the Place of the Ethical," Sharon Todd and Carl Anders Säfström argue that traditional schooling often views conflict as antithetical to democratic education, as counterproductive to dialogue. Indeed, dialogue and conversation, the authors argue, are the response to conflict that is often viewed as a breakdown in communication. But perhaps there is an "inevitability and importance of some kinds of conflict for legitimizing the possibility of democracy itself." This is the thesis that the authors set out to examine as they look anew at the significance of cross-cultural conflict for democratic education and the ethical and political dimensions of conflict for education. "Our purpose," they write, "is to explore the significance of conflict for democratic possibilities in education and to propose an ethical orientation that seeks to make space for conflict as an integral part of learning democracy." The authors argue "that the language teachers currently have available to them for 'handling' conflict is inadequate to such a task."

Language is also the concern of the next authors but from a different perspective. In "The Best Democracy Money can Buy: NCLB in Bush's Neo-liberal Marketplace (a.k.a., Revisioning History: The Discourses of Equality, Justice and Democracy Surrounding NCLB)," authors Rebecca A. Goldstein and Andrew R. Beutel apply critical discourse analysis to some of the speeches of Secretaries of Education Roderick Paige and Margaret Spellings. Their analysis examines the ways in which both Paige and Spellings employed the terms of equality/equity, justice, and democracy in speeches to each of three audiences - African-American interest groups, education organizations, and business organizations. The authors illustrate how the Bush Administration was able to "galvanize support across multiple communities" by employing what they called "audience-specific discourse" -- altering the discourse employed to convey a uniform message that furthered its vision of educational reform. The authors also show how this manipulating of public perception through the use of language and co-opting of words was able to silence, or at least, delegitimize its opposition. The resulting message, argues the authors, reflected the Administration's "conservative and market-driven ideologies" made palatable to different audiences. The writers talk about the implications of this revisioning for those who are committed to teaching social justice as a democratic practice for negotiating a collective understanding of the common good.

This revisioning of democracy as the function of market interests and values is taken up as the theme in "The Educator Roundtable: Working to Create a World Where Teachers *Can* School as if Democracy Matters." Philip Kovacs looks at our journal's question by studying what hinders us from imagining schools as public spaces that help our country pursue a more just and participatory democratic social order. At the heart of the dilemma, he argues, is a certain "neoliberal or neoconservative definition of progress [that] has ascended to positions of dominance" and has been allowed to dominate the language of public and educational policy. The author considers how various influential organizations chart progress towards the vision of society that underlies their agendas. Progress, or course, always presupposes a vision of what we are progressing toward – a vision of the kind of society we want to be. The author argues that over the last several decades neoconservative think tanks and organizations have successfully revisioned the educational landscape where democracy is increasingly equated with individual choice in commerce. In describing the creation of the *Educators Roundtable*, Kovacs talks about his effort to build an organizational and political base that will offer a counternarrative and a counter-movement to the two dominant narratives of progress for public education – standardization

and privatization - and to create a world where teachers can indeed school as if democracy matters. If schools are political sites for the contestation of deeply held ideas, Kovacs's article will provide a plethora of educational, political and pragmatic strategies for those who are working to realize progressive ideas and changes in the schools. For a look at a worldwide movement committed to similar goals, readers may want to reread the article, "[Teachers' Ethics: Education International and the Forging of Professional Unity](#)," by Athena Vongalis-Macrow from Melbourne, Australia in the winter 2007, Volume 2 Number 1 issue of our journal.

Our last three articles in this section touch on curriculum as well. In "Immigrants into Citizens: A UK Case Study for the Classroom," Patricia White from the London Institute of Education provides our readers a perspective from within the framework of another liberal democracy. Carefully comparing two editions of the British government publication, *Life in the United Kingdom: A Journey to Citizenship*, designed to help prospective citizens pass a citizenship test, White raises questions about the changing assumptions underlying the concept of citizenship in the United Kingdom, and asks if these are "appropriate assumptions for a country which aspires to be a democracy." White goes on to suggest that this could serve as a good case study for students trying to understand the "complexities of immigration and possible democratic responses." The journal would welcome a similar article that compares what is happening in the United Kingdom at this time with what is occurring in the United States. In what ways are the approaches by these two liberal democracies similar and in what ways do they differ?

Our second case study with implications for curriculum and democratic dialogue focuses on the Hurricane Katrina tragedy in New Orleans. In "Teaching *The Levees*: An Exercise in Democratic Dialogue," Margaret Smith Crocco and Maureen Grolnick describe the curriculum that they developed at Teachers College, Columbia University, in partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation. Intended to stimulate a democratic dialogue about a current social event, the curriculum was built and integrated around Spike Lee's four-part HBO documentary, *When the Levees Broke*. The curriculum is supported by a website that makes the curriculum and other professional materials available to teachers and others interested in this innovative project. See: www.teachingthelevees.org. Thirty thousand copies had been originally distributed to teachers and school districts across the country last August when we invited the authors to share their initiative with our readers.

Finally, in a sensitive, personal account of her teaching, Melody Wong describes the difficulties her class encountered in reading a novel that seemed remote to them in time, place and experience. In "Teaching a 'Racist and Outdated Text': A Journey into My Own Heart of Darkness," Wong describes her experience as a high school English teacher who "discovers her own complicity with and complacency about Western political, economic, and social hegemony. Ultimately," she writes, "her research into the historical, social, and political contexts of the 19th century novella enable her to understand its immediate relevance to the privileged world that she and her students live in, and to take her students on a personal journey in the modern 'heart of darkness.'" Wong's essay provides a prelude to our upcoming issue on "Art, Social Imagination and Democratic Education," scheduled to be published in the winter of 2009. Dedicated to the life and work of Maxine Greene, that issue will examine the role that the arts (visual art, music, performance art and literature) play in developing the social imagination required for sustaining the life of a democracy.

Our last essay in this section is by Sam Chaltain, former director of the First Amendment Schools and current executive director of the Five Freedoms Project, where he is reconceptualizing the role of educational administrators and developing a new model of school leadership. "The central challenge in any organizational culture," writes Chaltain, "is to help people become more aware of the inner place from which they operate." His essay, "Ways of Seeing (and of Being Seen): Visibility in Schools," provides some of the groundwork for establishing the importance for rethinking the role of school

leadership by describing the current state of invisibility so many of our students experience in our schools. We hope to publish in the future some of his conclusions on the type of leadership that is required to combat this invisibility. This essay is also a nice prelude into our next section that looks inside the classrooms and the school culture of the League of Democratic Schools.

SECTION 3 – A LOOK INSIDE THE CLASSROOMS OF THE LEAGUE OF DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS

The Editor invited teachers and principals whose schools participate in John Goodlad's League of Democratic Schools to talk about their schools and classrooms. Readers will see a variety of ways teachers have interpreted their democratic mission in schools from Washington, Oregon, and Ohio. We invite teachers from around the nation and the world to respond in our Rejoinder page. We plan to provide a more informal discussion section for a sustained interaction among educators as well as space for more formal responses. We invite you to respond to the authors' account, share what you think is helpful or problematic in their practices, provide an account of what your schools and classrooms are doing, describe what you see as the obstacles to a truly democratic education, make recommendations for new directions and new initiatives, etc. We will keep publishing responses as long as the conversation continues.

SECTION 4 - SPECIAL SECTION ON THE U. S. SUPREME COURT'S MOST RECENT DECISION ON STUDENT RIGHTS

On June 25, 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a decision on a much anticipated student speech rights case, *Morse v. Frederick*, often referred to as the "Bong Hits 4 Jesus" case." Readers can find a link to the decision at: <http://laws.findlaw.com/us/000/06-278.html>. Many of the authors in earlier sections talked about the importance of student voice to an understanding of democratic practice. The authors in this section examine the extent to which that voice has the constitutional protection of the First Amendment. Both Nathan Roberts in "'Bong Hits 4 Jesus': Have Students' First Amendment Rights to Free Speech been Changed after *Morse v. Frederick*?" and Aaron Caplan in "Visions of Public Education in *Morse v. Frederick*" examine the legal implications of the decision against a backdrop of earlier Supreme Court decisions involving the speech rights of public school students. Caplan's article also analyzes the High Court's vision of public education, especially secondary education, that had "animated" these earlier speech rights cases. It is the lack of any real discussion or connection to the purposes of public education in this most recent decision that he finds particularly disturbing.

In addition to reading Caplan's article, readers can now view a videotape of an interview that was conducted with him on April 30, 2008, and webstreamed into the journal. These interviews are part of a new initiative of the journal. In the future, readers will be able to read articles by our authors and then view videos of interviews with them. Our purpose in the interview series, *Talking with the Authors*, is to provide a larger context and framework for reading the articles as well as to come to know the authors more personally. Also check out the link to our spring forum, the *10th Annual Educational Law and Social Justice Forum*, that featured PowerPoint presentations by three of our authors on the theme of this issue. With this issue, we also begin our first book reviews on books that relate to our theme. Along with three newly published books, we provide a review of one of the classics by John Goodlad, *What Schools are For*, reviewed by Antony Smith, the regional coordinator for Goodlad's League of Democratic Schools and a faculty member at the University of Washington.

The other books reviewed in this issue are: *Pedagogy and Praxis in the Age of Empire: Toward a New Humanism* by Peter McLaren and Nathalia Jaramillo, *Capitalizing on Disaster: Taking and*

Breaking Public Schools by Kenneth J. Saltman, and *Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way: Lessons from an Urban Classroom* by Brian D. Schultz. Readers will remember Brian's article in our earlier issue dedicated to Jonathan Kozol in Volume 2 Number 1 Winter issue. See: "[Living Savage Inequalities: Room 405's Fight for Equity in Schooling.](#)"

We invite our readers to join the conversation on our Rejoinder page.

See the [REJOINDERS SECTION](#) to read reactions to the articles in this issue.

See the "[TALKING WITH THE AUTHORS](#)" VIDEO SERIES for videotaped interviews with some of the authors.

See [a video from the 10th Annual Educational Law and Social Justice Forum](#) on the theme of this issue, "Schooling as if Democracy Matters.