

*Classroom democracy: including everyone as a means of reducing
master-slave relations*

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Автор статті доводить, що для виховання демократичного громадянина необхідно, щоб він набув досвіду демократії за роки свого навчання в школі. Демократія означає користь для кожної особистості, а не для невеликої групи обраних людей за рахунок інших. У статті подано декілька стислих, але конкретних пропозицій щодо розвитку демократичних відносин на уроках у школі (та сім'ї), які сприятимуть запобіганню авторитаризму.

Ключові слова: демократичні відносини у школі (та сім'ї), побудувати міцну демократичну громаду, господар, таксономія Блума, приймати рішення, спільно вирішувати проблеми, умови демократичних шкіл.

One Saturday morning a few years ago, I awoke quite early as a direct result of failing to turn the alarm off prior to retiring the night before to the sound of an interview with an author on the radio. I was as fascinated by the author's thesis, to which I will turn in a moment, as I was pleased by his use of the term «Gift» to modify «ADHD» (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) child. When the bookstore opened that morning, I obtained his book and consumed it with a passion as I realized I had found additional support for my contention that the possibility of a humane global future lies solely within the realm of democratic relations. More specifically, I intend to take Dewey's claim that «There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences. Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves» (p. 84, 1916) as axiomatic both for and in life as well as the classroom. Furthermore, I assert that we cannot expect democracy to originate among adults and recent school graduates unless and until they have substantial experience in democratic practices during their schooling. Sadly, in many schools, the experience is far from democratic and, as I intend to demonstrate, benefits a select few at the expense of a mass of others. In what follows, I intend to conclude by offering some brief, but concrete suggestions for promoting democratic interactions in classrooms (and homes) to empower and build community in order that we might prevent some from being masters of others. But first, let me begin by briefly considering the book whose radio interview so abruptly drew me out of my slumber.

While my space here is limited, consider Hartman's (2003) thesis: the diagnosis of ADHD, in many cases, depends on a negative evaluation of symptoms that in general, derive from, and are antithetical to an archaic model of schooling. By medicating and suppressing the symptoms, schools are able to continue, much as they have in the past, managing the behavior of both students (and staff) in ways that reproduce the *status quo*. The alternative take on this situation offered by Hartman, and a much more positive

stance in my view, is that in many cases, by controlling impulsiveness, distractibility, and creativity, we have harnessed the energies and capabilities of our innovators and inventors at a time in which their tendencies just might be critical for the global challenges we face now and in the foreseeable future. The dilemma, of course is do we «[c]hange these schools or change the children» (Hartmann, p. 123). He continues, noting that the action, thus far, has been funded and supported by the pharmaceutical industry, and has been to medicate «nonstandard» students to gain school compliance (p. 125). Rather than trying to modify our students, his solution is clear: transform the way schooling is conducted.

Cognitive Engagement, Schooling, and Outcomes

At some point in their career (usually during their pre-service education, but not always), most U.S. educators are exposed to what is usually referred to as Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom and Krathwohl, 1956); web sites presenting this information can quite readily be located with a quick search on one of the Internet search engines. Figure 1 presents Bloom's Taxonomy in a triangular form. At the base is knowledge, and one's knowledge is generally demonstrated and assessed via one's ability to recall. Next, comprehension is demonstrated when one is able to show an understanding of the material. Above that is application, or the ability to use the knowledge in new situations.

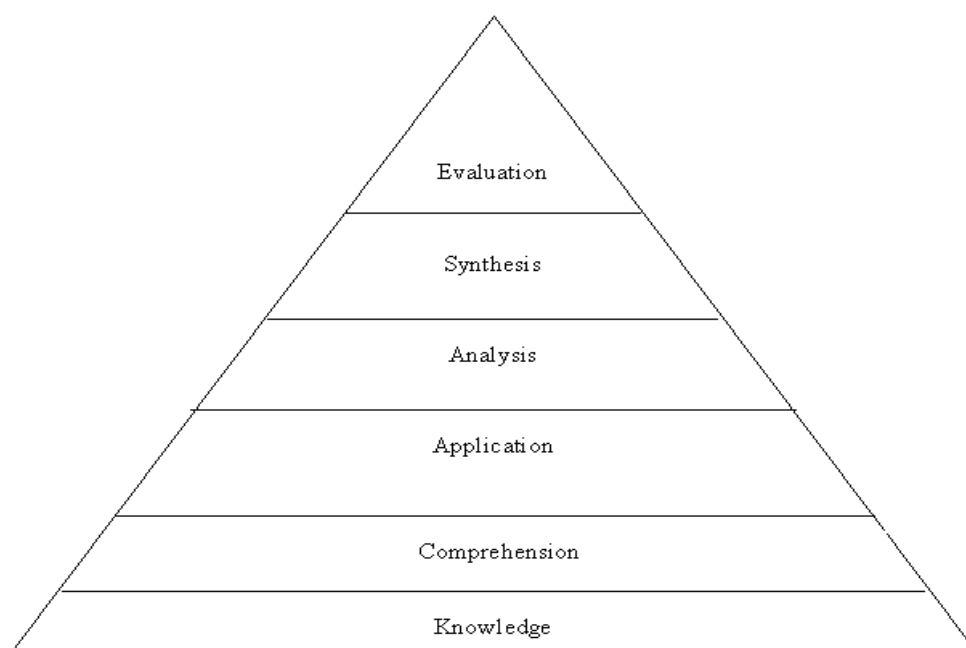


Figure 1. Bloom's Taxonomy

Then comes analysis: the ability to break down and examine components and synthesis: the creation of a new/original whole. Finally, at the apex is evaluation, and this is demonstrated when one is able to make judgments on the basis of criteria internal or external to the thing being evaluated. This taxonomy makes intuitive sense, and on the surface, provides an excellent scheme for developing and nurturing cognitive growth and development. Unfortunately, there is at one significant educational problem related

to these levels of cognitive development that, while it does not negate the usefulness of the taxonomy, illuminates a serious educational problem detrimental both to students and democracy.

In a study originally published in 1981, Jean Anyon (2001) studied a number of schools that she classified, on the basis of income and the type of work most parents of the students were engaged, as working-class, middle-class, professional-affluent, and executive-elite. In brief, in the working class schools, math was seen as following procedures and steps; the teacher did not tolerate different procedures; social studies consisted of carrying out tasks and following the teacher's instructions. Knowledge consisted of knowing facts and simple things and was seen to come from teachers and texts. The dominant theme was one of resistance and the parents were in an income category with 38.6% of other people in the country. They performed unskilled, semiskilled, and a few skilled jobs. In the middle class schools, knowledge was considered to be what is needed for high school and maybe college (which was possible to attend through hard work). There was an emphasis on understanding the content of books; in social studies, students would read the text and listen to the teacher's explanation. Knowledge was equated with remembering facts and considered to come from out there (texts, books, elders, etc). The dominant theme was one of possibility, and the parents were in highly skilled as well as traditional middle-class occupations (teacher, social worker, etc.) with an income that fit in the next 38.9 % of people in the USA. Together with the working class group then, these families account for the 77.5 % of the families in this country.

In the professional-affluent school, knowledge meant individual discovery, creativity, and important ideas; math and science involved students creating knowledge as a result of their activity gathering data and conducting experiments, though there were some constraints (e.g. a correct answer was often expected). It was considered important to learn to think and social studies emphasized higher conceptual learning. There was an emphasis on thinking for oneself that probably contributed to a dominant theme of narcissism/extreme individualism. Students felt that you had to try hard and go to the right college to be anything you want to be. They held an antagonistic attitude toward the rich, had more of a focus on struggle and critique of the status quo than other schools. These families, whose parents hold positions, for example, as highly paid doctors and executives, account for 7 % of the population in the USA.

Executive elite families comprise less than 1 % of the population and parents held positions as vice-presidents and advanced executives in multinational corporations or in Wall Street financial firms. The school children from these families equated knowledge with reasoning and problem solving since they felt the students would go to the best schools and needed to be prepared; in some ways, learning was similar to that in the affluent-professional schools, but much more rigorous. Students were guided to develop mathematical and scientific reasoning; social studies texts and class discussions were analytical but not critical of current arrangements; texts contained negative comments about the «ignorant» masses/classes. Most believes they can create knowledge and that

knowledge came from tradition, past experience, and that you needed to know the answer quickly in order to solve problems. The dominant theme was excellence.

Before pulling these ideas together, I would like to examine one additional situation. In a study of conceptions of democracy among students in eastern European schools (Bishop, 2005), a relationship between the type of secondary school attended (itself related to social class of parents) and conception of democracy held by students is described. If these schools are considered roughly to equate with the first three schools discussed above it can be seen that «working class» school students consider democracy passively, as something that grants them rights and is given to them by others, by the government. «Middle class» school students recognized both rights and duties and more actively saw their role as one of electing representatives to government. The «professional-affluent» school students saw themselves as the ones who would more likely actually participate in the operation of governing the country.

In sum, as with the results discussed above for Anyon's study and Bloom's taxonomy, the results of this study can be arrayed along a continuum from a considerably «lower,» more constrained «level», to a «higher,» more open, active, and flexible domain. Table 1 presents a summary of this information side-by-side in a form that permits us to compare the results of these three seemingly different studies. If we recall the discussion of these studies above and if we can generalize the results, it is quite clear from examining the summative presentation in the table that the educational system and pedagogical classroom practices play a prominent role in ensuring that some get educated into being masters while others get educated into «slavery.» Worse still, when students with special needs are segregated in special schools, as they are throughout Eastern Europe, or special classrooms (or sometimes schools) as they often are in the USA, or when they are medicated because it is easier to medicate a few students than it is to transform an entire educational system, it becomes quite clear that a lack of shared experiences contributes to a hierarchical society that is anything but democratic.

Table 1

Social Class, Views of Knowledge, Cognitive Taxonomy,
and Conceptions of Democracy

Social Class	School View of Knowledge	Cognitive Taxonomy	Conceptions of Democracy
Executive Elite	Solving Problems	Evaluation	?
Professional Affluent	Creating Knowledge	Synthesis Analysis	Saw selves as actual participants

		Application	
Middle Class	Understanding	Comprehension	Elect Representatives
Working Class	Facts	Knowledge	Passive granting of rights to individual

Doing Democracy in Classrooms

In what has come to be a classic contemporary comment on the decline of community in America, Putnam (1995, 2001) utilized, among other things, information about the decline of team bowling, despite the fact that more Americans bowl than ever, to document our increasing lack of interaction with our neighbors. Doing democracy, in the classroom, or elsewhere, requires conversation or dialogue, rather than adversarial debate (Grant, 1996). And though there might be political, social, and economic purposes to education (Spring, 2002), the primary reason for the existence of our schools is for political purposes. As Glickham (1998) notes, «[t]he means for enabling all persons to take their rightful place as valued and valuable citizens of a democracy was to be done through ... education» (p. 16).

The problem stems from the early days of America. As Crittenden, (2002) notes Jefferson felt that «people could be more educated so as to be capable of even more democracy» (Crittenden, p. 22) through public education. Unfortunately, Madison's view of democracy won out over Jefferson's. Madison felt that ordinary people would be lead astray from community concerns by their selfish interests, and thus it was necessary that «best educated and most experienced should rule ... because they were apt to be the most thoughtful» (Crittenden, p. 19). As it turned out, he discovered that even educated «gentlemen» would pursue their own self-interests, and it was argued that when «their own interests were thwarted or offset by competing interests ... their only recourse was to think about what would be good for all» (p. 20). In sum, we live in a society that was created under the assumption that the vast majority of people are too selfish to be concerned with the common good; more basely, we are not intelligent enough to govern ourselves. Given a decline of community, we may just not have enough concern about our fellow citizens to actually care about governing ourselves in support of the common good.

Other terms for our current arrangement are thin, instrumental, representative, or liberal democracy when what we actually need is a thick, active, strong democratic community (Barber, 1984). We need to move from the contemporary conception of democracy as a procedure, to democracy as a way of life (following Dewey, 1916) and, in the classical sense of democracy, as a way of attaining our humanness (Carr & Hartnett, 1996, p. 41).

How many teachers, or parents for that matter, have gotten as involved in video games as their children? We try to force our version of literacy on young people without realizing that they live in a completely different world than adults did when they were that age. For example, imagine the different experiences between reading a story where

you have to construct an image in your mind and hearing a story on the radio where you need aurally to attend to the speaker to be able to construct images. In the former, you can pause and reflect before continuing; in the latter example, it was not until the advent and popularity of recording equipment some years ago that one could temporarily pause the «action.» And of course, at that time, we had move beyond film and radio to television, and the possibility of recording daily images and sound at home for later observation. Now in addition to hyperlinks on the Internet, we can go see a movie, and then immerse ourselves in virtual game realities (on a variety of platforms) where we physically manipulate input devices to control our experience in the game. Some of these games, such as «Enter the Matrix,» include additional film footage not viewable elsewhere.

How strange is this experience when compared to an annual progression through an authoritarian school system that does little to provide the experience of community or democracy needed once matriculated from school? How different is it from viewing problems in school and elsewhere as the result of someone lacking culture, ability, family background, etc.? Not much different, I contend. And the solution to such deficit thinking is democratic education (Pearl, 1997).

How different it must be for the child who, on her first day of school is able to participate in arranging the room, thus creating a sense of ownership (Griffin, 1994). How great it must be to enter a school with a democratic environment that develops «in young children the habits of heart and mind that make the democratic impulse the first response» (Wood, 1998). In fact, there are some educators who make claims such as «democratic conditions and processes need to be present and active in schools before educating for democracy can thrive» (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1997). As long as behaviorism reigns, it may be difficult to stomach the notion that reward and punishment (and other forms of behavior management) work only temporarily, and at best, at least when done publicly, function primarily as a means of controlling the behavior of others and of imposing control on others – this is precisely why Alfie Kohn argues we need to move from compliance to community and permit students to choose, to form a community, and to solve problems together (1996).

Perhaps one of the most succinct presentations of conditions for democratic schools are those articulated by Beane and Apple (1995, pp. 6–7): 1) an open flow of ideas, 2) faith in our ability to resolve problems, 3) critical reflection and analysis, 4) concern for the common good, 5) concern for the dignity and rights of all, 6) understanding that democracy is an ideal to be lived, and, 7) organizing ourselves (and schools) to promote a democratic way of life. If we think back, briefly to the discussion of research earlier in this article, we can see that when working class children are not permitted to reflect critically or analyze we do not have a democratic situation. When students are not able to discuss alternative ideas or solutions to problems, we do not have the conditions necessary to prepare them for a democratic life. When children and staff in schools do not have to learn how to solve their problems in order to live with unmedicated ADHD children, we do not have a democratic situation.

Young people can make decisions about the affairs that directly affect them. In the classroom, this might entail deciding how to arrange and decorate the classroom; at home, it might involve decorating one's own bedroom. Young people can make decisions about the curriculum and certainly they can analyze and critique any mandated curriculum to discover why it is that some people's children are educated differently than other people's children. While I am not necessarily promoting a conspiracy of the elite theory of the structure and practice of schooling, I am suggesting that an increasing

centralized control and standardization of curriculum contributes to a social fragmentation that also renders difficult our ability to commune and hence, develop community. In fact, it is precisely this lack of sharing that makes community building as difficult as it is to empower young people to be democratic citizens. The root metaphor that permits or denies such democratic community is the structuring of our consciousness and action that occurs via notions of inclusion and exclusion. After all, if preparing our young, including those with disabilities, to govern themselves and our planet in a democratic fashion is not the end of education, following Postman 1996), it ought to be the end of schooling, so we can get on with educating ourselves to live.

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