

**SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY
AND NON-VIOLENCE**

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary debates about education there is much discussion of 'school effectiveness'. What constitutes an effective school and what makes a school ineffective? Much of the literature on school effectiveness has been concerned with what might be termed conventional indicators of school effectiveness, particularly examination results, because these are more easily quantified and measured. This literature has tended to avoid less conventional but arguably more important concerns such as whether schools can and do contribute to a culture of democracy and non-violence. The purpose of this paper is to review evidence that schools can contribute in this way if they are organized more democratically. Moreover, it is also argued that increasingly the evidence from studies of school effectiveness is that democratically organized schools are also more successful in terms of conventional indicators of effectiveness than traditional schools.

Democratic education as effective education

A discussion of school effectiveness cannot avoid the question of goals - effective at what? What sort of individual person and what sort of state and society should the effective school aim to produce? If the aim is to produce non-violent citizens and a peaceful society then a key goal of education must be to foster democracy because democracy provides the best environment for the non-violent solutions of disputes and conflicts. Authoritarian regimes have been marked by civil unrest, violent repression and wars against neighbours. While democracies are not perfect, accountable and representative government minimizes internal violence and the abuse of human rights and greatly decreases the possibility of going to war without good reason. In other words democracy can help to provide a peaceful context in which school can at least function safely. Education for democracy is therefore of fundamental importance in judging school effectiveness as the values, skills and behaviours that form a political culture that is supportive of democracy are not inherited genetically, they are learned socially and schools must play a role in this. At the moment, however, the evidence is that, although democratic schools do exist and there is increasing interest in them, in the majority of countries the majority of schools are still predominantly organized along authoritarian, hierarchical and bureaucratic lines (Harber, 1991, 1995) and in some parts of the world schools are actually factors in the reproduction of a culture of violence (Harber, 1996).

What, therefore, might a democratic school look like? Democratic political systems are based on the idea of accountable and representative government which protects human rights and the rule of law. This includes a choice of political parties, the freedom of speech, freedom of association and a free and diverse mass media. In terms of education this implies not only a certain minimum level of knowledge of the political system but also the development of political skills such as detecting bias, arguing a case and participating in group decision making. However, it is important to remember that democracy is not just about participating but, more importantly, about **how** participation takes place. Participation rates were high in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union but this did not make them democracies. There are important procedural values underlying democracy which education must foster and encourage such as tolerance of diversity and mutual respect between individuals and groups, a respect for evidence in forming opinions, a willingness to be open to the possibility of changing one's mind in the light of such evidence and regarding all people as having equal social and political rights as human beings.

However, if schools are to educate for democracy then they must practice what they preach. They must be organized in such a way as to develop democratic skills and values through experience. This means a shift of power and authority away from staff to students, both in terms of decisions about how the institution is run and in terms of what is learned in the classroom and how. While details will vary from school to school, there are broad features of school organization and curriculum which will be present in any democratic school. In terms of school organization there will be some sort of elected school council which represents staff, students and parents. The powers of such a council will vary according to the ages of the students but must include matters which are of significance to them. In terms of curriculum and classroom method, the democratic school is one where students can have some real power over curriculum because there is some genuine choice and student initiative involved. Teaching and learning in such a situation will be characterized by a variety of teaching methods which regularly include those such as discussions and projects where the students themselves are influential in shaping the direction the work takes.

The remainder of this paper examines evidence on the extent to which such democratic schools, where they exist, are effective schools, first in terms of whether they are effective at

actually fostering the democratic values which are conducive to the non-violent resolution of conflict, and second, in terms of their effectiveness in the more conventional and traditional sense of being better organized and achieving better results.

Democratic schools and democratic values

Research evidence from the United States suggests that a democratic school environment can indeed foster democratic values, skills and behaviours. Hepburn, summarizing five pieces of research in the United States, concluded that:

‘Collectively, the five research studies reviewed here provide evidence that democratic schooling is more than just a philosopher’s dream. Carried out in different conceptual frameworks with differing methods, these studies indicate that democratic education is not only possible but that it is feasible, even within the bureaucratic structure of American schools and in the shifting attitudes of society. Moreover, the five studies add to the evidence, collected in other democratic countries, that democratic experiences in the school and the classroom do contribute to the participatory awareness, skills and attitudes fundamental to life in democratic societies’ (1984:261).

Research in Britain (John and Osborn, 1992) compared two secondary schools, one traditional and authoritarian and one democratic, in terms of the development of civic attitudes. The research suggested that there were somewhat stronger democratic attitudes among the students from the democratic school than the traditional one. Also, students at the democratic school were more ardent supporters of race and gender equality but were also more sceptical about whether the government actually operated democratically. The findings also suggested that the democratic school was also more likely to encourage freedom of expression in the classroom.

In Africa there is also evidence that more democratically organized schools affect student attitudes and behaviour. In interviews carried out by the writer in two schools in Tanzania with active student councils, it was noted by both staff and students that they felt that participation had helped to develop responsibility, confidence, problem-solving through discussion and a friendlier and more co-operative environment (Harber, 1993). In 1976, during the Eritrean war of independence against Ethiopia, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front opened what became known as the ‘Zero School’ to provide education for young Eritreans who had fled from the Ethiopian occupation. During the 1980s the school became organized along increasingly democratic lines. As the director of the school concluded:

‘Therefore, the Zero School tried to make decisions collectively and encouraged students to participate actively and trained them to be good citizens who were free to give suggestions and opinions students were responsible and disciplined and their academic achievement was high but beyond this they were critical’ (Tesfamariam, 1993:14).

After the war some 500 students from the school were moved to a new site at Decamare some 40 kilometres from the capital Asmara. Here they attend a local school but live in dormitories in what was until 1991 an Ethiopian army base. The writer visited the school in 1995 and found that the ethos of the Zero school had had a strong impact on the students. The dormitories are ethnically mixed and there is a strongly co-operative and friendly atmosphere. There is a council composed of elected representatives from the dormitories which meets once a month but can meet weekly if issues arise. The students expressed their concerns about the

problems of integrating into the local, 'normal' school. They said that they were used to teachers who treated them as equals and discussed in a democratic and participatory manner. They pointed out that, whereas teachers in the Zero School would encourage questions, even if they were not particularly good ones, the teachers in the present school discouraged questions and even scolded them if they asked. The trust and equality they were used to were not present in the school but they were determined to maintain it in the dormitories.

Similar problems of reintegration have been faced by students who attended the SWAPO (South West African Peoples Organization) school at Loudima in Congo Brazzaville. After independence the students from Loudima were moved to a 'normal' school at Mweshipandeka in northern Namibia. The students from Loudima were used to a learner-centred curriculum that used group, discussion, problem solving and critical thinking and which encouraged them to challenge teachers and this had had an impact on them as they were seen as rude and lacking respect by existing students and some of the teachers (Brock-Utne, Appiah-Endresen and Oliver, 1994:17).

There is also evidence that more open, democratic classrooms can foster a range of democratic political orientations such as greater political interest, less authoritarianism, greater political knowledge and a greater sense of political efficacy (Ehman, 1980). Democratic and co-operative teaching methods have also been shown to reduce inter-ethnic conflict and to promote cross-cultural understanding (Lynch, 1991:22). A study of ethnically mixed schools in the south-eastern United States compared two schools that stressed co-operative learning, the development of interpersonal relationships, values clarification and the heterogeneous grouping of students with three traditional schools where students were streamed by achievement and taught in a lecture-recitation style in predominantly same-'race' classes. The study found that cross-'race' interaction and friendships and a positive evaluation of different 'race' students were significantly higher in the former than the latter schools (Conway and Damico, 1993).

Democratic education and conventional school effectiveness

A democratic school that promotes the values of peaceful conflict resolution and decision-making through discussion and participation is also a more effective school generally in that it provides a better organizational environment for learning. A recent review of conventional school effectiveness research (Dimmock, 1995:163-7) concluded that many of the structures and processes which characterize effective schools in meeting the learning needs of their students align with democratic principles and practice. Effective leadership is seen in terms of empowering others rather than exercising power over others. In terms of classroom management, classroom organization which encourages and rewards student involvement is linked to higher learning. Achievement is higher where students take responsibility for their own learning. Effective schools are those which encourage a mix of teaching methods that includes individualized and co-operative learning as well as limited amounts of enthusiastic and motivated whole-class teaching. In terms of student care, students in effective schools are treated with dignity and encouraged to participate in the organization of the school, including the primary school, and as a result they feel valued. The effective school culture includes many of the core values associated with democracy such as tolerating and respecting others, participating and expressing views, sharing and disseminating knowledge, valuing equity and equality and in the opportunity for students to make judgements and choices.

Evidence from both 'developed' and 'less developed' countries supports this. An early study of school effectiveness in Britain (Rutter et al., 1979) found that schools that give a large proportion of students responsibility had better examination results, better behaviour and attendance and less delinquency. Trafford's case study of the democratization of Wolverhampton Grammar School in Britain, interestingly called **Sharing Power in Schools: Raising Standards** (1993) and his subsequent further research on the school (Trafford, 1996) both suggest that there has been an improvement in examination results since the process of democratization began. In the state of Victoria, Australia:

'Democratic approaches have allowed the introduction of such qualities as innovation, participation, co-operation, autonomy, individualization and initiative in both staff and students as characterizing the ethos of a successful comprehensive school, for it is these qualities which can support the democratic principles of tolerance and equity between human beings' (quoted in Dunstan, 1995:121).

A longitudinal study of the graduates of Sudbury Valley School, which is a democratically organized school in the United States, looked at effectiveness in a rather different manner. It examined what had happened to a sample of 76 students after they had left school and concluded that not only had they not suffered as a result of having attended such a school, but had gone on to good colleges and got good jobs because the school had created traits in them such as a strong sense of responsibility, the ability to take the initiative and solve problems, an ability to communicate effectively and a high commitment to the field in which employment is sought (Gray and Chanoff, 1986).

In some developing countries there is a growing awareness that traditional, authoritarian schools are ineffective in that they promote dependence, rigidity, passivity, a false certainty about knowledge and a uniform approach to a diverse group of people. A main thrust of the argument for democratizing education in Namibia since independence in 1990, for example, has been that in the new context of education for all, teacher-centred education is ineffective:

'As we make the transition from educating an elite to education for all we are also making another shift, from teacher-centred to learner-centred education. That, too, will seem troubling at first and will take us some time to accomplish successfully. We are accustomed to classrooms where attention and activities are focused on the teacher. Indeed, we have probably all encountered teachers set in their ways that pay little attention to the backgrounds, interests and orientations of their students Few people learn easily or well in that setting. Much of the significant learning that does take place is accomplished despite, not because of, the teacher. Teacher-centred instruction is inefficient and frustrating to most learners and certainly is inconsistent with education for all' (Namibia Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993:10).

A recent book on school effectiveness in developing countries (Levin and Lockheed, 1993) looked at a number of case studies of projects in Colombia, Brazil, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burundi supported by governments and international aid agencies which had been designed to increase school effectiveness in conditions of insufficient resourcing, low levels of completion and low levels of achievement. It found a number of common themes. One important theme was empowerment where teachers, students and parents and the community are encouraged to take responsibility for making educational decisions and for the consequences of those decisions. Another was active learning with a shift from a more traditional, passive approach in which all knowledge is imparted from teachers and textbooks to an active approach in which the student is responsible for learning (15/16).

An instructive case study of the democratization of schools in order to increase their effectiveness comes from Colombia. The Escuela Nueva or New School Programme was launched in 1975 to improve the quality and effectiveness of primary-level education in rural areas of Colombia. By 1991 some 20,000 of the 27,000 rural schools in the country were involved in the programme (Torres, 1992:511). The New School Programme's slogan 'More and better primary education for children in rural areas' sums up its attempt to reconcile quantity with quality:

'It is a matter not just of providing children in rural areas with greater access to education but of offering them a better education. They endeavour to depart from conventional teaching and learning practice - top-down, authoritarian, rote and passive learning - and the attainment of higher levels of achievement in conventional schools have been crucial, constant elements in EN's development' (Torres, 1992:514).

In terms of curriculum the New Schools Programme promotes active and reflective learning, the ability to think, analyse, investigate, create, apply knowledge and improve children's self-esteem. It incorporates a flexible promotion system and seeks the development of co-operation, comradeship, solidarity and civic, participatory and democratic attitudes. School government is organized to provide an introduction to a democratic way of life. Children are organized into committees where they learn group decision-making and responsibility. The school committees can be linked to community groups and projects and are seen as facilitating social-affective and moral development as well as linking the school with family and community. In-service training is provided for teachers which is based on the conviction that if teachers are to develop the classrooms in which children's learning is active, discovery-oriented, co-operative and creative then the processes of teacher training must have the same characteristics (Colbert, Chiappe and Arboleda, 1993; Rojas, 1994). It is not surprising that one researcher on Latin America commented that 'Colombia is doing wonderful things in terms of education for democracy' (Villegas-Reimers, 1993:76).

In one evaluation of 12 case-study schools it was found that in almost all the schools there had been an improved relationship between teachers and students. Teachers felt that they had become more accessible to students and in some cases recognized that they could learn from the children. In almost all of the schools, the teachers acted as facilitators for the children as suggested in the guides and training workshops. In the classrooms students were observed to approach teachers with questions and challenge them in both large and small group situations (Rojas, 1994:63). Moreover, other evaluations have found that New Schools students have higher achievement scores than their counterparts in conventional rural schools as well as significant achievements in terms of self-esteem, creativity and civic behaviour. It has increased community participation in school-related activities and has reduced the probable drop-out rate. It has also been found to have had a significant impact on adult education, agricultural extension, athletic competitions, health campaigns and community celebrations (Torres, 1992:515).

In the first part of this paper it was argued that more democratically organized schools are more effective than traditional, authoritarian schools because they can contribute to a culture of peace and non-violence in the wider society through the learning of democratic values and behaviours. However, they can also contribute in a direct manner to the alleviation of violence in schools. Democratic schools, for example, are highly unlikely to use violence against their students in the form of corporal punishment. This is important in Africa, for example, where the use of caning in schools is still widespread. Yet, as one writer on corporal punishment in South Africa puts it: 'People replicate behaviour they have been exposed to. The use of force and power to control behaviour thus becomes a self-perpetuating mode of

behaving. Few facts in psychology are as well substantiated as the finding that aggression breeds aggression and that violence leads to violence' (Holdstock, 1990:344, 347).

Secondary schools in Africa have also regularly experienced violent student disturbances. Harber (1989:124-6) and Harber and Dadey (1993) use evidence from Nigeria and Kenya to argue that these result from the authoritarian organization of schooling which results in poor communication, poor decisions based on insufficient consultation and which encourages dependence and passivity rather than independence and self-discipline. Problems occur when the authority structures which students are supposed to depend on break down and things go wrong in a context where students are anxious about their success and where their families have often invested heavily in their education. As no participatory structures on democratic culture of discussion exists, students resort to violence to vent their frustration and disagreement.

Research based on interviews with staff and students in two schools in the United Republic of Tanzania with active elected school councils, on the other hand (Harber, 1993), identified a number of advantages in regard to creating a culture of non-violence. At the first school it was noted that the council enabled problems to be discussed before they got out of hand. In this way it improved communication and increased understanding and therefore, as the head teacher put it, avoided strikes. It was also noted that discipline problems were reduced because, as the discipline master put it, 'Staff are closer to students'. In the second school the interviewees mentioned that involvement in school management trained the students to be self-disciplined, responsible and self-reliant. They added that the school worked more smoothly - 'We live like a family', 'You can learn to solve problems by discussion'. Significantly, they added that it improves communication: 'There are no secrets', 'We have no riots because pressure does not build', as the staff put it or, as one of the students who had been to another school said, 'They don't just ignore you and tell you to go away'. These findings were supported by Lwehabura (1993) who did research in four schools in the United Republic of Tanzania. All faced severe financial problems, resource shortages and low teacher morale. He found, both in terms of the ability to deal with practical problems of stringency and in terms of examination success, that the more democratically organized the school the more effective it was. Similarly, Dadey's study of the work of secondary school head teachers in Ghana (Harber and Dadey, 1993) noted the way that successful heads used participatory structures to avoid violence stemming from students.

Conclusion

Schools that consciously educate for democracy through providing experience of democratic skills, values and behaviours in the classroom and the school as a whole contribute more to a culture of non-violence than schools that reproduce authoritarianism. A culture of non-violence needs citizens committed to peaceful conflict management through discussion, negotiation, co-operation and compromise based on mutual respect among the differing parties. These are precisely the qualities a democratic education sets out to foster. This paper has reviewed existing international evidence that democratic schools can help to shape democratic individuals and that such schools also tend to be more effective at achieving the conventional goals of schooling such as examination success. There are therefore powerful arguments for greater democracy in schools in the future, though the majority of schools have yet to change and there is still much to be done in education before schools can make a significant contribution to peace.

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