

## Democratic Education and Crisis

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Humanity today faces multiple intertwining existential threats, from both ourselves and from one another. These threats stem from our disagreements, mistrust, and polarization, which, at times, erupt fully into physical violence. Concurrently, our shared planet is getting hotter, making our collective survival increasingly precarious. To help navigate these threats, democratic education for knowledge, understanding, and critical reflection is essential. So how does the education we currently have measure up against the education we truly need? What theoretical and educational tools are necessary to address the challenges we are facing? The articles in this issue respond to these questions while also taking up other timely themes, such as the problems of political polarization, the use of nostalgia in misinformation campaigns, the need for respect and dignity for children, the vital role of dialogue in education, and the potential for Stoicism to make a comeback in the twenty-second century.

In “Education for Democracy in an Age of Political Polarization,” Elizabeth Anderson examines risks to public education in the United States heightened by laws supposedly focused on protecting children. Anderson observes that references to students’ negative feelings are used in arguments from both sides of the political spectrum, suggesting that educators could face penalties for offending students or hurting their feelings in classes. In this context, she argues that democratic education should prioritize teaching students how to navigate social differences, rather than focusing solely on their feelings. Here, understanding how people’s views are based in their experiences and developing a sense of distance from one’s own perspective are valuable.

In her response to Anderson, Sigal Ben-Porath delves deeper into the nature of polarization. First, she questions whether polarization is the core issue, or whether it revolves around justice. If justice is indeed the issue, then democratic education’s aim should be to facilitate students engaging with moral struggles over values. Second, Ben-Porath asks how educators should respond to arguments made by bad-faith actors, given the importance of trust and good

faith in managing disagreements. Third, she critically examines the necessity of neutrality, particularly in light of concerns about indoctrination. Fourth, she discusses handling disagreements about knowledge, especially in relation to challenges surrounding mistrust. Finally, Ben-Porath notes how issues of affect are still involved in democratic education for managing social difference, despite Anderson's hesitations regarding teachers focusing on students' feelings.

Similar themes arise in Ron Aboodi's article "Critical Thinking, Thin Ideals, and Irreducibly Normative Deliberation." As Aboodi notes, critical thinking is often viewed as essential to democratic education. In this context, people need to be motivated to think critically. Here, Aboodi considers how thin normative ideals about "doing what's right" can be cultivated. He argues that recognizing such ideals is necessary to have the right kind of motivation to engage in critical thinking in practices of normative deliberation.

For Brad Rowe and Vik Joshi, the use of nostalgia in misinformation campaigns is a vital issue that requires amelioration in democratic education. Nostalgia fuels misinformation, they argue, and thwarts democratic education. Based on the narrative of "Make America Great Again," their analysis notes how nostalgia can be restorative or reflective as a backward-looking experience. They conclude that nostalgia is a powerful tool to understand and respond to misinformation and is thus an oft-neglected topic in relation to democratic education. Responding to Rowe and Joshi, Suzanne Rosenblith extends the argument by noting how educators should address "restorative nostalgia" in the classroom through the use of inclusive pedagogy. She also notes that not all restorative, nationalistic narratives are equally dangerous, examining how education, inclusivity, and democracy are currently being undermined by Florida Governor, Ron DeSantis.

In his article, Juan Antonio Casas explores the importance of dignity and respect in democratic education, drawing from Stephen Darwall's distinction between respect as "recognition" versus "appraisal." This distinction enables educators to see students as possessing dignity while engaging in educational tasks involving character evaluation. By advocating for an educational framework rooted in children's human dignity, Casas argues that this view reconciles

the contradiction between educating students and treating them as objects for intervention. In his response, Kevin McDonough further explores how Casas' approach helps address the question of when paternalism in education is and is not permissible in developing children's agency.

In Francis Schrag's exploration of the challenges of democratic education, he considers what is needed in the twenty-second century by turning to the Ancient past. He argues that Stoicism offers valuable principles for navigating future educational challenges related to turmoil and insecurity. Aiming to transform, rather than inculcate doctrine, Stoic education involves responding to miseducation by helping students develop a critical mindset. Schrag thus concludes that Stoicism is a vital tradition which is particularly relevant to confronting a future marked by instability and existential threats. Chris Higgins, in his essay, observes resonances of Schrag's provocative work with that of others in educational philosophy's canon, while raising sharp questions about his methods and conclusions.

The final set of articles in this issue, authored by Deron Boyles and Dave Waddington, delve into different aspects of educational practices. Boyles focuses on John Dewey's view of "reflection" within his epistemology and contrasts it with what he calls "traditional pedagogy." Arguing that reflection is vital in Dewey's work, he makes connections between the final chapter of *Logic and Other Work on Reflection*, and critiques traditional educational approaches for failing to foster reflective inquiry. In response, Waddington observes the lack of reflection in North American education and considers what types of classroom interactions promote reflection. He notes the challenges educators face in promoting genuine dialogue in classrooms due to curriculum constraints and assessment pressures. Waddington concludes that, at a policy level, reflection and dialogue are simply not valued as part of education, which is becoming increasingly more custodial over time.

Collectively, the articles in this issue offer a powerful response to the world we live in today and the challenges we are facing. This issue is not intended for those looking for a quick dose of optimism or a Sunday afternoon pick-me-up. The predictions and insights presented across these texts are sobering, based in thorough reflection and analysis. However, if you're seeking a better

understanding of the myriad challenges we face, these articles offer valuable new perspectives and practical suggestions on educating for democracy amidst our current crisis.