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Citation
Reimers, Fernando M. "Education and the challenges for democracy." Education Policy Analysis Archives 31 (2023). DOI: 10.14507/epaa.31.8243

Published version
https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.31.8243

Link
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Special Issue
Education and the Challenges for Democracy

education policy analysis archives

A peer-reviewed, independent, open access, multilingual journal

aape epaa
Arizona State University

Volume 31 Number 102 September 19, 2023 ISSN 1068-2341

Education and the Challenges for Democracy

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Citation: Reimers, F. M. (2023). Education and the challenges for democracy. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *31*(102). https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.31.8243 This article is part of the special issue, *Education and the Challenges for Democracy*, edited by Fernando M. Reimers.

Abstract: This introductory essay for the special issue, "Education and the Challenges for Democracy," proposes challenges to democracy call for a reexamination of the relationship of democracy to democratic education. The essay describes the challenges to democracy, how those challenges impact democratic education, and how education can address those challenges, followed by a summary of six peer reviewed papers that examine the relationship of education to democracy in Japan, Singapore, South Africa, and the United States. The essay concludes with a discussion of the significance of these papers to understand the dialectical relationship between education and democracy, and their implications for research, policy, and practice.
Key words: democracy; civic education; democratic education; education reform; education inequality

Educación y desafíos para la democracia
Resumen: Este ensayo introductorio para el número especial *Education and the Challenges for Democracy* (Educación y los Desafíos para la Democracia) plantea que los desafíos para la democracia requieren un reanalisis de la relación entre democracia y educación para el desarrollo de la ciudadanía democratica. El ensayo describe los desafíos para la democracia, cómo estos afectan la educación para el desarrollo de la ciudadania democrática y cómo la educación puede abordar dichos desafíos,

Journal website: http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/
Facebook: /EPAAA
Twitter: @epaa_aape

Manuscript received: 06-06-2023
Revisions received: 01-08-2023
Accepted: 01-08-2023

seguido por un resumen de seis artículos dictaminados por pares que examinan la relación entre educación y democracia en Japón, Singapur, Sudáfrica, y Estados Unidos. El ensayo concluye con una discusión sobre la significacion de estos artículos para comprender la relación dialéctica entre educación y democracia, así como sus implicaciones para la investigación, las políticas, y la práctica educativas.
Palabras clave: democracia; educación cívica; educación para la ciudadanía democrática; reforma educativa; desigualdad educativa

Educação e os desafios para a democracia
Resumo: Este ensaio introdutório para a edição especial "Educação e os Desafios para a Democracia" propõe que os desafios à democracia exigem um reexame da relação entre democracia e educação democrática. O ensaio descreve os desafios à democracia, como esses desafios impactam a educação democrática e como a educação pode lidar com esses desafios, seguido por um resumo de seis artigos revisados por pares que examinam a relação entre educação e democracia no Japão, Singapura, África do Sul e Estados Unidos. O ensaio conclui com uma discussão sobre a importância desses artigos para entender a relação dialética entre educação e democracia, e suas implicações para pesquisa, política e prática.
Palavras-chave: democracia, educação cívica, educação democrática, reforma educacional, desigualdade na educação

Education and the Challenges for Democracy

At the last meeting of the International Academy of Education, in September of 2022, members of the Academy discussed the challenges facing democracies around the world. During the meeting, some decided to contribute to the scholarly debate on the implications of those challenges for education with a series of essays examining various aspects of this relationship in diverse contexts. Our aim was to stimulate debate and reflection among education scholars, as well as among the communities of education policy makers and practitioners. This special issue of *Education Policy Analysis Archives* is the result of that effort. We appreciate the receptivity of the editors of the journal to this project, as well as the collaboration of the peer-reviewers of the articles and the work of the translators of the articles in Portuguese and Spanish.

This introduction sets the stage for this wider discussion on current challenges facing democracy by conceptualizing the relationship of education to democracy as capacious and dialectical, then underscoring various limitations in how schools prepare students for democratic life, as discussed in the special issue contributions. These six articles. authored by members of the Academy who agreed to participate in the project, include theoretical papers, syntheses of research, and secondary analysis of data focused on education and democracy in national contexts such as Japan, Singapore, South Africa, and the United States. We expect this collection of papers will be provocative, stimulating vigorous debate and disagreement. We hope such deliberations will animate further scholarship and contribute to the development of educational approaches that counter the powerful forces, which, at present, challenge democracy as well as education for democracy.

The core thesis of this introductory paper is that a dialectical relationship exists between education for democracy and democracy. This relationship shapes how new and old challenges to democracy influence education institutions. This interpretation of the relationship as a dialectic underscores that it is not unidirectional or linear, but one of reciprocal influence, evolving over time. Developments in democracy influence the way in which schools prepare students for participation.

But developments in the way in which schools prepare students for democratic participation also influence democracy. Changes in either of these institutions (democracy and education for democracy) bring about changes in the other, making both of these processes *cause* and *effect*. This seemingly contradictory idea, that the same process can be cause and effect, and that changes in one of them activate changes in the other, is what I mean by a dialectical relationship between them.

This concept of *dialectic* processes, leading to a synthesis that achieves a new equilibrium, draws on the work of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1812), who proposed that historical developments are the result of the dialectical progression through which new social, political, or cultural structures result from conflicts and contradictions within societies. Hegelian dialectics conceptualized the development of ideas as a result of the resolution of the contradictions contained in opposing concepts: every idea (thesis) containing within it its opposite (antithesis).

According to Hegel, the resolution of this contradiction leads to a synthesis—a more capacious, higher level, integration of the thesis and antithesis. I am using this concept of dialectic to resolve the apparent logical contradiction that if democratic processes cause the manner in which schools prepare students for civic participation, it is not possible for the latter to also cause democratic processes, because a process cannot be at the same time cause and effect. My argument is that these two ideas— *democracy causes how education prepares students for democracy* and *the education students receive for democracy causes democracy*—while logical opposites, meaning that each contains the negation of the other, are in fact both true. The tensions between these forces lead to higher forms of integration and synthesis, while the relationship between these social processes evolves over time. I draw also on the concept of *dialectic* to explain that the manner in which education prepares students for democracy is not the linear consequence of democratic demands, but the result of negotiation between contradictions. Such tensions can produce deficient education for democracy, even when democracy demands schools to prepare students for democratic participation; or, conversely, schools may resist democratic challenges, even as they attempt to constrain democratic education.

For example, the expansion of political rights to groups of the population previously denied rights (e.g. women, members of racial or religious minorities) may lead to increased access for these groups to educational institutions and a curriculum that prepares them for political participation. These changes, in turn, feed back into the political process, fostering increased demands for participation and new forms of representation as a result of the new skills and dispositions these groups gained by educational and political changes. But these increases in representation may activate political backlash from groups who seek to preserve the status quo. These forces may translate into efforts to constrain the manner in which schools prepare new groups for political participation. In this way, the relationship between democratic politics and democratic education is never static, but in perpetual, dynamic, dialectical motion that leads to new structures and processes. The acknowledgement of this relationship as one that requires resolution of tensions and contradictions, of course, does not imply an inevitable cycle of continuous democratic improvement, as there can be setbacks—both in democracy itself, and in education for democracy.

The goal of this article is to examine how democratic setbacks can lead to setbacks in democratic education, but also how education can resist those challenges to democracy. Structured in four parts, the first section examining this concept of a dialectical relationship between democracy and education. The second section demonstrates this relationship, with a discussion of the challenges facing democracy and education for democracy as well as how education for democracy could, in turn, address those same challenges. The next section highlights the special issue articles and the ways they inform the conceptual argument. Each of the articles consistently underscore the limitations of democratic education to counter democratic challenges, suggesting that the nature of the dialectics of how education and democracy relate in a context of democratic setbacks is one of

mutually reinforcing setbacks. The essay concludes with a discussion of why education institutions have responded to the challenges of democracy with diminished forms of democratic education and what education *could do* to sustain democracy in the face of present challenges.

The Dialectic between Democracy and Education

Democratic decline and the challenges to democracy in the first quarter of the 21st century calls for a reexamination of the dialectical relationship between them. Such a reexamination requires an understanding of 1) how democratic education contributes to democracy, 2) the challenges to democracy, and 3) how those challenges influence education for democracy and, specifically, how education for democracy can address those challenges.

The dialectical relationship between democracy and education for democracy reflects the fluid natures of both democracy and education. Fluctuations within the internal dynamics of democratic institutions and relations between democracy and society can reflect progress, a deepening of democracy, or setbacks. As a result of such flux, the relationship of democracy to education evolves as does democracy itself, necessitating periodic reexamination so that efforts to align educational institutions with democratic goals remain relevant. For example, the opportunity for political participation calls for the elevation of educational standards to reflect the increased complexity of public affairs. Whereas basic literacy to read newspapers and other printed media conferred ample opportunity for civic engagement a century ago, the level of knowledge and skill required to participate civically, in domains which require understanding present phenomena such as climate change, globalization, or the implications of artificial intelligence, is considerably higher.

International comparisons of students' knowledge and skills based on standards that reflect the expected levels of functioning in democratic societies and in knowledge-based economies show that a large percentage of 15-year-olds have only the most basic levels of literacy, math, and science (Schleicher, 2018). For those with the lowest levels of cognitive skills and civic knowledge, it is unlikely that they understand how democratic government is supposed to work, have the cognitive skills to hold elected officials accountable, to demand transparency from government officials, recognize misinformation and propaganda or have the agency and efficacy to sustain democracy when it is challenged.

Democracy—a social contract intended to balance freedom and justice—is not only fluid and imperfect but fragile. This fragility has become evident in recent years, according to various metrics showing that democracy is in decline around the world (Plattner, 2020). Beginning in 2006, the number of countries where freedoms declined outnumbered those where they increased, and this gap has been increasing since. In 2020, three-quarters of the world population lived in countries where freedoms had declined (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021, p. 45).

This decline is the product of forces old and new, their power augmented by rapid developments of technology, the COVID-19 pandemic, and rising international conflict. The threats to democracy will likely undermine how schools and universities can prepare students for democracy. But the dialectical relationship between democracy and education for democracy requires that we untangle the resolution of the tensions and contradictions resulting from democratic decline, based on conceptual and empirical analysis, as offered in the six papers contained in this issue. In order to challenge the forces undermining democracy, schools and universities need to recognize these challenges and their systemic impact and reimagine what they must do to prepare students to address them. While the articles in this special issue do not provide concrete examples of how to effect such systemic change, they are an excellent starting point for discussion and debate on these issues.

Education for Democracy: Schools

Educational institutions contribute to democracy by providing students opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and dispositions that allow them to effectively participate in the democratic process. As one of the institutions created to advance the project of the Enlightenment, public schools and universities are intended to prepare citizens for self-rule and self-improvement by cultivating their reasoning skills and capacity to work with others across lines of difference. In that sense, everything public schools do contributes to educating students for democracy. For example, participating in a democracy requires the skills to read with understanding and think critically about what one reads. A considerable amount of information about public affairs is communicated in printed form, and literacy is the foundation of much subsequent learning. Similarly, understanding issues of public interest and being able to participate civically requires the capacity to comprehend scientific evidence and draw inferences about the implications of that evidence. Contemporary examples of this might include knowing how a virus spreads during a pandemic and the role of various mitigation strategies such as wearing masks or administering vaccines. Schools help students develop the necessary skills to reason and understand scientific evidence.

Beyond their contribution to the development of critical thinking and civic virtue, schools can also teach students how the democratic process works and inform them of its vulnerabilities. These specific forms of preparing students for democratic citizenship are collectively called *democratic civic education*. Democratic civic education typically includes teaching about the history and principles of democracy and the legal framework and institutions that sustain democratic life (federal constitutions, the concept of popular sovereignty, the importance of individual rights and freedoms, and the organization of government and its functioning); teaching about the rights and responsibilities of citizens; providing opportunities for students to practice democratic mindsets and skills (such as critical thinking, problem solving, and communication as well as the skills to participate civically, organize politically, vote, and influence legislation and elected representatives); and creating a school climate that provides a democratic experience (giving students voice, valuing diversity, and practicing tolerance). The experience and practice of a democratic mindset benefit from interaction with diverse groups of students along multiple lines of difference, in preparation for actually living in a pluralistic and diverse society. In some countries, civic education is a core part of the curriculum taught to all students, while in others it is taught through extracurricular activities or community service (Hahn, 2010; Schulz et al., 2017).

Challenges to Democracy

The five traditional challenges to democracy are corruption, inequality, intolerance, polarization, and populism. In recent years, their effects have been augmented by three accelerants: technology, the COVID-19 pandemic, and rising tensions among several nation states that have led to growing political interference. These challenges, accompanying democratic decline across the globe, shape and are shaped by school settings, and this dynamic warrants a re-examination of the role of schools in educating for democracy.

Defined by the ability of people to elect their leaders and influence how they govern, democracy requires a legal framework and a set of institutions regulating a social contract whose legitimacy depends on the consent of the governed. The democratic social contract establishes that all persons are fundamentally equal, and therefore have the same right to participate in the political process and demand accountability. Democracy is challenged when those elected to govern abuse this public trust through *corruption*, or capturing public resources to advance private ends. Corruption undermines democracy by weakening the notion of equality under the law and the rule of law more generally and by obstructing accountability (Seligson, 2002; Transparency International, 2021). When

elected leaders abuse their power to advance private political goals, they move towards autocracy (Helms, 2022).

Democracy is also challenged by *social and economic inequality* and by the *political inequality* they may engender. As one of the goals of democracy is to uphold fundamental equality among all people, its legitimacy is challenged by persistent inequality. Economic and social inequality also challenge democracy when particular individuals or groups of individuals end up with more opportunities to participate in the political process because of their privilege or status. Democracy also requires the practice of tolerance, the commitment to coexist with and recognize the rights of those we perceive as different due to identity, beliefs, customs, or feelings, (Dunn & Singh, 2014). *Political intolerance*, combined with the abuse of power of elected officials who seek to undermine the political rights of their opponents, is the very definition of autocracy.

One result of political intolerance is *political polarization*, the adoption of political identities in ideological extremes that reduces the possibility of finding common ground with those with different political views (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019). The process of adopting extreme political views that override other dimensions of one's identity and reducing people with different political views to that singular dimension of their identity renders political negotiation and compromise impossible. Political intolerance is augmented by *Populism,* an ideology which challenges the idea that the interests of ordinary people can be represented by political elites. In favoring a direct relationship between leaders and the people and promoting mistrust in elected representatives and the institutions of democratic government, populism undermines the checks and balances provided by the laws and institutions of the various branches of government that define representative democracy (Deiwiks, 2009).

In recent years, three interrelated accelerants have augmented the power of these five forces to undermine democracy: developments in information and computing technologies, in particular social media platforms and artificial intelligence, the COVID-19 pandemic, and rising tensions among several nation states, which have led to foreign political interference. *Technological developments* have enabled new forms of power that provide individuals with an extraordinary capacity to organize, process, and spread information, including misinformation. Enabled by social media platforms and artificial intelligence, this new power can serve socially constructive purposes that strengthen democracy; it can also be used to undermine democracy by supporting political polarization and intolerance. In facilitating the dissemination of information and the organization of communities, social media and social platforms have augmented the possibility of spreading ideas that do not correspond with any objective reality (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). These tools have also enabled the organization of groups of people with similar views, including groups who share extremely intolerant ideas and oppose basic norms that define a democratic social contract, and instead embrace practices such as the use of violence against people of different identities. The algorithms that govern the consumption of social media can be used to spread propaganda and misinformation, reinforce extremist views, challenge the ability of citizens to make informed decisions, and undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions (Tucker et al., 2017). Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have amplified the capacity to spread misinformation and create echo chambers where people are only exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs. For example, AI can be used to increase the surveillance, tracking, and monitoring of activities of individuals, and this data can be used to suppress dissent or target political opponents (Manheim & Kaplan, 2019).

The immediate and long-term effects of the *COVID-19 pandemic* have also undermined democracy around the world. While researchers continue to uncover new information about its impact on local, national, and global levels, we know the pandemic has contributed to the isolation

of individuals; increased surveillance, censorship, inequality, and social media usage; suppressed dissent; and weakened the rule of law (Devine et al., 2021). The management and reporting of the pandemic has led to a decline in trust in institutions, including governments, the media, and the scientific community. The COVID-19 virus impacted specific groups of individuals differently and exacerbated existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting poor and marginalized groups (Mahler et al., 2022). In some countries, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a weakening of the rule of law as numerous governments invoked emergency powers allowing governmental leaders and agencies to bypass democratic norms and procedures (Marzocchi, 2020). These circumstances made it easier for governments to abuse their power and crack down on dissent, arresting and prosecuting critics of their response to the crisis (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021). Such governmental responses led to a climate of fear and intimidation, making it difficult for people to speak out against the abuses.

Predating the challenges created by the pandemic, *rising international conflict* has resulted in an increase in foreign influence in the internal political affairs of nations. While foreign influence in the internal affairs of nations is not new, new forms of technological influence (such as the use of chatbots and social media platforms to spread false information and foment divisions among the population) and rising conflict between democratic and authoritarian nations have increased the vulnerability of democratic societies to foreign interference. Such interference includes funding political campaigns, spreading propaganda and misinformation, augmenting societal divisions, fomenting mistrust in government and democratic institutions, hacking the electoral process to count and report votes, and using economic coercion to influence or foment corruption among elected officials.

Dialectical Responses to Democratic Decline

The first order of effects of these forces undermining democracy is to constrain the ability of education institutions to educate for democracy. But a second order of effects results from the conflicts and tensions generated by these forces, the dialectical responses in which educational institutions could counter those first order effects, educating students about those very challenges, and cultivating their skills to resist them.

This type of second order effect of resistance to those challenges necessitates understanding the systemic, mutually reinforcing nature of the five challenges and three accelerants discussed earlier; therefore, an effective response requires addressing them as an interdependent whole. For example, corruption can undermine education for democracy when resources to support education are seized to serve private ends. Such embezzlement of public funds robs students of opportunities to learn, constraining access and quality (Dridi, 2014; Hallak & Poisson, 2005). But such corruption in education also erodes trust in institutions, including schools and universities, and therefore, in democracy. The corroding effect of corruption on institutional trust has been found to increase as the level of education of people increases, which suggests that as people become more educated their sensitivity to corruption is heightened (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012).

However, education can also combat corruption, primarily by building a more informed citizenry who understands how democratic government is supposed to work and who have the means to hold elected officials accountable to transparency and political participation. The critical thinking skills which education institutions can cultivate protect people from deceit and manipulation from corrupt leaders and officials. Private capture of authority over schools can also be used to advance intolerant or extreme views or undermine opportunities to promote critical thinking (i.e., school boards seeking to eliminate from the curriculum texts that offer critical accounts of racism and bigotry) and offer advantages to some groups over others (i.e. children of

parents who can afford to live in higher income communities attend higher quality schools). Opposing the advancement of intolerance resulting from corruption, democratic education promotes respect for human rights for all and for the rule of law thus strengthening the functioning of democratic institutions. When people are tolerant and respectful of others, they are less likely to engage in corrupt practices.

In another example, intolerance (Anti-Defamation League, 2023) and political polarization are problems in schools that often go hand-in-hand. For teachers, classroom discussions of controversial topics are difficult or even discouraged for fear of offending students or parents (Journell, 2022). But teaching controversial topics and engaging students in difficult conversations is essential preparation to understand the complexity of society and history, and therefore, participate in democratic civic life. Schools teach critical thinking skills, which are essential for comprehending and evaluating information from a variety of sources, identifying bias, analyzing arguments, and drawing informed conclusions. In teaching respect for others—including tolerance among people with different political views—and the skills to negotiate differences, education builds the foundations of the essential compromise in democratic life. When educational institutions provide experiences for diverse groups of students to learn together and appreciate other perspectives, this has the potential to reduce discrimination and build bridges between people with different political views.

While each of the challenges to democracy have corrosive effects on education's role in preparing students for democracy, the accelerants of technology, global pandemic, and foreign conflict further diminish school's efficacy in preparing students for democratic engagement. For example, technology has the potential to divert attention away from learning, meaningful connections, and social interactions; create echo chambers for students, teachers, and parents; spread misinformation; erode privacy, and freedom of speech;, to name a few. If technology is used by students in ways that diminish their analytical and research skills—for example, using artificial intelligence to submit research assignments rather than perform those assignments themselves—this can also undermine the cultivation of critical thinking essential for democratic engagement.

When schools closed and shifted to remote learning to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, they prioritized foundational learning. This led to a loss of learning in unprioritized subjects such as civics, history, and science, and also widened the achievement gap between students from different racial and socio-economic backgrounds (Reimers, 2021). The pandemic also eroded trust in institutions, including schools and governments, among those who believed that these institutions failed to protect them from the virus. This situation led to increased polarization, as people became more divided over issues such as mask mandates and vaccination. All these situations reduced the ability of people to have productive conversations about important issues and negotiate differences, which spilled over into educational institutions, creating challenges for teachers and school leaders. A survey of 359 district and charter network leaders conducted by the RAND corporation between October 25, 2021, and December 10, 2021, found that three-quarters of district leaders reported "that political polarization about COVID-19 safety or vaccines was interfering with their ability to educate students in 2021–2022" (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2022).

From a dialectical perspective, however, while these forces undermining democracy and the capacity of schools to educate for democracy, schools and teachers can address these forces as they educate within the context of democratic decline. Educational institutions can help students recognize the three accelerants of the challenges to democracy and develop skills that mitigate their effects. Teachers can add components on media literacy in their lessons to train students to identify misinformation. Education policies and programs can counter the impact of COVID-19 and recover learning loss, particularly in domains such as civics, history, and science. Education can also prepare

students to understand and analyze international conflict and how it can lead to foreign influence in the democratic process.

Meeting Challenges to Democracy through Education

The six articles in this special issue examine how educational institutions contribute to democracy, either conceptually or through empirical evidence. Their methodologies vary from case studies, syntheses of research, secondary analysis of data, and normative analysis. All of them adopt the Deweyan (1916) premise that the experience of democracy is essential for the development of democratic habits and dispositions. Despite the universal nature of democratic principles, the dynamics of how those principles playout in the role of schools is contextual, therefore examining how the dialectics of this relationship shape school responses to democratic decline requires analysis of democratic education in diverse contexts. Some of the articles synthesize evidence from a range of sources in support of broad analyses of education and democracy in Japan, Singapore, South Africa, and the United States.

In *Civic Education, Citizenship, and Democracy,* Lorin Anderson contends that there is significant disagreement across schools–within and between nations—on the relevant knowledge, skills, and dispositions that schools should develop to prepare students for the exercise of citizenship. Drawing on the comparative studies of civic education of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, Anderson examines the goals of civic education, knowledge, engagement, attitudes, and values and how civics is taught in schools. Anderson discusses shortcomings of those cross-national studies in focusing mostly on conceptual rather than procedural knowledge, allowing students to decide the meaning of basic concepts, and using a composite student performance score of civic knowledge. Anderson's analysis highlights that the way schools educate is misaligned with the new and old challenges to democracy and unlikely to produce a response that could strengthen democratic institutions as they are under siege.

In *Critical Thinking and the Conditions of Democracy,* Nicholas Burbules posits that far less is known about how to cultivate the disposition than the ability to think critically. To think critically requires a form of self-criticism that can open our minds to the perspectives of others. This awareness of one's own limitations, Burbules argues, comes from interacting with others who can make those limitations evident. New forms of media which can personalize messages and online 'echo chambers' create a social context that undermines the disposition towards critical thinking. explains that there are inherent dangers of bringing religion into public life, in that, by definition, religious beliefs are not fallible, and therefore inadequate as a basis to critical thinking. Burbules' article confirms and expands a dialectical perspective on education and democracy, that is, the challenges democracy faces in turn challenge the conditions to develop some of the key dispositions to sustain democracy.

In *Race, Class, and the Democratic Project in Contemporary South African Education: Working and Reworking the Law,* Crain Soudien examines how the series of education reforms since the transition to Democracy in South Africa have supported the rights of citizens to determine the education which their children should receive. Soudien examines the challenges of advancing the democratic aspirations of the South African Schools' Act as it is opposed by organizations of white and middle-class parents, exercising their right to participate. At the heart of this analysis is the dilemma of reconciling the right of individuals and groups to participate to advance their own interests, while serving the needs of the wider public. South African reforms have created considerable room for parents to participate in the governance of schools, electing the governors of the schools every three years, thus creating an opportunity for the practice of democracy. This article illustrates how the dialectics of the relationship between education and democracy are about how tensions and

contradictions are negotiated. In the South African case, social inequality challenges democracy as well as education for democracy, as parental participation and voluntary financial contributions to schools end up reinforcing educational inequality in ways that undermine democratic education.

In *Challenges in Fostering Democratic Participation in Japanese education*, Yuko Nonoyama-Tarumi examines whether Japanese schools are organized in a way that students can experience democratic living–in terms of the experience of students with diversity within schools–and whether they provide opportunities for students to develop the ability to relate what they learn to the world outside the school. Using student data from the PISA survey, she finds that Japanese schools are highly segregated by socio-economic background and academic achievement. She also finds that students participate very little in class or in open debates and have limited opportunities to apply scientific concepts to real issues. She argues that these features of Japanese education contribute to youth political apathy and to limited youth-activism in Japan, thus underscoring the role of school segregation in constraining opportunities for the development of democratic experiences and dispositions.

In *Education in a Democratic and Meritocratic Society: Moving beyond Thriving to Flourishing,* Ee Ling Low examines how social and academic segregation undermines education for democracy in a Singaporean context. Historically, Singapore has attempted to provide equal educational opportunities to all, with the primary driver of education policy as economic development. Singapore streams students into different tracks based on their "academic merit" with the goal of providing all students similar opportunities. Recent policy debates have emphasized the need to broaden the definition of "educational merit" to avoid social stratification of students who are sorted into different academic strata. This has led to a renewed interest in the goals of education, and in mechanisms used to sort students into different streams and to select teachers. Low argues that this reconceptualization of academic merit should lead to three goals for education: student resilience, promotion of human values, and pathways for lifelong education.

In *Speculations on Experiences in Public Education and the Health of the Nation's Democracy*, David C. Berliner examines the difference in intentional alignment between schools preparing students for democratic living and those educating students for employment, in light of current debates in the United States over whether schools should pursue the goal of democratic education. Berliner examines how a commitment to educate for democratic living requires the creation of opportunities to experience democracy in education, which might include giving students choice over what to study, although very few schools do. Constraining schools' role in educating for democracy, he argues, are (1) contemporary assessment practices to which students, teachers, and schools are held accountable and (2) the many pressures faced by teachers and schools to limit curriculum and curtail freedom of information. The compounding effects of these factors limit the development of students' autonomy and responsibility or provide opportunities for students to experience meaningful education for democracy. Berliner argues that the existence of independent school boards and increased school-community interactions are critical to preparing students for democracy. He also makes a strong case for public schools as being most aligned with democratic aspirations.

Conclusions and Implications

Collectively, the six articles in this special issue underscore how inadequately schools are preparing students for democratic engagement and the limitation of current education responses for the challenges to democracy, in the context of the accelerative effects of technology, pandemic, and conflict. In examining the relationship between education and democracy, these papers focus mostly on how limits to democracy also limit education for democracy. A common theme throughout the

papers is how social inequality translates into educational inequality, which impedes widespread and equitable opportunities for democratic education within and across schools. In various contexts, the contributions highlight the democratic function of schools is contested and undermined by limited educational approaches, as well as by powerful social forces that segregate students into schools by class, race, and academic performance, thus limiting the opportunities of students to learn from their differences.

The secular and novel challenges to democracy discussed here, and the way in which those challenges constrain the ability of schools to educate students for democracy, call for capacious and systemic responses of schools that directly addresses those challenges. None of these articles, however, provide evidence or arguments suggesting that particular schools in particular communities or nations can—or are—contesting the challenges to democracy and democratic decline. In this sense, the articles suggest that the dialectics of the relationship as proposed in the first section of this introduction are largely characterized by mutually reinforcing setbacks in democracy and in education for democracy.

Given the enormity of the challenges to democracy and to educating for democracy, effective educational responses require a clear focus of schools on relevant knowledge, skills, dispositions, and educational experiences to help students develop democratic living habits, as noted by Anderson, Berliner, Burbules, and other contributors to this issue. Such opportunities must go beyond the teaching of civics in a siloed course and address the multiple levers which shape the everyday experiences of students in schools, from the way in which students are sorted into schools (see this Nonoyama-Tarumi, Low, this issue) to the way in which they learn sciences and other subjects (see Soudien, this issue) to whether and how students learn to think, analyze, debate and negotiate (see Burbules, this issue). As Soudien (this issue) demonstrates, opportunities for parental participation must also be reconciled with the creation of diverse communities of students in schools. All of this will require support for teachers to develop the necessary pedagogical competencies and for school administrators to sustain school cultures that enable an education for democracy.

But while the authors of the special issue articles support these ideas, they do not explain how to transform existing education systems into systems where such commitment to democratic education is evident. This is an important limitation of existing research. We need to progress from understanding what educational practices relate to democratic living and begin to understand *how* to transform schools and systems so they become more democratic. We need more research on potential processes of system transformation, and we need specific studies of what democratic education looks like in contexts where democracy is challenged in the various ways described in this article.

If schools are to resist both old and new challenges facing democracies around the world, this work will require a clear-eyed commitment to their democratic role, translated into capacious and coherent systemic strategies to create schools and school systems where students learn to live and practice democratically. Given the limitations of the evidence discussed in these articles, policies and programs that support such a capacious response require new evidence. This evidence should examine how schools currently contribute to the development of knowledge and the full range of dispositions essential for democratic living. It should explore how schools address the new and old challenges to democracy and if or how they do so beyond the narrow "containers" of civic education and social studies.

Future research agendas and programs should inform educational and societal dialogues, which can animate the dialectics of education and democracy. Rather than simply adapting to indicators of declining democracy and other challenges discussed in this paper, educators should

challenge them vigorously and effectively. In doing so, they will fortify their efforts to sustain democracy and help schools to do more than reproduce the social context they inhabit—to become places that anticipate a better, more democratic future.

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Special Issue
Education and the Challenges for Democracy

education policy analysis archives

Volume 31 Number 102 September 19, 2023 ISSN 1068-2341



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