

Beyond Student Voice: Patterns of Partnership and the Demands of Deep Democracy

Más allá de la voz del alumnado: patrones de colaboración y las exigencias de la democracia profunda

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Abstract

Of the many contemporary world crises, one of the most important concerns growing disillusionment with representative forms of democracy that are increasingly seen to offer only intermittent, condescending and ineffective involvement. The central argument of this paper is that we need to develop schools and other institutions of education that take participatory traditions of democracy more seriously. Whilst the increasing development of the 'student voice' movement in many countries across the world is contested and open to very different readings, it nonetheless offers a promising starting point to reflect on and develop new possibilities and approaches to learning, both in its more restricted formal modes and in its broader more openly democratic senses. Given the hostility and practical difficulty in imagining and developing alternative realities of this kind, the paper offers an intellectual typology and practical tool -patterns of partnership- intended to assist in the process of intergenerational learning and democratic development. Having given examples of what each pattern might look like in real schools in real time, the paper argues for one particular perspective -democratic fellowship- that attends, not only to power, but to relationships, to care as well as to rights and justice, to creative and joyful relations between persons as both the end and means of politics. The paper concludes by suggesting we need to reconnect to radical democratic traditions of

education. It is here that we are most likely to find both the intellectual continuities and the practical storehouse of alternative capability on which we might usefully draw to inspire and sustain the kinds of democratic developments the paper advocates. Furthermore and finally, a 10 point framework is offered as a means of helping us to draw generic conclusions about alternative ways of living and working together in democratic fellowship.

Key words: student voice, patterns of partnership, intergenerational learning, democratic fellowship.

Resumen

De las múltiples crisis del mundo contemporáneo, una de las preocupaciones más importantes es la creciente desilusión con las formas representativas de la democracia que son vistas como mecanismos que ofrecen únicamente una participación intermitente, condescendiente e ineficaz. El argumento central de este artículo es que tenemos que desarrollar escuelas e instituciones educativas que se tomen más en serio las tradiciones participativas de la democracia. El creciente desarrollo del movimiento de la «voz del alumnado», debatido y abierto a lecturas muy diferentes, en países de todo el mundo, constituye un prometedor punto de partida para reflexionar y desarrollar nuevas posibilidades y enfoques para el aprendizaje, tanto en su modalidad formal más restringida como en sus significados más amplios, abiertamente democráticos. Dada la hostilidad y la dificultad práctica para imaginar y desarrollar otras realidades alternativas de este tipo, este artículo ofrece una tipología intelectual y una herramienta práctica –patrones de colaboración– dirigidas a ayudar en el proceso del aprendizaje intergeneracional y del desarrollo democrático. Después de ofrecer ejemplos de cómo cada uno de estos patrones podrían desarrollarse en centros concretos, el artículo debate una perspectiva particular –comunidad democrática– que atiende no solo al poder, sino también a las relaciones, al cuidado así como a los derechos y la justicia, a las relaciones creativas y jubilosas entre las personas que son tanto un medio como un fin de la política. El artículo concluye sugiriendo la necesidad de reconectar con las tradiciones de la educación democrática radical. Es en ellas, donde encontraremos más probablemente tanto las continuidades intelectuales como las prácticas de la capacidad alternativa que sería útil establecer para inspirar y sostener el tipo de desarrollo democrático defendido en este artículo. Finalmente se ofrece un marco de 10 puntos como medio para ayudarnos a trazar unas conclusiones genéricas sobre formas alternativas de vivir y trabajar juntos en una comunidad democrática.

Palabras clave: voz del alumnado, patrones de colaboración, aprendizaje intergeneracional, comunidad democrática.

Introduction

We are at the beginning of a new chapter in the history of democracy, not just in our own countries, but within and between many different nations and movements across the world which draw inspiration and strength from each other. As I write, young people from Spain (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNlr_haNwe0) are camping out in one of the main open spaces in my home city of Brighton, England and engaging in conversations with passers by of all ages about the nature of justice, freedom and what it means to lead good lives together that transcend generations, nationalities and political boundaries. As they do so, other young people from the UK-Uncut movement (<http://www.ukuncut.org.uk>) occupy a number of stores in the city to protest against tax avoidance by major corporations, banks, and international companies. At the heart of their non-violent, direct action and central to the form as well as the substance of their protests is debate, dialogue, public engagement in conversations within and between generations about the kinds of society we live in and the kinds of future to which we might aspire.

These sorts of developments exemplify quite different understandings and enactments of democracy to the dominant traditions to which we are used. In contrast to the representative or elitist view of democracy now dominating the Western World, more often than not through market-led models, these alternative approaches eschew the occasional and inevitably partial prosthetics of representation preferring instead the participatory, republican, or classical traditions of democracy. Here there is substantial emphasis on the importance of the public good; of an inclusive popular involvement in decision-making; of appropriate deliberation in that process; of the necessity of each person being free to make authentic judgements unintimidated by dominant others; of economic egalitarianism and, most important of all, of participation in collective decision-making in public-spirited action (White, 2008). The cumulative argument of this paper is that for those who find these alternative traditions and aspirations attractive we need to develop schools and other institutions of education that take such ideals seriously.

Patterns of partnership: how adults listen to and learn with students in schools

Student voice and its critics

It is important to begin by acknowledging that the range of student voice work that has developed in many countries across the world in the last two decades has been quite remarkable. Listening to the voices of young people, including very young children, is now something that is not merely espoused, but actively advocated, by government departments and their satellite organisations, both in the context of formal education and also within an increasingly integrated multi-professional framework of childhood services. There has also been very substantial grass-roots interest in student voice from teachers, from young people themselves and from university researchers. However, there are, of course, very different readings of what student voice is, why it has flourished in the way it has, what its strengths and weakness are, and what its future prospects might be (Bragg, 2007; Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011; Discourse, 2007; Educational Action Research, 2007; Educational Review, 2006; Fielding, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2011; Forum, 2001; Improving Schools, 2007; International Journal of Leadership in Education, 2006; Percy-Smith, 2006; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998; Thiessen & Cook-Sather 2007).

Within this literature there is a range of critiques which (a) highlight absences such as the voices of those deemed less successful or less important in school and society; (b) argue for the entitlement of rights based approaches rather than the condescending uncertainties of patronage and good will; and (c) expose exuberant claims of participation as little more than glossy enticement into the Scylla of performativity and the Charybdis of perpetual consumption. In short, for many critics student voice has nothing whatever to do with challenging the hegemony of neo-liberalism, still less with development of more fully democratic ways of living and learning together. There are, of course, exceptions which engage with issues such as environmental degradation or more sustainable ways of living, but too often these are seen to be at the margins of concern and easily co-opted by the very interests which they set out to question.

Patterns of partnership: an alternative typology of student voice

One way of supporting more genuinely participatory alternatives and exposing the deceit or self-delusion of much contemporary work is to go beneath the surface and begin to ask questions about the nexus of power and purposes that too often

get forgotten or put aside in the heat of advocacy. Perhaps the best known of the typologies that help us to differentiate in a searching and discriminating way are from the field of youth participation e.g. Roger Hart's 'ladder of participation' (Hart, 1992) and the equally interesting and useful, but less well-known 'pathways to participation' developed by Harry Shier (2001). My debt to both of these leading pioneers is self-evident.

What I hope my own patterns of partnership typology offers is, firstly, a framework that has generic significance across contexts and professions, but also one which draws distinctions about different ways in which young people and adults work together that pay particular attention to the complexities and specificities of school based environments.

Secondly, I have become increasingly convinced of the need to name and explore participatory democracy as a legitimate and increasingly urgent aspiration, not only in society at large, but in schools themselves. Of course, many will disagree with this, but my hope is that some at least will not only warm to the naming of democracy as a legitimate aspiration to be overtly addressed on a day-to-day basis in the processes and culture of the school, but also welcome the incremental possibilities my typology supports and encourages.

Thirdly, and as a consequence of the particular view of democracy for which I am arguing, I wish to go beyond the quite proper insistence that we take seriously the power relations that inevitably circumscribe or enable different kinds of engagement. Power is not the only characteristic of human relations that prohibits or facilitates different kinds of outcome. Equally important, and especially so when taken into account with the calibrations of power, are relationships, by which I mean the way we regard each other, the way in which our dispositions are directed and shaped by our willingness to treat each other as persons in our own right, as beings with all the distinctiveness and possibility our uniqueness proclaims and the rich commonality our humanity presumes and requires.

Leaving a fuller exploration of the relational dimension of my proposals until later in this paper, I set out below my typology -*Patterns of partnership: how adults listen to and learn with students in schools*- which suggests six forms of interaction between adults and young people within schools and other educational contexts. These are:

- Students as data source - in which staff utilise information about student progress and well-being.

- Students as active respondents - in which staff invite student dialogue and discussion to deepen learning/professional decisions.
- Students as co-enquirers - in which staff take a lead role with high-profile, active student support.
- Students as knowledge creators - in which students take lead roles with active staff support.
- Students as joint authors - in which students and staff decide on a joint course of action together.
- Intergenerational learning as lived democracy - in which there is a shared commitment to/responsibility for the common good.

In each of these ways of working the power relations are different, thus not only enabling or prohibiting the contributions of one side of the partnership, but also influencing the potential synergy of the joint work and thereby affecting the possibility of both adults and young people being able to listen to and learn with and from each other. In order to explore their possible resonance with the current and future realities of work in schools I illustrate each of the six forms of interaction at the classroom level, the unit/team/department level, and at the level of the whole school.

TABLE I. Students as data source

Staff utilise information about student progress and well-being		
Classroom	Unit/team/department	School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lesson planning takes account of student test scores and other data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Samples of student work shared across staff group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student attitude survey

Source: own elaboration.

In the *Students as data source* partnership staff work hard to utilise information about student progress and well-being. There is a real teacher commitment to pay attention to student voices speaking through the practical realities of work done and targets agreed. It acknowledges that for teaching and learning to improve there is a need to take more explicit account of relevant data about individual students and group or class achievement. At unit/team/department level this way of working might express itself through, say, samples of student work being shared across a staff group, either as a form of moderation, or, less formally, as part of a celebration of the range of work going on. At whole school level, an example would be the now much more common practice of conducting an annual survey of student opinion on matters the school deems important.

TABLE II. Students as active respondents

Staff invite student dialogue and discussion to deepen learning/professional decisions		
Classroom	Unit/team/department	School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engaging with and adapting explicit assessment criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Team agenda based on students views/evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students on staff appointment panels

Source: own elaboration.

In the *Students as active respondents* partnership staff invite student dialogue and discussion in order to deepen their approach to student learning and enhance the professional decisions they make. Here staff move beyond the accumulation of passive data and, in order to deepen the learning of young people and enrich staff professional decisions, they feel a need to hear what students have to say about their own experience in lessons or their active engagement in contributing to its development via, for example, assessment-for-learning approaches. Students are discussants rather than recipients of current approaches and thereby contribute to the development of teaching and learning in their school. At unit/team/department level this active respondent role might express itself through, say, every fourth meeting having a significant agenda item based on pupil views/evaluations of the work they have been doing. At whole school level, an example would be the inclusion of pupils in the appointment process for new staff.

TABLE III. Students as co-enquirers

Staff take lead role with high-profile, active student support		
Classroom	Unit/team/department	School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How can we develop more independence in learning? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student evaluation of e.g. a History unit of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Joint evaluation of current system of Reports

Source: own elaboration.

In the *Students as co-enquirers* partnership we see an increase in both student and teacher involvement and a greater degree of partnership than in the previous two modes. Whilst student and teacher roles are not equal, they are shifting strongly, if not in an egalitarian, then in a more strenuously interdependent direction. Students move from being discussants to being co-enquirers into matters of agreed significance and importance. While the focus and the boundaries of exploration are fixed by the

teacher the commitment and agreement of students is essential. At a classroom level this might involve, for example, a shared enquiry into and development of more independent ways of student working. At unit/team/department level this kind of approach might express itself through student evaluation of a unit of work, as, for example, undertaken by a group of History students in a girls' secondary school calling themselves the 'History Duettes'. At whole school level an example would be a joint staff-student evaluation of the Reports to Parents system.

TABLE IV. Students as knowledge creators

Students take lead role with active staff support		
Classroom	Unit/team/department	School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of Student-Led Reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is the playground buddying system working? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the cause of low level bullying in class?

Source: own elaboration.

Students as knowledge creators deepens and extends the egalitarian thrust of the co-enquiry approach. Partnership and dialogue remain the dominant ways of working, but here it is the voice of the student that comes to the fore in a leadership or initiating, not just a responsive, role. It is students who identify the issues to be pursued and students who subsequently undertake the enquiry/development with the support of staff. At classroom level this has sometimes expressed itself through annual Student-Led Reviews which replace traditional Parents' Evenings (where parents come to the school to hear the teacher's views about the progress their child). At unit/team/department level a good example comes from a Student Year Council who were concerned that their playground buddying system was not working in the ways they had hoped. At whole school level students in an innovative secondary school used photo-elicitation as part of their enquiry into the causes of low-level bullying that went largely undetected by staff.

TABLE V. Students as joint authors

Students and staff decide on a joint course of action together		
Classroom	Unit/team/department	School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Co-construct e.g. a Maths lesson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a 'Research Lesson' for the department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Joint student + staff Learning Walk

Source: own elaboration.

The *Joint authors* model involves a genuinely shared, fully collaborative partnership between students and staff. Leadership, planning and conduct of research and the subsequent commitment to responsive action are embraced as both a mutual responsibility and energising adventure. At classroom level this might express itself through the co-construction of, for example, a Maths lesson. At unit/team/department level this might take the form of a Research Lesson (Dudley, 2007) in which, say, three staff and three students co-plan a lesson, observe it, meet to discuss the observation data, plan version two in the light of it and repeat the process. And all of this endeavour is undertaken on behalf of the team/department and their students. At whole school level this kind of approach might express itself in a jointly led Learning Walk (NCSL, 2005). Here a focus or centre of interest is agreed and the school (and any other participating institution) becomes the site of enquiry within which the focused Walk is undertaken.

TABLE VI. Intergenerational learning as lived democracy

Shared commitment to/responsibility for the common good		
Classroom	Unit/team/department	School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students + staff plan lesson for younger students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Classes as critical friends in thematic conference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whole School Meeting to decide a key issue

Source: own elaboration.

Finally, the *Intergenerational learning as lived democracy* approach extends the shared and collaborative partnership between students and staff in ways that Fielding (2004a) emphasises a joint commitment to the common good, and Fielding (2004b) includes occasions and opportunities for an equal sharing of power and responsibility. At its best it is an instantiation and explicit acknowledgement of the creativity and promise of intergenerational learning

At classroom level it might involve staff, students and museum staff planning a visit to a museum for younger students. At unit/team/department level this might take the form of classes acting as critical friends to each other in the wider context of a thematic or interdisciplinary project within and/or between years. At whole school level this might express itself through the development of whole School Meetings that are such an important iconic practice within the radical traditions of both private and publicly funded education.

Democratic fellowship and the demands of deep democracy

Whilst deliberately naming democracy as a form of partnership that is pre-eminently desirable and incrementally achievable in schools through something like the patterns of partnership between adults and young people, it is important to say a little more about the view of democracy on which such advocacy rests. In so doing it is also important to relate it to earlier arguments about relationships as a key component in the nexus of power and purposes that define and enable the intergenerational work that schools and the wider practices of society intend and develop. There then follows a democratic fellowship reading of each of the six patterns of partnership in order to illustrate their credibility as achievable ways of living and learning, even within a largely hostile social and political context.

Insistence on the importance of relationships as an integral component of the nexus of power and purpose in reconfiguring our aspirations and practices is fundamentally tied to, though not exhausted by, a view of democracy that insists on the link between the personal and the political, between democracy's purposes and the means by which it seeks to realise its intentions. Democracy is much more than a collaborative mechanism by which we agree our aspirations, take action, hold each other to account and revise or renew our commitments in the light of public deliberation. It is primarily a way of living and learning together at the heart of which lie the three mutually conditioning commitments to freedom, equality and community. Certainly, it transcends the now ubiquitous intrusions of the market in much contemporary theory and practice of democracy. As Michael Sandel has so eloquently reminded us:

Democratic governance is radically devalued if reduced to the role of handmaiden to the market economy. Democracy is about more than fixing and tweaking and nudging incentives to make markets work better... [It] is about much more than maximising GDP, or satisfying consumer preferences. It's also about seeking distributive justice; promoting the health of democratic institutions; and cultivating the solidarity, and sense of community that democracy requires. Market-mimicking governance -at its best- can satisfy us as consumers. But it can do nothing to make us democratic citizens (2009, p. 4).

The machinery of democracy must articulate and enable the kinds of human encounter, the kinds of living and learning which democracy intends. The practical realisation of deep democracy will ultimately and immediately depend on the lived

dispositions and values, on what writers within this tradition have often called fellowship, or what I, for reasons sketched out below, call democratic fellowship. Democracy needs fellowship to forestall, for example, the tyranny of a populist or racist injustice (Fielding, 2010): fellowship needs democracy in order to forestall, for example, the wistful reaffirmation of hierarchical communities in which all come, once again, to know and love their place. For me, as for writers like the great Scottish philosopher, John Macmurray, fellowship is the point of politics. Indeed, politics 'has significance only through the human fellowship which it makes possible; and by this its validity and its success must be judged' (Macmurray, 1950, pp. 69-70). Democratic fellowship is not just the point of politics, but the precondition of democracy's daily development and future flourishing: 'the extent and quality of such political freedom as we can achieve depends in the last resort upon the extent and quality of the fellowship which is available to sustain it' (Macmurray, 1950, p. 69). Human fellowship is at once the precursor to and hope of democratic politics which is both its agent and an important site of its prefigurative enactment. 'The democratic slogan -liberty, equality fraternity- embodies correctly the principles of human fellowship. To achieve freedom and equality is to create friendship, to constitute community between men (sic)' (Macmurray, 1950, pp. 74-75).

If we supplement this relational view of democracy which presumes, nurtures and anticipates more inclusive and more generously conceived forms of human sociality with a number of other allied considerations, a fully fledged democratic fellowship perspective will interpret and act on the patterns of partnership with very different understandings, intentions and results to those who approach them from neo-liberal standpoints. Three such considerations seem to me particularly apt here. Firstly, there will be an optimistic, enabling view of what young people are capable of that was at one time much more widely held by, amongst others, the now much maligned progressive education movement. Secondly, there will be an acknowledgement, tacit or otherwise, that those more open views of young people are partnered with both a respect and a regard the children's rights movement has done so much to develop in the last two decades. Thirdly, and this is the point it is important to press most insistently here, attention will be paid to relationships, to care as well as to rights, justice and power. When teachers and students begin to work in these new ways they are not just redrawing the boundaries of what is permissible and thereby jointly extending a sense of what is possible: they are also giving each other the desire and the strength to do so through their regard and care for each other. In sum, a democratic fellowship perspective not only insists on the necessity of emancipatory

values guiding its development, it also requires a similarly open and creative set of dispositions and understandings that provide the motivational energy and responsive engagement at the heart of its aspirations.

The demands of democratic fellowship

How, then, might democratic fellowship engage with the lived realities towards which I have gestured in my six-fold 'patterns of partnership'? A democratic fellowship reading of the classroom example of *Partnership 1 - Students as data source* in which staff utilise information about student progress and well-being might draw attention to and encourage a teacher to go beyond test data and draw on her emerging knowledge and understanding of the student's range of involvement in many areas of the curriculum, and on her developing knowledge and appreciation of the young person in both formal and informal and school and non-school situations, including those in which she is developing her agency as a public actor in communal and interpersonal contexts.

A democratic fellowship reading of the unit/team/department classroom example of *Partnership 2 - Students as active respondents* in which staff invite student dialogue and discussion to deepen learning/professional decisions might include the presence, either in person or via their work or evaluations, of students in the team meeting; it might involve each teacher bringing artefacts or recordings or rich verbal accounts from a number of different of students/identities to the meeting; it might involve recent collected items from a suggestions box, listening post or video booth facility; it might involve selected items from a number of individual and class blogs. The key thing here is that personal knowledge of the range of students and rich narratives which articulate a holistic, vibrant knowledge of the diversity and particularity of young people provides the trigger for the discussion or agenda item for staff.

As a classroom example of a democratic fellowship approach to *Partnership 3 - Students as co-enquirers* in which staff take lead role with high-profile, active student support, I recall witnessing a wonderful infant school teacher ask her children what they felt independence in learning would look like if they saw it in a classroom. The ensuing discussion was simply recorded to, in effect, create an observation schedule for the subsequent video recording of their learning together. Teacher and children then sat down and looked at the audio-visual recording of their joint work through the lens of their prior discussion, delighted in what they thought laudable, and resolved to further develop

ways of working that they thought would enhance their adventure and interdependence as learners together. In the teacher's view, not only was this an important catalytic event for the class, it also revealed to her aspects of children's learning and her teaching she would have been unlikely to have understood so deeply had she not involved her class as co-enquirers in what amounted to an elegant piece of classroom-based action research. It was a deeply relational undertaking, not just a piece of committed action research: the relationships energised the enquiry, enriched its developed, and ensured its conclusions would not just be noted, but enacted in future ways of working. The enquiry became, in effect, the development of a shared responsibility between teacher and young people for the quality and future direction of their learning together.

A democratic fellowship reading of the classroom example of *Partnership 4 - Students as knowledge creators* in which students take a lead role with active staff support would bring out the fact that students themselves have responsibility for organising the Review meeting by liaising between themselves, their teachers and their parents, about mundane but important practicalities. These would include, for example, the student attending to the physical details of the meeting such as seating arrangements that reflect who and what are the central focus of the imminent dialogue. It would also bring out the student's leading role in the moral and existential conduct of the encounter as well as the establishment of clarity about outcomes and the resulting responsibilities of each of the partners involved. Furthermore, in some of the best examples I know of, the fellowship dimensions of the Review Meeting involve not just the teachers and parents, but a group of the young person's peers who act as critical friends to the student in the preparation of the presentation of the achievements and aspirations which lie at the heart of the Review process. Perhaps even more importantly, in some schools the young person's review goes beyond academic and job aspirations to asking questions which touch on what it means to live a good life (Fielding and Kirby, 2009).

Finally, a democratic fellowship exemplification of *Partnership 6 - Intergenerational learning as lived democracy* in which there is a shared commitment to/responsibility for the common good would foreground the importance of rich involvement of all participants in pursuit of communal aspirations. Thus the kinds of School Meetings for which I am arguing are not those that attend with forensic energy to matters of procedure or the minutiae of form. Rather they are those which acknowledge that democratic living requires more than procedural fidelity. It transcends justice: it is more-than-political; it is a way of life within which democratic fellowship is both the *raison d'être* and the means of its realisation. Democratic community, with the daily Meeting at its centre, is important because its explicitly egalitarian form enables a

deep and demonstrable reciprocity, thereby providing both existential and practical testimony of the need for and presence if not of love, then of care, of kindness, of human fellowship and the reciprocal needs of recognition. Indeed, for some key figures in the radical traditions, the main virtue of the Meeting with its egalitarian, intergenerational openness and mutuality had less to do with the procedural exploration of individual and collective intention than its capacity to enable us to engage the person behind the persona, to help us to 're-see' each other, to unsettle presumption and so reaffirm freedom as the centripetal value of democratic community.

Reaffirming and renewing radical democratic traditions of education

My hope is that my patterns of partnership typology and the democratic fellowship perspective for which I have argued will not only challenge the domination of neo-liberal perspectives, but also provide a practical means towards the realisation of democracy as a way of living and learning together and of schools as themselves examples of democracy in action. However, practical steps of the kind I am suggesting will not be enough to support and sustain the development of schools as democratic learning communities. We also need at least two other enabling commitments. These are firstly, the identification and full use of traditions of democratic practice, predominantly, though not exclusively, within the publicly funded sector of education. Secondly, we need an analytic tool which draws on the radical democratic traditions of public education in our own countries and across the world and helps us to identify the key factors that not only name what we are committed to, but also points to the key elements that are necessary to sustain and develop our work.

Traditions of democratic practice

There are a number of reasons why we need to locate our work within alternative traditions. The first has to do with the necessary link between our pasts and our capacity to understand the present and shape the future in ways that our values demand and our hopes suggest. Russell Jacoby is entirely right in his judgement that

any society that has lost its memory has also lost its mind. 'The inability or refusal to think back takes its toll in the inability to think' (Jacoby, 1977, pp. 3-4). We cannot think the present or the future unless we think our pasts.

Secondly, just as there is no one history, so there is a plurality of alternative traditions reflecting particular standpoints, preoccupations and aspirations. Following the advice of Roberto Unger (1998, p. 235), we must find our genealogies, not merely inherit them. These genealogies will, of course, be rooted in our own national contexts and our educational and political commitments. However, we are also likely to find cross-cultural, international narratives that weave their way through the texture of our stories and our struggles. Thus, for me, two important Spanish examples include the work of Francisco Ferrer (1913) and the international Modern School movement in the early years of the twentieth century and, some twenty to thirty years later, the long forgotten, but hugely important, work of Chloe Vulliamy (1948) with Basque refugee children in England which was influenced by the great pioneer Spanish educator Margarita Comas.

The third reason has to do with our need to encounter pictures of lived realities – real examples of real schools and communities in real places – which demonstrate that alternatives are possible, that things have not always been like this, could be different again in the future and are, occasionally and bravely, happening in our own and other societies now. Some of these examples will come from the past. Thus, for me, three of the most influential, richly textured accounts of radical democratic education of the kind for which I am arguing concern the work of Alex Bloom in the East End of London from 1945-1955 (Bloom, 1952, 1953; Fielding, 2005), Howard Case's work in a residential special school in Hertfordshire, England from 1958-1972 (Case, 1966; Fielding, 2010, 2011), and Lawrence Kohlberg's work in the USA during the 1970s and 80s (Kohlberg, 1980; Fielding, 2010). However, there are also outstanding contemporary examples of the kinds of practice for which this paper is arguing. Pre-eminent amongst these is work of Alison Peacock (2005, 2006), who leads a very successful primary school, also in Hertfordshire, England, in which there is no ability grouping of any kind and in which student voice informs every aspect of the school's daily work.

Schools for Democracy – an analytic framework

Even though the traditions of radical democratic practice for which I am arguing have always been in the minority, it, nonetheless, seems to me that their moral, political, educational and existential legitimacy remains compelling. Whilst their practicability

will inevitably remain severely constrained by the hegemony of the societies within which they are located, those constraints are not and will never be absolute. Many of these points are eloquently articulated and convincingly demonstrated in the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, who pioneered the Just Community School movement in the USA in 1970s and 80s. In Kohlberg's view 'the educational aim of full individual human development can be reached only through an education for full participation in society or in a human community' (Kohlberg, 1980, p. 34) and it is the duty of schools in a democracy to provide just such an education. Why? Because representative democracy privileges those who are already politically mature. His research suggested that unless young people experience participatory engagement in a rich way at school, when they leave they are likely to avoid opportunities for participation and public responsibility, not seek them. For him, and for me:

The most basic way in which the high school can promote experiences of civic participation is to govern itself through a process of participatory democracy... The only way school can help graduating students become persons who can make society a just community is to let them try experimentally to make the school themselves (p. 35).

Despite the importance of Kohlberg's work and the persuasiveness of his insights and advocacy, thirty years later the challenges facing those working within publicly funded school systems have become more rather than less intimidating. Hopefully, my joint development of patterns of partnership and the companion orientation of democratic fellowship provide practicable ways forward for those who share a commitment to schools themselves as key sites of democratic practice. However, whether on their own or in combination, they are not enough to bring about and further develop these sorts of democratic aspirations. For this to happen they need to be combined with an historically aware, research informed institutional framework such as my 10-point *Schools for Democracy* sketched out below. These ten points, developed in much more detail elsewhere (Fielding and Moss, 2011), are part of a wider argument about the desirability and practical possibility of radical democratic education in and beyond schools, in and for a society that takes democracy seriously enough to weave it into the fabric of daily life and future possibility.

- *Education in and for radical democracy* is likely to entail a proclaimed, not just an intended, democratic vitality, albeit one that bears in mind the demands of context and circumstance.

- *Radical structures and spaces* express a permanent and proper provisionality, a residual unease with hierarchy. Transparent structures encourage ways of working that transcend boundaries and invite new combinations and possibilities. Here there is emphasis on the spatiality of democracy, on interpersonal and architectural spaces that encourage a multiplicity of different forms of formal and informal engagement with a multiplicity of persons and a strong sense of identity and mutual recognition. Pre-eminent importance is likely to be attached to variations on the General Meeting within which the whole community reflects on its shared life, achievements and aspirations. Here young people and adults make meaning of their work together, returning tenaciously and regularly to the imperatives of purpose, not merely to the mechanics of accomplishment.
- *Radical roles* exemplify a commitment to what Roberto Unger (1987, pp. 563-564) calls 'Role defiance and role jumbling' amongst staff, but also between staff and students. The *Patterns of Partnership* developed in this paper offer a range of examples.
- *Radical relationships* encourage us to 're-see' each other as persons rather than as role occupants. The development of a democratic fellowship orientation will nurture a new understanding, sense of possibility, and felt respect between adults and young people, together with a greater sense of shared delight, care and responsibility.
- *Personal and communal narratives* are of increasing rather than diminishing importance, especially, though not exclusively, for staff. They are encouraged through multiple spaces and opportunities for young people and adults, to make meaning of their work, both personally and as a community. A key part of this meaning making also entails the making of connections with radical democratic traditions of education that extend the narrative in and over time.
- *Radical curriculum, critical pedagogy and enabling assessment* lie at the heart of the schools' daily practice. Here the formal and informal *curriculum* equip young people and adults with the desire and capacity to seriously interrogate what is given and co-construct a knowledge that assists in leading good and joyful lives together. It starts with the cultures, concerns and hopes of the communities the school serves, but also transcends them. It invariably includes integrated approaches to knowledge with students and staff working in small communities of enquiry. *Critical pedagogy* encourages reciprocity of engagement and involvement, not only with the immediate community, but

with other communities and ways of being, at a local, regional, national and international level. *Enabling assessment* develops the flexibility to respond to the particularities of context at both national and local levels. It encourages high levels of peer and teacher involvement through assessment-for-learning approaches and additional community and family involvement through public, portfolio-based presentations.

- *Insistent affirmation of possibility* insists on generosity of presumption that requires us to keep options open and counter the confinement of customary or casual expectation. It denies the legitimacy of ability grouping, emulation is preferred to competition, and intrinsic motivation and communal recognition rather than the paraphernalia of marks and prizes.
- *Engaging the local* reminds us that education is a lifelong process. Here the school becomes a site of community renewal and responsibility in which young and old explore what it means to live good lives together. School and community are seen as reciprocal resources for broadly and more narrowly conceived notions of learning.
- *Accountability as shared responsibility* argues that democratic accountability is better understood and enacted as a form of 'shared responsibility'. It is morally and politically situated, not merely technically and procedurally 'delivered'. The challenge is to develop new forms of accountability better suited to a more engaged understanding of democratic living.
- *Regional, national and global solidarities* are made real through reciprocal ideological, material and interpersonal support and through values-driven networks and alliances, which draw on and contribute to the dynamic of radical social movements.

'Some changes have to start now – else there is no beginning for us'

If we believe in deep democracy we must put democratic schools - i.e. schools as democratic institutions in which adults and young people live and learn democracy together - at the centre of our work together. As Francis Williams (1941, p. vi) so elegantly put it fifty years ago, 'Democracy is not only something to fight for, it is something to fight with'. Whilst we may not immediately be in a position to emulate

pioneers in our own countries and across the world there is much we can take from growing international pressure to rethink politics from the ground up, from current advances in student voice and from increasingly inclusive approaches to leadership in schools. If harnessed to democratic fellowship approaches to patterns of partnership and to the kind of democratic frameworks for which I have been arguing, these kinds of developments have the potential to contribute to a new phase of democratic advance. If we nurture developments of this kind within a wider strategy of what has variously been called ‘real utopias’ (Wright, 2010), ‘democratic experimentalism’ (Unger, 2005), or ‘prefigurative practice’ (Boggs, 1977, 1978), then we may yet create a society and an international community worthy of the radical democratic traditions to which this paper belongs. In the resonant words of the great feminist, Shelia Rowbotham (1979, p. 140), ‘Some changes have to start now, else there is no beginning for us’.

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