

Teaching Democracy in School

Chiharu FUJII
Waseda University

Masamichi UENO
Sophia University

Regarding the teaching of democracy in school, Dewey emphasized not teaching democracy itself, but rather experiencing it through democratic life. This approach was grounded in his recognition of the limitations of intentional and institutional schooling. He also envisioned school as “embryonic societies” that would incorporate democratic life, a concept that contributed to the social center movement, which ultimately ended in the 1930s without fully realizing its original purpose. Teaching democracy in school presents significant theoretical challenges.

The recent development of various theories of democracy and education can be seen as a response to the challenges of our time. These include the normative theory of democracy, as exemplified in Rawls’ theory of justice, the publicness debate within participatory democracy, the tension and mediation between deliberative and agonistic democracies, the rise of radical democracy in response to these tensions, and the ethics of care, all of which have garnered considerable attention.

This symposium aims to review and propose principles for democratic education in school, taking into account this growing interest and organizing the issues and points of contention.

First, there is the practical issue of where and how democracy should be taught in school, which are often constrained by limited human and material resources as well as time and space limitations. In terms of subjects, we might consider moral education, social studies, civics, integrated learning (inquiry), special activities, and others. Past research often highlights democracy, education, politics, and citizenship education. Two patterns of democratic education based on educational philosophy emerge: one centered on moral education and the other on political education. Citizenship education may be seen as an integration of the two. Where and how should we teach citizens, the bearers of

Correspondence:

Chiharu FUJII, Waseda University. Email: chiharu-f@waseda.jp
Masamichi UENO, Sophia University. Email: maueno@sophia.ac.jp

a democratic society, both within and beyond the formal curriculum? Should certain fields (e.g., art) be treated as distinct from academic subjects?

It is also worth noting the diverse developments in democratic education theory in the context of the antagonistic relationship between deliberative democracy and agonistic democracy, and their application to school. Various theorists offer differing perspectives in a dynamic interplay. Can the novelty and originality of these theories be reflected in the principles of teaching democracy in school? The inheritance and development of critical theory and critical pedagogy will be crucial, but what does “criticism” really mean? What does “criticism” imply in relation to global environmental issues, inequality, or even doubts about democracy itself? An examination of “criticism” will also be important when constructing the principles of inquiry-based activities in school.

The old and new question of whether citizens can be the bearers of democracy has also been a subject of discussion. In recent years, concerns about populism, post-truth, and fake news have led to calls for epistocracy (rule by experts and those with common sense). In contrast, “epistemic democracy,” which relies on the perceptions of ordinary people and citizens to guide better democratic decisions, has been proposed as an alternative. The rise of generative AI and the promotion of DX (digital transformation) are also reshaping how democracy is formed. The GIGA school concept is being promoted in school, and we are left to wonder what impact this will have on the development of democratic citizens.

In this symposium, we hope to deepen our understanding of the principles for teaching democracy in school, considering the factors mentioned above, and to provide an opportunity for collective reflection and exploration of this important topic.