Democracy and Education: A Theoretical Proposal for the Analysis of Democratic Practices in Schools

Jordi Feu¹ · Carles Serra¹ · Joan Canimas¹ · Laura Lázaro¹ · Núria Simó-Gil²

Published online: 13 February 2017
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2017

Abstract In the educational sphere, the concept of democracy is used in many and varied ways, though the hegemonic school culture often starts from a concept of democracy that is taken for granted, and it is understood that the entire educational community shares a similar concept. As a result of the research project “Democracy, participation and inclusive education in schools” (EDU2012-39556-C02-01/02) we realized that the above-mentioned concept is used without being accurately defined in the school setting. This observation is what has prompted us to write this article, basically structured in two parts. In the first part, based on the theoretical debate occurring in the field of social sciences, we delimit the concept of democracy and structure it in four basic dimensions: governance, inhabitance, otherness and ethos. In the second part, we specify and examine in depth these four dimensions in the school setting in order to construct a broad and transversal, yet specific, definition, with which to be able to develop ambitious democratic projects and, in turn, contribute to scientific debate.

Keywords Democracy · Democratic schools · Democratic values · Inclusive education · Citizenship and education

Núria Simó-Gil
nuria.simo@uvic.cat

Jordi Feu
jordi.feu@udg.edu

Carles Serra
carles.serra@udg.edu

Joan Canimas
joan.canimas@udg.edu

Laura Lázaro
laura.lazaro.lasheras@gmail.com

¹ Department of Pedagogy, University of Girona, Girona, Spain
² Department of Pedagogy, University of Vic-Central University of Catalonia, Barcelona, Spain
Introduction

Many authors reflect on the role of schools in promoting democracy, but they almost never address the controversy implicit in the concept, and proposals elaborated from the educational sphere are generally unrelated to current philosophical, politological and sociological debate on democracy. Hence, the hegemonic meaning of the term, which is shared in our schools (with exceptions that we cannot overlook), tends to be simple, ambiguous, diffuse, and often situated halfway between the banal and the defense of values where virtually everything fits. Democracy, in education, is associated indiscriminately with governability, altruism, equality, the common good, collaboration and participation, without any precise criteria to establish the relationship of each of these concepts with democracy.

This situation is not new nor is it exclusive to the field of education. In 1852 Auguste Blanqui had already called for a clarification of “what is a democrat” and declared that we found ourselves “before a vague and trivial term, with no precise meaning, an elastic term” (Blanqui 2006, p. 172). One hundred sixty years later, Brown (2011), among others, argues that this vagueness has even increased. Nancy (2011, p. 58) also considers that “the signifier ‘democracy’ has become an exemplary case of absence of meaning” and, still more radically, Jacques Rancière (2011, p. 78) claims that for as long as the word democracy has existed “the only consensus that exists consists of the idea that ‘democracy’ means different and opposing things”.1

Given this situation, it is undeniable that democracy as a concept remains highly attractive today; broad sectors of society identify with it, and groups and movements appear in the political sphere that rally to the cause of democratic regeneration, democratic radicalism or a more authentic and “true” democracy.2 It is therefore important to clarify what we mean when we refer to democracy in education and it is imperative for the concept we are going to employ to be consistent with the conceptualization of the term in other fields. As Feu et al. (2017) argued, the concept of democracy which we support integrates the postulates of the three generations of human and social rights, and aligns with the principles of republican, deliberative and participatory democracy. We start, then from the contributions of authors including Barber (1984), Taylor (1994), Fishkin (1995, 2009), Habermas (1999), Sandel (1998) Pettit (1997a) and Skinner (2004) who in one way or another exercise a critique of the model of representative liberal democracy, considering it elitist, competitive and rigid in the distinction it establishes between governors and governed, and considering the citizenry to be insufficiently represented. The idea of equality is crucial according to principles of singularity, reciprocity and communality as Rosanvallon (2013) outlined.

Thus, in the following section we expose how the research team understood democracy (and democracy in the field of education), interweaving classical aspects (such as governance) with less common ones (such as inhabitance and otherness), and others that are very present in the area of education (values).

---

1 According to other authors, the issue is not the lack of definition of the concept, but the degradation of democratic practices. Thus, Daniel Bensaïd (2011, p. 16) states that popular sovereignty today lies hidden behind democratic formalism, and Wolin (2008) speaks of a fugitive democracy, a mere episodic expression of the legitimate rights of the people.

2 “Democracy now” and “they call it democracy, but it is not” are some of the most popular slogans chanted in the 15M demonstrations in Spain, just as they were in other countries like the United States, with the OWS (Occupy Wall Street) movement that began in New York, or the United Kingdom, with the OL (Occupy London) movement in London.
Democracy: Four Dimensions to Take into Account

The first thing we must recognize is that we use the word democracy to describe a form of government in which the sovereignty of political power resides in the citizens and in which, consequently, structures of participation and free and informed decision making are established and organized. We call this dimension of democracy governance. However, a description of the forms of government is not sufficient to characterize democracy. It is necessary to delve into the conditions that enable the exercise of popular sovereignty and free and informed participation and decision making.

To identify these conditions, it is helpful to look at the three generations of human rights systematized by Vasak (1977). According to this Czech-French jurist, “while first-generation rights (civil and political) were based on the right to oppose the State and those of the second generation (economic, social and cultural) on the right to place demands on the State, those of the third generation currently being proposed to the international community are rights of solidarity” (Vasak 1977, 1984).

As we know, first-generation human rights were formulated at the end of the 18th century, in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 and in the Bill of Rights of the United States of America in 1791. They focus mainly on governance, that is, on liberty and participation in political life and on the forms and limits of the exercise of power. However, it soon became evident that democratic governance alone was not sufficient for living together, that this required certain living conditions, and economic, social and cultural rights. We will call this second dimension of democracy inhabitance, since it deals with the conditions in which people inhabit. This second generation of human rights, together with the first, was embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

As of the 1980s, and despite the fact that first and second generation human rights had by no means been fully achieved, it in turn became evident that governance and inhabitance were insufficient for living together; that mutual recognition and fraternity with others, as well as respect for the planet were also necessary, whereupon rights began to be formulated including the rights to self-determination, difference and peace, and the right to a preserved, healthy and sustainable environment not only for contemporaries, but also for future generations, etc. For our purposes, we will call this dimension of democracy otherness, as it deals with recognition of the other and of the different, with all the complexity associated with this term.

In each of these three dimensions of democracy the ethos (character, way of being and of living in the world) of individuals and collectives surfaces. Without specific values, virtues and characters it is impossible to articulate governance, inhabitance and otherness. Without humanist values, virtues and characters governance turns into particracy or bureaucracy, inhabitance becomes complacency, and otherness is impossible. These dimensions are brought into play in approaching democracy as a form of associated life. As Bernstein (2010, p. 251) states when analyzing Dewey’s work: “Democracy is the personal way in which an individual lives life and only becomes a reality when practiced in our day-to-day existence”.

We use the concept governance in its most generic sense, of “forms of government”, and more specifically to refer to processes, devices or mechanisms designed for decision making. We are not referring to the concept of governance as it has been defined since the 1990s as a “new form of government characterized by the interaction of institutions at different levels and by public administrations interacting and working in network with civil society or private organizations” (Rhodes 1997; Subirats 2010).
Consequently, in this article, when speaking about democracy, we will take into consideration the four dimensions of any democratic project: governance, inhabitance, otherness and ethos.

**Democracy as Governance**

Democracy as governance refers to the structures and processes through which political decisions are made and the public sphere is managed, as well as to a method and rules of coexistence. In modernity, this sense of democracy is embodied in the liberal tradition, in the first generation of human rights and the rule of law.

This dimension is what generates greater consensus among theorists of democracy.\(^4\) Thus, for Bobbio (1986: p. 9) the minimum definition of democracy consists of “a set of procedural rules for collective decision making in which the broadest possible participation of stakeholders is envisaged and fostered”. From this perspective, democracy is a form of social organization that attributes ownership of political power to individuals recognized as citizens who form a society. Generically, it is a form of social coexistence in which its members are free and equal and social relations are established according to contractual mechanisms. More particularly, it is a form of State organization in which collective decisions are adopted by the people (by those who are recognized as citizens) through different mechanisms of participation.

However, beyond the consensus generated around democracy as a particular form of government, discrepancies and questions arise when establishing the specific characteristics that democratic governance should have.\(^5\) For example, how should popular sovereignty be translated to making concrete decisions? Or, to what degree should the principles of democratic governance be extended?

**Democracy as Inhabitance**

The humanist and socialist tradition, and more recently new social movements, have considered that political freedoms alone were not sufficient, that democracy is not only governance but inhabitance as well, that political participation in conditions of freedom and equality is not only a procedural question, but also material. Hence, debate surrounding democracy showed concern for the conditions in which people live and propounded that governance requires basic conditions of quality of life and well-being for all people in
order for it to be truly democratic. Without the attenuation or elimination of certain
ingequalities, any pretense of participation in political life on an equal basis is mere fantasy;
for political life to be egalitarian, it must be based on economic, material and health
conditions, and access to information, training and security. This is what we mean when we
talk about inhabitance.

The opening of the concept of democracy towards issues that go beyond governance
became evident in the second generation of human rights, which vindicated as fundamental
the right to education, health, work, housing, culture and creativity, and began to mate-
rialize, albeit in a timid and limited way, in the so-called welfare state.

Recently proposals have been made that attempt to specify human rights and identify
what is required for a life worthy of human dignity. The “Capabilities Approach to Human
Development” of Sen (1999, 2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2011), for example, moves in
this direction. This approach is based on the consideration that personal and political
governance (to choose and act) require capabilities that Nussbaum (2011, p. 21) defined as
follows: “I call these states of the person (not fixed, but fluid and dynamic) internal
capabilities. They are to be distinguished from innate equipment: they are trained or
developed traits and abilities, developed, in most cases, in interaction with the social,
economic, familial, and political environment”. One of the most interesting contributions
of Amartya Sen in the development of economic and social indicators is the concept of the
capabilities approach: people must have the capability to convert their rights into real
events, such that a government should be judged on the specific capabilities it provides to
its citizens, for example to be able to vote.6 These capabilities range from access to
education, to citizens having a means of transportation that allows them to arrive at polling
places. Only when these barriers are overcome can it be said that citizens can exercise their
personal choice. Martha Nussbaum’s7 work develops, explores in depth, and in some cases
modifies this line began by Sen.

Different theorists of democracy also refer to the conditions of inhabitance as an
essential prerequisite for us to be able to speak of democracy. One of them is Paolo Flores
d’Arcais who states:

“A citizen, first and foremost, is a body, a bios. To exercise power, they have to be
able to live. Even the most intolerant of metaphysicians would grant this ‘materi-
alism’. If there are no guarantees for the bios, there is no possibility of will or
decision. The bios is the first ‘chez soi’, original and inalienable, of the individual
citizen in relation to society: the beginning of political equality and, to start speaking
meaningfully, physiological equality of the vital minimum.” (Flores d’Arcais 2005,
p. 29)

Flores d’Arcais considers that this vital minimum includes food, housing and health care
and believes that these factors are the “inalienable material foundation of abstract equality
(for instance, of political equality) between citizens” (2005, p. 30). To not guarantee this
basic inhabitance causes some to live below the minimum while others live in the privilege

---

6 His approach based on “capabilities” ties in with the idea of positive freedom (the actual ability of a
person to be or do something), instead of negative freedom (the absence of prohibitions).

7 Nussbaum identifies ten core capabilities, which have to do with (1) longevity, (2) physical health, (3)
physical integrity, (4) the senses, imagination and thought, (5) emotions, (6) practical reason, (7) mem-
bership, (8) the relationship with other species, (9) play, and lastly, (10) control over one’s environment.
(Nussbaum 2011: pp. 52–53). Of these ten core capabilities identified by Nussbaum, governance covers only
certain aspects, while the remainder refer to inhabitance and otherness. (Nussbaum 2011: pp. 33–35).
of disproportionate wealth, and democracy suffers from this, because “the sick, and perhaps even more than the hungry, are absolutely dependent: they cannot dissent, nor even decide” (2005, p. 30).

As Flores d’Arcais points out, it is not about taking advantage of discussing democracy to interpolate social objectives; it is a question of recognizing that equality goes beyond the formal equality of “one person, one vote”. Furthermore, he asserts that equality must reach aspects in which education plays a fundamental role, because in order to deliberate and decide we need to know.

Therefore, he asserts that democratic decisions have to be oriented towards a more complete and thorough equalization of social conditions. On the one hand, the republican, which emphasizes participation in the political life of the community, advocates a virtuous and responsible citizenry \(^8\) able to take control of their destinies, and seeks to encourage participation, deliberation and the public good and to abolish any form of domination. On the other hand, there is the liberal tradition, which gives priority to individual freedom and the inviolability of private life. Undoubtedly, our proposal is closer to the republican conception than the liberal, \(^9\) or what Barber (1984) has defined as “strong democracy”: a system where citizens actively participate and the government is not in the hands of the few, where there is the will to correct some of the undesirable consequences of inequality, discrimination and domination, and where mechanisms of social inclusion and deliberative processes appear as fundamental.

To the minimum conditions that enable participation, and which we can relate to certain ideas of social justice, another may be added: the quality of reception, coexistence and welfare of the contexts where participation develops (in the educational setting they have been called “climate of the school” or “climate of coexistence”). If, as we have stated, our option is based on a republican, participatory and deliberative conception of democracy, we must consider that everything that favors or is predisposed to participation contributes to the quality of democratic processes.

However, in order to practice democracy, it is not enough to merely promote and ensure participation (first dimension), nor basic conditions of material and environmental well-being for all (second dimension). It is also necessary to recognize the other in their diversity and provide them with adequate answers, for which the policies of the first modernity are no longer sufficient, because in their universalist configuration they ignored singularity, which brings us to the third dimension of democracy, otherness.

**Democracy as Otherness**

Recently, the humanist tradition has insisted and advanced in the study of responsibility towards the other. This third opening of the word democracy is reflected in the third generation of human rights: protection of minority groups or those discriminated against, respect for cultural diversity and, in general, for the choices people make in the most diverse areas of their lives (sexuality, religion, diet, etc.) in an increasingly heterogeneous society. This dimension nullifies the democratic paradigm of numerical power through which the majority imposes their will on minorities, replacing it with the paradigm of reasonableness and respect for singularities. As authors of reference of these approaches

---

8 Talking about citizenry is not easy, because this concept depends, in part, on the political project and the ideology that supports it.

9 The texts of Pettit (1997a, b), Sandel (1998, 2004) and Agulló (2014) adequately describe the two traditions, while helping to position our proposal in relation to them.
we can cite Taylor (1994) and Kymlicka (1995a, b), especially concerned about respect for minorities, practices and policies of recognition and protection of community rights; and Henry Giroux (2005) who applied some reflections on these issues to the field of education.

Within this perspective we can include all those actions, policies, programs and attitudes that enable the normalized, dignified and positive recognition of persons and non-hegemonic groups that because of this condition are easily rendered invisible or negatively represented (stigmatized). Otherness refers to the recognition of the “other.” There are those who, like Axel Honneth, refer to three-dimensional recognition: emotional (through relationships of love and friendship, which make self-confidence possible), legal (through equality and legal protection or rule of law, which allow an elemental self-respect) and social (through social consideration and assessment, which make self-esteem possible)

Non-recognition, disparagement, humiliation, failure to respect dignity or exercising violence against the identity of a person or group, can cause, states Honneth, their “psychic death” or “social death”, but also the reaction and struggle in their different forms of expression (Honneth 1997).

The principle of equality is the recognition that all people, regardless of their singularities, have the same rights. It is not, as some pretend, the nullification of singularities in order to make us all homogeneous. Linguistic, sexual, cultural or any other kind of diversity must be recognized and respected, provided they do not violate fundamental rights of others, and at the same time, it must be ensured that certain discourses based on diversity do not serve as a basis for establishing principles of inequality (Taguieff 1990). All of this leads us to the need to clarify the values to promote in a society that seeks to be democratic.

**Democracy as Ethos: Values and Virtues**

In the introduction we noted that to define our model of democracy we understand that along with governance, inhabitance and otherness we contemplate ethos, since that without values, virtues and certain characters it is impossible for governance, inhabitance and otherness to function in accordance with democratic standards. Thus, ethos (largely, that which education has been addressing for centuries) is an integral and fundamental part of the other three dimensions.

This proposal is consistent with the republican tradition, with which we have already expressed our affinity. From this tradition, it is considered necessary to cultivate the virtue of citizens if we want the community to take control of its own destinies (Sandel 1996), and it is assumed that citizenship not only entails rights for the individual, but also duties.

Public virtues are intimately related to the sustaining of liberty, virtues understood as “capabilities that each of us must possess as a citizen: capabilities that allow us to willingly serve the common good” (Skinner 2004, p. 106). Pettit also considers that laws require the support of “forms of virtue, good citizenship, or civility” (1997b, p. 326), in so far as they ensure greater respect for the law, improve their application and favor their submission to collective interests.

Concerning the defense and promotion of civic virtues, there are notable differences in the discourse of current republicans Some continue considering them as the only way to elevate the character of citizens and tend to a certain perfectionism, while others defend them for purely instrumental reasons, as a means to promote deliberation in the service of social justice (for example Sunstein 2004, p. 153). Agulló (2014, p. 226) states that all advocates of republicanism agree that civic virtue is the “backbone” (Giner 1998, p. 2) of republican democracy, and that there cannot be genuine deliberation (nor valuable or
desirable participation) without citizens who are aware of their duties and responsibilities, competent, active, well informed and willing to make a commitment to act in the service of the public good (Peña 2000, p. 196). Agulló, in turn, cites Rubio (2005), who states that only an elevated sense of democracy enables politics based on popular sovereignty to function properly.

On the other hand, Ovejero et al. (2004, p. 27) caution that, while liberal discourse has traditionally been more reticent to speak of virtues (in that they would be linked to specific conceptions of “the good”, which the State should refrain from supporting), several authors of liberal inspiration have begun to reflect on the role of civic virtues based on liberal principles and cite Macedo (1990), Galston (1991) and Rawls (1993).

The values to be promoted diverge from one author to another, but there is a degree of consensus around qualities such as responsibility, commitment, prudence, continence, tolerance, courage, respect for others and their freedom and opinions; and also with regard to capacities such as knowing how to listen and express oneself, searching for and selecting information and knowing how to interpret and contrast it, developing critical and independent thinking and resolving conflicts peacefully. The concretion of these values and capacities in real life is not unequivocal, since, without invoking cultural relativism, they are embodied in particular and diverse cultural contexts.

Democracy in the Classroom: the Four Dimensions of Democracy in the Field of Education

Thus far we have established a way of understanding democracy that is consistent with some of the current approaches being dealt with in disciplines such as political science, sociology, legal theory or philosophy; and this theoretical framework now allows us to analyze the dilemmas and uncertainties faced by schools in view of the challenge of promoting democratic educational practices.

Governance in Educational Contexts

To analyze school governance mainly involves analysis of all of the bodies and processes related to decision making, which in turn involves studying the relationships between the different agents of the educational community in terms of both the interpersonal dimension and the search for common or collective interest. Thus, the analysis of governance in schools requires analysis of the functioning of bodies established by the administration (institutional bodies), those established by each school (their own bodies), and the more or less informal and spontaneous practices that in one way or another influence the decision-making processes. These governance bodies and processes can be differentiated by the type of participation of each of the agents, their representativeness or the competences that are attributed to them. Thus, it is of great interest to analyze in each school how crucial questions are resolved such as: What forms of participation and/or representation are encouraged? Which aspects can be decided upon and which decisions are considered to be the province of only one particular body? How do participation and decision making affect the hierarchy between teachers and students?

Analysis and proposals of this type are posed, for example, in the Proyecto Atlántida (Atlantis Project), which formulates proposals for a school in which all educational and social partners (local social agents, participatory structures of families and governing
bodies of the centers) share responsibility for its operation (Luengo 2006). In an interesting article, Álvarez (2004) offers a critical review of the functioning of the governance mechanisms of public and concertada (private establishment financed with public funds) schools, analyzes the official political bodies of the center and what he calls “micro politics”, and offers some suggestions for improvement aimed at training for participation and change in the dynamics of governance. Garreta (2008), in a study on associations of parents (2008), provides abundant data and recommendations on the role that these associations have in the governance of schools and in educational activity in general, and calls for internal democracy and open structures to facilitate their participation. Edelstein (2011) is another author interested in governance, which he conceives of as a prototype of democratic government (an idea that is related in some ways, with Freinet), and proposes learning through democracy as a form of “learning democracy”. Learning through democracy involves, among other things, student participation in the processes of government articulated through self-government practices as a tool that offers the possibility of collecting the expression and discussion of the wishes of students in the classroom and in the center.

As Flutter (2007) affirms, assessing the voice of the student body is a complex task. To ensure that the voice of students will be heard involves the broad participation of all students in all areas of decision making of the school (both in organization and curriculum, and in determining the educational mission and philosophy). In the words of Sutherland (2006, p. 8): “Student voice and student participation in schools need to be part of a collaborative ethos that embraces all members of the school community”.

Inhabitation in Educational Contexts

In speaking of inhabitation in the school context we are referring to the set of actions that make the educational community, and especially students, feel good and be able to fulfill their main task: to be autonomous citizens, with good judgment, able to relate well with others, to be happy and be able to successfully complete the various stages of the education system. This is a broad and diverse principle that we have centered around three issues: actions designed to provide a good reception for the community (especially students, teachers and families); strategies that favor educational success for all; and lastly, those relating to educational infrastructures and human, economic and pedagogical resources.

Actions related to reception refer to actions that are carried out to facilitate participation in the center of students and families with difficult living conditions (with deficits of inhabitation), in order to mitigate as much as possible the interference that these situations cause for them. This includes ease of access to the center (one can hardly speak of political equality if access to certain centers is conditioned by the payment of fees or if families have difficulty accessing school material), aid for access to certain services (one wonders whether it makes sense to talk about school success or participation of families when some students do not have their daily meals guaranteed), scheduling meetings on days and at times so that working families may attend, taking specific actions so that parents from disadvantaged groups can serve on the school board, and the existence of channels or protocols to detect and address problems that may occur in the family and have repercussions on children.

Second, the strategies set in motion by the school to achieve the educational success of all students encompass actions aimed at capacitating all members of the educational community, especially students, but also their families. For example, educational actions and support in the classroom so that all students may acquire the skills and knowledge
necessary to develop their capabilities and live in society. This aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their social, economic or geographical origin, may achieve school success in the terms set out by Ainscow et al. (2004).

And last, the actions and strategies referring to educational infrastructures and human, economic and pedagogical resources. This includes taking care of all those aspects that promote a positive atmosphere, making the stay in the educational center easy and enjoyable and facilitating the relationships that are established within it, which contribute to the quality of life and well-being. For example: conditions of habitability of schools, ease of access to the center, ease of contact and relationship with its professionals, establishment of a climate of coexistence and cordiality, existence of a positive link between all educational agents and the school, amenity and comfort of the architecture and attention to the decoration of the center, etc. Only in these conditions is reciprocity in the interpersonal relations between students, teachers and other educational agents possible. As Thornberg and Elvstran (2012) pointed out, “Only when understood in this way can the trust be built that allows relationships in which all the participants, in this case pupils and teachers, feel that they are full partners”. And as expressed by Simó et al. (2016, p. 2), “In the realm of education, the quality of the shared life is described as the school atmosphere, which involves two fundamental aspects: the minimum conditions that make possible the participation of each and every one of the members of the school community, and the level of receptiveness, the quality of the shared life and the sense of well-being of the contexts in which participation occurs.”

Many authors have stressed these aspects linked to the discourse of democracy and democratic quality in education. Gutmann and Thompson (1996), for example, focus on the first aspect that we mentioned when they argue that to participate in a deliberative democracy there is a general need for certain minimal resources, such as housing and access to healthcare. In the same vein, Apple and Beane (1995) mention the need for structural and institutional inclusion accompanying equal access to education in democratic schools. Levinson (2012) believes that civic involvement of students and, therefore, the possibility of learning about democratic citizenship, presupposes levels of social and ethnic integration in the schools and areas where they are located, and the study by Brady et al. (1995) shows that socioeconomic status is included among the predictors of political participation of citizens (in their analysis they go beyond the school environment), evidenced in the possession of resources such as time and civic skills.

Other authors link democracy, equality and academic success. For example, Guarro (2005) asserts that a democratic school is a fair school, committed to the democratic reconstruction of its culture to create citizens, properly integrate all students, without discrimination of any type, and provide an education that allows them to live in harmony and actively participate in society. Feito (2009, 2010) argues that a democratic school has to be committed to comprehensiveness and inclusion (it must work towards the academic success of students in the compulsory education stage and should adopt educational strategies that contribute to achieving this goal). Also, Levinson (2012) and Diane Reay (2011) advocate inclusive education and take a position against tracking, to the extent that this does not contribute to position students in a situation of maximum equality, and actually does just the opposite. In fact, Reay builds on the work of Tawney (1964) and extends this argument to advocate for a common school in order to promote the same capabilities in all students, which she considers essential for navigating the world in which we live, understanding it and positioning ourselves before it judiciously.
Otherness in Schools

As we have seen in some examples from the previous section, it is sometimes difficult to draw a clear distinction between what corresponds to *inhabitance* and what corresponds to otherness, among other things because frequently the groups considered as “different” turn out to be, moreover, those suffering from the worst conditions of *inhabitance*, and both axes are mutually interfering or reinforcing. In any case, we understand that otherness in the area of education is embodied in the practices, discourses, initiatives, policies or projects that are established in order to recognize (respect, welcome, include) and positively assess the “other” (the other who is minority, unconventional, counterhegemonic, etc.). In this meaning, democratic practice not only consists of “tolerating” the other, but in giving them visibility and “normalized” treatment, resituating the relations of power and domination between the hegemonic and the peripheral. This exercise involves understanding the other in all their complexity and taking into account their own frame of reference, as well as their cultural and symbolic universe.

The majority of initiatives aligned in what has been called *intercultural education* (or *critical multiculturalism*, in the British tradition), and the practices of reception and attention to diversity from an inclusive perspective, can be described as initiatives that seek to work on one of the aspects we consider fundamental in any democratic project: otherness. A separate issue is the effectiveness of such practices and the undesirable effects that can be generated and that have been intensively studied and denounced by a large proportion of the researchers who we can situate in this tradition.\(^{10}\) In this direction, works including those of Palaudàrias (2002), Bertran (2005) and Garreta (2009), among many others, go into depth on this dimension of democratic practices, focusing on analysis of the participation of immigrant families in schools, while studies by Palaudàrias and Feu (1997) analyze reception and recognition at school (it is somewhat more difficult to find works on inclusion and recognition of other forms of diversity).

*Ethos and Education: the Treatment of Values, Virtues and Capabilities in the Classroom*

The fourth and final dimension is that of values, attitudes and competences that enable us to participate fully and responsibly in democratic processes. We have already mentioned that values are an area that seems particularly educational, scholastic even; there are many authors who insist that democratic education consists of an education in values and think of it as an element of ethics. What varies substantially from one author to another is how these moral values, these attitudes and the ability to implement them are transferred to students. Barbosa (2000), for example, establishes three basic models: the model of transmission of knowledge and values, according to which content is transmitted through the explicit curriculum integrated in one or more subjects; the model of training democratic habits, which seeks to develop democratic routines and attitudes through experience and implementation of democratic practices in schools, and the model of direct confrontation with socio-political reality, which aims to develop democratic values and attitudes through the

---

\(^{10}\) Primarily based on the work of Taguieff (1990). In Spain, San Román (1996) includes many of the contributions of the French philosopher, and Carbonell (2000), has effectively transferred them to the field of education. Serra (2002) exposes the criticism to the first multiculturalism and presents the basic axes of critical multiculturalism and interculturalism. Authors like Delgado (2003) move away from the optimism or possibilism of others, and continue to raise profound criticism of both multicultural and intercultural approaches.
exposure and involvement of students in real social problems. Guarro (2002, 2005) as well as Barbosa (2000) and Edelstein (2011) contribute abundant bibliography on authors who have elaborated proposals along these lines, and on projects and programs that have been developed and on researchers who have analyzed the limitations and problems of some of these proposals. One aspect that seems particularly relevant to highlight is the notion of citizenship that we relate to this way of understanding democracy. In this connection, Lawy and Biesta (2006) and Biesta et al. (2009) contrast the concepts Citizenship-as-achievement and Citizenship-as-practice. In the first, the skills and capabilities learned in school are those that students need when they leave school and become future citizens, while the second concept understands students as citizens involved in the existing socio-political, economic and cultural order. Thus the conditions in which students experience the school institution, and the interpersonal relations that develop there, shape their way of understanding and living life. Accordingly, we share with Lawy and Biesta (2006, p. 43): “Citizenship is no longer a solely adult experience but is experienced and articulated as a wider shift in social relations common to all age groups. It is reflexive because it feeds back on itself, and is relational because it is affected by different factors, including social and structural conditions that play upon it. As such it cannot be simply learned in school or in any other institution but is common to all situations”.

Conclusion

The proposals for analysis of democracy in the sphere of education and proposals for implementation of what is intended to be a democratic education encompass very diverse fields: from forms of governance to the commitment to comprehensiveness and inclusion; from a curriculum centered on democratic values to the defense of recognition or the commitment to interculturalism; from academic success for all to the development of the critical capacity of students. But this was the starting point of our article; the aim was to show the extent to which such heterogeneous proposals could be framed as proposals for promoting democracy in education.

At the beginning of the article, we observed that very few of the works on democracy and education made an effort to link their proposals intended for the educational sphere with an idea of democracy sufficiently comprehensive so as to be acceptable for those disciplines that have traditionally worked on, and continue to work on, this concept. We believe that throughout these pages we have shown how, from the republican and deliberative concept of democracy (two currents of democratic thought still fully relevant and recognizable in current political and academic debate), we can establish and delimit this notion of democracy that is at once coherent, acceptable and comprehensive. This is a notion that unfolds in four dimensions: governance, inhabitance, otherness and ethos, which any democratic project should consider and which has the virtue of collecting the process of progressive recognition and expansion of human rights, as has been analyzed and systematized by Vasak (1977, 1984). And lastly, it is a conception of democracy that allows us to position ourselves clearly before the current crisis of the concept of democracy and democratic practices. Put another way, we believe that the multifaceted concept of democracy identified here is current, relevant, well-established, defensible from different disciplines, comprehensive and at the same time committed and ambitious, the precise opposite of the simplicity, ambiguity, laxness—and in some cases, the banality—that we denounced in the introduction. In short, it is far from the vacuity referred to by Brown.
and from what, according to Nancy (2011, p. 58), was a signifier without meaning.

Undoubtedly, the multifaceted conception of educational democracy that has been presented here can be controversial. We would even dare to say that it should be, especially if we want to take it as a starting point to analyze what a democratic education or school should be. The possibility to translate the different dimensions of the concept of democracy to the educational sphere allows us to establish broad (but at the same time coherent) and ambitious criteria to work on the analysis and proposals of what has come to be called the “democratic quality” of our schools. We understand that with the delimitation of the concept we have proposed it is possible to analyze the coherence of heterogeneous and seemingly disparate practices and proposals, such that it is easier to establish what we mean when we talk about democracy in education or which aspects we should pay attention to and which aspects we can influence to contribute to improving the democratic quality of schools.

Acknowledgements This article is part of the research project “Democracy, participation and inclusive education in primary schools” (EDU2012-39556-C02-01/02) carried out by the research team Democracy and Education: Demoskole, and funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness from the Spanish Government.

References

Agulló, M.V. 2014. La democracia republicana: Problemas y límites de un modelo alternativo a la democracia liberal. Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas 146: 217–238.

Álvarez, E. 2004. Participación en la escuela: Visión crítica y propuestas para su mejora. Aula Abierta 83: 53–76.

Ainscow, M., T. Booth, and A. Dyson. 2004. Understanding and developing inclusive practices in schools: A collaborative action research network. International Journal of Inclusive Education 8 (2): 125–139.

Apple, M.W., and J.A. Beane. 1995. Democratic schools. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Barber, B.R. 1984. Strong democracy. participatory politics for a new age. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Barbosa, M. 2000. Educar per a una ciutadania democràtica a les escoles: Una discussió de models. Temps d’Educació 24: 359–373.

Bertran, M. 2005. Relacions entre famílies immigrades i institucions educatives en l’etapa de zero a sis anys. Barcelona: Fundació Jaume Bofill.

Bernstein, R. 2010. Filosofía y Democracia: John Dewey. Barcelona: Herder.

Bessette, J.M. 1980. Deliberative democracy: The majority principle in republican government. In How democratic is the constitution, ed. R. Goldwin, and W. Shamba. Washington, DC: AEI Press.

Bensaïd, D. 2011 [2009]. Permanent scandal. In Democracy in what state?, 38–43. New York: Columbia University Press.

Biesta, G., R. Lawy, and N. Kelly. 2009. Understanding young people’s citizenship learning in everyday life: The role of contexts, relationships and dispositions. Education, Citizenship and Social Justice 4 (1): 5–24.

Blanqui, A. 2006. Lettre à Maillard (6 juin 1852). In Maintenant, il faut des armes. París: La Fabrique.

Blattrberg, C. 2003. Patriotic, not deliberative, democracy. Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy 6 (1): 155–174.

Bobbio, N. 1986. [1984]. El futuro de la democracia. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Brady, H.E., S. Verba, and K. Lehman. 1995. Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation. The American Political Science Review 89 (2): 271–294.

Brown, W. 2011. [2009]. We are all democrats now. In Democracy in what state?, 44–57, New York: Columbia University Press.

Carbonell, F. 2000. Educació i immigració: els repies educatius de la diversitat cultural i l’exclusió social. Barcelona: Mediterrània.
Delgado, M. (ed.). 2003. *Inmigración y cultura. Ciudad e inmigración II*. Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona.

Edelstein, W. 2011. Education for democracy: Reasons and strategies. *European Journal of Education* 46 (1): 127–137.

Feito, R. 2009. Éxito escolar para todos. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación* 50: 131–151.

Feito, R. 2010. *Escuela y democracia. Política y sociedad* 47 (2): 47–61.

Feu, J., Simó, N. Serra C., and Canimas, J. 2017. Dimensiones, características e indicadores para una escuela democrática. (Dimensions, characteristics and indicators for a democratic school) *Estudios Pedagógicos* (in press).

Fishkin, J. 1995. *Democracia y deliberación. Nuevas perspectivas para la reforma democrática*. Barcelona: Ariel.

Fishkin, J. 2009. *When the people speak. Deliberative democracy and public consultation*. Nueva York: Oxford University Press.

Flores d’Arcais, P. 2005. *El sobirà i el dissident. La democràcia considerada seriósament*. Lleida: Pagès.

Flutter, J. 2007. Teacher development and pupil voice. *Curriculum Journal* 18 (3): 343–354.

Galston, W.A. 1991. *Liberal purposes: Goods, virtues, and diversity in the liberal state*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Garreta, J. 2008. La participación de las familias en la escuela pública. Las asociaciones de madres y padres del alumnado. Madrid: CEAPA.

Garreta, J. 2009. Escuela y familias inmigradas. Relaciones complejas. *Revista Complutense de Educación* 20 (2): 275–291.

Giner, S. 1998. Las razones del republicanismo. *Claves de Razon Práctica* 81: 2–13.

Giroux, H. 2005. *Estudios culturales, pedagogía crítica y democracia radical*. Madrid: Popular.

Guarro, A. 2002. *Currículum y democracia. Por un cambio de la cultura escolar*. Barcelona: Octaedro.

Garreta, J. 2005. La transformación democrática de la cultura escolar: Una respuesta justa a las necesidades del alumnado de zonas desfavorecidas. Profesorado. *Revista de Currículum y Formación del Profesorado* 9 (1): 1–48.

Gutmann, A., and D. Thompson. 1996. *Democracy and disagreement*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.

Kymlicka, W. 1995a. *Multicultural citizenship*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Kymlicka, W. 1995b. *The rights of minority cultures*. London: Oxford University Press.

Lawy, R., and G. Biesta. 2006. Citizenship-as-practice: The educational implications of an inclusive and relational understanding of citizenship. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 54 (1): 34–50.

Levinson, M. 2012. The civic empowerment gap. In *No citizen left behind*, ed. M. Levinson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Luengo, F. 2006. El proyecto atlántida: Experiencias para fortalecer el eje escuela, familia y municipio. *Revista de Educación* 339: 177–194.

Macedo, S. 1990. *Liberal virtues: Citizenship, virtue, and community in liberal constitutionalism*. Nueva York: Oxford University Press.

Macpherson, C.B. ed. 1973. *Post-liberal-democracy? In Democratic theory: Essays in retrieval*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Marx, K. 1975. [1843]. On the jewish question. In *Early writing*, ed. K. Marx. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Nancy, J.-L. 2011. [2009]. Finite and infinite democracy. In *Democracy in what state?*, 58–75. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nussbaum, M. 2011. *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Ovejero, F., Martí, J.L., and Gargarella, R. 2004. La alternativa republicana. In *Nuevas ideas republicanas. Autogobierno y libertad*, ed. F. Ovejero et al. Barcelona: Paidós.

Palaudàrias, J.M. 2002. Escola i inmigració estrangera a Catalunya: La integració escolar. *Papers* 66: 199–213.
Palaudàrias, J. M. and Feu, J. 1997. La acogida del alumnado extranjero en las escuelas públicas. Una reflexión necesaria para favorecer la integración plural. In ¿Educación o exclusión de la diversidad?, ed. F.J. García Castaño and A. Granados. Granada: Universidad de Granada.

Peña, J. 2000. La ciudadanía hoy. Problemas y propuestas. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid.

Pettit, P. 1997a. Republicanism: A theory of freedom and government. Nueva York: Oxford University Press.

Pettit, P. 1997. Liberalisme et républicanisme. In Dictionnaire d’éthique et de philosophie morale. París: Presses Universitaires de France.

Rancière, J. 2011 [2009]. Democracies against democracy. In Democracy in what state?, 76–80. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rhodes, R. 1997. Understanding governance: Policy networks, governance and reflexivity. Londres: Open University Press.

Rosanvallon, P. 2013. The society of equals. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Rubio, J. 2005. Ciudadanos sin democracia. Nuevos ensayos sobre ciudadanía, ética y democracia. Granada: Comares.

Sandel, M. 1996. Democracy’s discontent. america in search of a public philosophy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Sandel, M. 1998. Liberalism and the limits of justice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sandel, M. 2004. La república procedimental y el yo desvinculado. In Nuevas ideas republicanas. Autogobierno y libertad, ed. M. Canto-Sperber. Barcelona: Paidós.

San Román, T. 1996. Los muros de la separación. Ensayo sobre alterofobia y filantropía. Madrid: Tecnos.

Sen, A.K. 1999. Development as freedom. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sen, A.K. 2009. The idea of justice. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Serra, C. 2002. Antropologia de l’educació: L’etnografia i l’estudi de les relacions interètiques en l’àmbit de l’educació. Girona: Servei de Publicacions de la UdG.

Simó, N., A. Parareda, and L. Domingo. 2016. Towards a democratic school: The experience of secondary school pupils. Improving Schools 16 (3): 181–196. doi:10.1177/1365480216631080.

Skinner, Q. 2004. Las paradojas de la libertad política. In Nuevas ideas republicanas. Autogobierno y libertad, ed. F. Ovejero et al. Barcelona: Paidós.

Subirats, J. 2010. Si la respuesta es gobernanza, ¿cuál es la pregunta? Factores de cambio en la política y en las políticas. Ekonomiaz 74: 16–35.

Sunstein, C.R. 2004. Más allá del resurgimiento republicano. In Nuevas ideas republicanas. Autogobierno y libertad, eds. F. Ovejero et al. Barcelona: Paidós.

Sutherland, G. 2006. Voice of change: Embedding student voice work. Curriculum Briefing 4 (3): 8–11.

Taguieff, P.A. 1990. La force du préjugé. Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles. París: Gallimard.

Talisse, R. 2005. Democracy after liberalism. New York: Routledge.

Taylor, C. 1994. The Politics of recognition. In Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition, ed. A. Gutman. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Tawney, R.H. 1964. The radical tradition. Harmondworth: Penguin Books.

Thornberg, R., and H. Elvstran. 2012. Children’s experiences of democracy, participation, and trust in school. International Journal of Educational Research 53: 44–54.

Vasak, K. 1977. A 30-year struggle. The sustained efforts to give force of law to the universal declaration of human rights. The UNESCO Courier, XXX 11: 29–32.

Vasak, K. 1984. Pour une troisième génération des droits de l’homme. In Études et essais sur le Droit International Humanitaire et sur les principes du CICR en l’honneur à Jean Pictet, ed. C. Swinarski. La Haya: Martinus Nijhoff.

Wolin, S. 2008. Democracy incorporated: Managed democracy and the specter of inverted totalitarianism. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Young, I.M. 2000. Inclusion and democracy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.