
Democracy & Education

Seeking Democracy Inside, and Outside, of Education

Re-conceptualizing Perceptions and Experiences Related to Democracy and Education

*Paul R. Carr (Université du Québec en Outaouais),
Gina Thésée (Université du Québec à Montréal)*

Abstract

This conceptual article underscores the importance of critical engagement in and through education with a view to enhancing education for democracy (EfD). As a centerpiece to illustrating this connection, we refer to our research project, which engages international actors through an analysis of the perceptions, experiences and perspectives of education students, educators and others in relation to EfD. The article presents the *Thick-Thin Spectrum of EfD* and a *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* to re(present) the problematic of political engagement and literacy on the part of teacher-education students. The findings of our study highlight a necessity for education to be connected and linked to deliberative and participatory democracy in a critical manner in order to create positive, progressive, and transformative educational opportunities, especially in relation to inequitable power relations and social justice. In sum, we seek to re(conceptualize) the meaning of democracy within, and for, education while making the linkage with the lived experience of future educators and others involved in formal education.

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PAUL R. CARR is a professor in the Department of Education at the Université du Québec en Outaouais in Gatineau, Quebec, Canada, and chair-holder of the UNESCO Chair in Democracy, Global Citizenship and Transformative Education. His research is broadly concerned with social justice, with specific threads related to democracy, media literacy, peace studies, intercultural relations, and transformative change in education. He is the principal investigator of Democracy, Political Literacy, and Transformative Education research project.

GINA THÉSÉE is professor in the Department of Teacher Education at University du Quebec à Montreal (UQAM) in Montreal, Canada, and co-chair of the UNESCO Chair in Democracy, Global Citizenship and Transformative Education. She is interested in the

socioeducational contexts related mainly to colonization, culture, ethnicity, gender, and race, and teaches in the field of high school teacher education. She is the co-investigator of the Democracy, Political Literacy and Transformative Education research project.

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THE SALIENCE OF lived experience (LE) is extremely compelling and relevant to the field of education, whether at the local, national or international levels (Conway, Amel & Gerwien, 2009; Deeley, 2010; Mooney & Edwards, 2001; O'Grady, 2014; Waterman, 2014). Nevertheless, it remains an area that is underdeveloped within political and educational spheres in North America and elsewhere (Dei, 2014; Westheimer, 2015). The notion of linking the lived experiences and realities of diverse peoples and groups within diverse contexts that are often imbued with conflictual, paradoxical, and contentious power relations with formal, structured, and highly normative and hegemonically influenced educational systems constitutes one of the main pillars of our research (Carr, Zyngier, & Pruyn, 2012; Carr & Becker, 2013; Carr & Plum, 2015; Carr, Plum, & Howard, 2014, 2015; Carr & Thésée, 2012; Lund & Carr, 2008).¹ Our interest and focus relates to the need for alternative and transformative educational opportunities to be provided for students and educators in order to constructively influence *critical* civic engagement and political literacy/participation aimed at cultivating social change rather than maintaining and reproducing social relations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Kincheloe, 2008a). The multitude of actions, interactions, debates, dialogues, tensions, proposals, and knowledge constructions resulting from the critical linkage between lived experience and formal learning, when acknowledged and cultivated, has the potential to underpin a (more) meaningfully participatory and vibrant democracy. The inference here is not intended to diminish the institutional, cultural, political, and economic dimensions that frame and underpin social inequalities, as evidenced by scholars in the areas of critical race theory (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2015), Whiteness studies (Leonardo, 2009), critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2008a, 2008b), and Marxist scholarship (Pruyn & Malott, 2016), among other areas. Rather, our concern here is with how LE is validated and interrogated within the formal educational realm so as to promote and develop education for democracy (EfD) as well as how it connects with the tenets of a broader association with the world through global citizenship (Andreotti, 2014; Banks, 2008; Banks et al., 2005; UNESCO, 2014).

Seminal scholars such as Dewey (1916/1997, 1938, 1958) and Freire (1973, 1974, 1985, 1998) have presented theories on the importance of critical and engaging educational experiences to critically influence the larger society and, significantly, to combat social inequalities (Christian, 1999; Marginson, 2006; Westheimer, 2015). Dewey (1938) argued in favor of educational disciplines and frameworks aimed at providing the necessary materials and experiences that all students could relate to and explicitly made the connection between the formal and informal

contexts related to education (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Saltmarsh, 1996). Friere (1973) made direct and nuanced connections with power relations, and developed concepts that help explain the process of conscientization, which fully encapsulates LE as well as the notion of emancipation in and through education. Such engaging and transformative educational opportunities can be possible through experiential and other critical forms of informal learning, if and when meaningful connections are facilitated (Kolb, 2014; Schugurensky, 2006; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

This article interrogates the role of LE in informing how teacher-education students connect with education and democracy and, importantly, EfD, and elucidates the potential for democratic engagement based on our theoretical and conceptual research project. Our research project engages international actors through an analysis of the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of teacher-education students (future teachers), in particular, as well as educators and others, in relation to democracy and education. The findings of our study highlight a necessity for formal education to be more critically connected and linked to deliberative and participatory democracy in order to create transformative educational opportunities, especially in relation to inequitable power relations and social justice. In particular, this article presents the *Thick-Thin Spectrum of EfD* (see Carr, 2011, as well as Figure 2) as well as the *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* (see Figure 3) so as to re(present) the problematic of political engagement and political literacy on the part of teacher-education students. In sum, we seek to re(conceptualize) the meaning of democracy within, and for, education while making the linkage with LE. Based on a large body of data, this conceptual paper formulates a renewed conceptualization so as to assist educators, policymakers, and scholars to reconsider how democracy is, and can be, linked to, and cultivated through formal education.

Context: The Informal Bleeds Over to the Formal

As learning is a continuous, holistic, and lifelong process, it is vital to recognize the importance of informal and experiential learning opportunities that can occur throughout the many disparate, overlapping and connected educational layers (Roberts, 2011; Waterman, 2014). Experiential and/or informal learning can be described as the learning and experiences that occur because of the interactions among people and their specific as well as generalized environments, a process that can materialize and develop both consciously and subconsciously, and are rarely conducted in a linear manner (Kolb, 2014; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). It is crucial for both educators and students to recognize the social construction of knowledge and the importance of critical discussions, resolutions of conflict, critical thinking, and positive action to be included throughout the entire educational experience (Deeley, 2010; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Kellner & Share, 2007). The neoliberal architecture buttressing the sociopolitical identities of students, especially in relation to their own schooling experience, must also be taken into consideration (Baltodano, 2012; Hill, 2012).

¹ The authors of this article are, respectively, the principal investigator and coinvestigator of the Democracy, Political Literacy and Transformative Education project.

A particular concern in relation to informal learning is not only the process, content, objectives, and outcomes of the learning journey but also the experiences, knowledge, influences, and frameworks informing those engaged in the teaching and learning process. Teacher-education students, for example, do not arrive in teacher-education programs as blank slates but, rather, have complex overlapping, intersectionalized, socially constructed identities, beliefs, perceptions, and experiences that inform their worldviews (Bekerman & Kellner, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 1991; Dei, 2014; Portelli & McMahon, 2012). The factors, influences, and experiences that underpin the individual and collective identities of the future teachers is, for our study, central to understanding the potential for *thicker* education for democracy work, engagement and outcomes in and through formal education. How formal education engages with the informal educational, social, and other experiences and learning that these students bring with them is, we believe, fundamental to conceptualizing programs, activities, approaches, and frameworks to develop an education for democracy.

EfD, therefore, seeks, in part, to contextualize, problematize and enhance the place, role and salience of the informal, lived experience of educators (and future educators) in relation to the formal, institutionalized experience of schooling and education (Carr, 2011, 2013). Our contention is that democracy cannot be understood without a critical examination of these multiple informal and experiential realities being taken into consideration. EfD is about participation, engagement, social justice, political literacy, deliberation, and connecting the interdependent issues, concerns, and realities so as to enact and be a part of social change. If the formal educational experience serves as a wall blocking emancipation, agency, solidarity, and engagement, then the potential for meaningful, tangible democracy at the societal level will be made all the more arduous and difficult.

Connecting to Our Research on Democracy, Political Literacy, and Transformative Education

Throughout the past several years (2006–2016) during our international research project, we have explored the linkage between the perceptions of, experiences with, and perspectives of democracy in relation to education and the potential for political literacy and transformative education. We have

developed a model (Figure 1) that seeks to highlight diverse, interlinked components framing the educational experience and, importantly, the parameters for EfD. In order to dismantle hegemonic forms of dominance, privilege, neoliberalism, and inequitable power relations, education has to be considered a central educational and political focus. In addition, teacher education should be concerned with the types of transformative social change that are responsive to complex, problematic social contexts (Carr & Becker, 2013). It is, therefore, vital that students, educators, and society seek to conceptualize how we *do* democracy, how we experience it, conceptualize it, and connect it critically to education (Carr, Zyngier & Pruyn, 2012; Westheimer, 2015).

The overall research project analyzed a number of samples of teacher-education students in Canada, the United States, and Australia (n=1,300), as well as several other countries (n=3,000), employing the same methodology and survey instruments, which were adapted for language and context. The methodology of the studies relied on an online survey with open- and closed-ended questions, first developed and administered by Carr in 2006. The survey has roughly 20 demographic questions, enabling cross-tabulations with all of the data, and 20 questions on democracy and education for democracy. Many of the demographic questions include menu options, and most of the content-based questions have both a Likert-scale as well the opportunity to provide narrative responses. The research team collaborated with colleagues in several countries to ensure that there was a rigorous, critical and comparative component to the study, extrapolating data contained in the electronic database. Table 1 represents the narrative analysis evaluation grid that we employed to gage the positioning, strength, and content of qualitative answers in the questionnaire, which significantly assisted us in triangulating and validating the robustness of the quantitative data. Although a few publications have been produced based on the overall study, this article aims to extend the conceptualization of the research, to bring some sense to it in a macro as well as meta way so as to be able to better explain, infer and comprehend how teacher-education students, in particular, relate to democracy in and through education, and, importantly, how their lived experiences, identities and realities affect the former.

Table 1. Narrative Analysis Evaluation Grid

1	2	3	4	5
No engagement and critique <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding • No relevant answer • No interest shown 	Weak engagement and critique <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imprecise answer • No argumentation • Weakly developed answer 	Medium engagement and critique <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple echo to the question • Weak argumentation • Weakly developed answer 	Elaborated engagement and critique <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaborated and supported argumentation • Beginning of critical analysis 	Thick engagement and critique <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced and nuanced argumentation • Complexified answer

The main findings, which are relatively consistent across samples, regardless of language, geography, and other contextual factors, highlight the constrained and often limited critical conscientization and conceptualization of democracy and social justice on the part of teacher-education students, which could impede engagement with social change once they become teachers. Rather, the perspectives of democracy that develop from our analysis, in general, reflect passive and neutralized engagement at several levels, based, in part, on the limited democratic experiences that participants have had as students themselves. Few participants in our studies critically spoke of social justice in relation to democracy, nor the direct and indirect connections to education. The research argues for more explicit, as well as implicit, connections to the experiences and identities of students outside of the classroom as well as the formal components of education, which are explored in the next section. The need for *thicker* approaches to understanding and analyzing democracy, which include critical media and political literacy as well as critical engagement that problematizes hegemonic forms of power (Culver & Jacobson, 2012; Kellner & Share, 2007; Portelli & McMahon, 2012), is a central concern for our research.

Our Conceptual Framework of Education for Democracy

Our conceptual model aimed at understanding education for democracy as well as education within democracy and democracy within education involves seven components (Figure 1). No one component is superior to the next; on the contrary, we view the components as being interlocked, interdependent, and each containing unique and shared dimensions that connect with power relations.

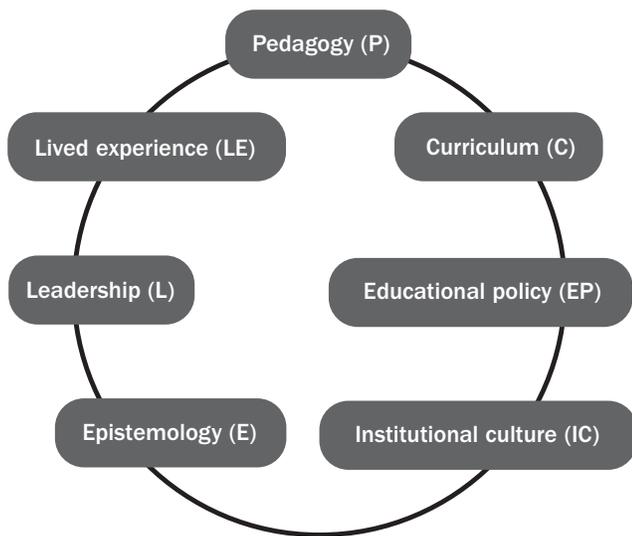


Figure 1. Conceptual framework underpinning the Democracy, Political Literacy and Transformative Education project.

The components of the conceptual framework are outlined below:

- *Pedagogy (P)*: concerned principally with teaching, teaching methods, and what happens in the classroom

- *Curriculum (C)*: concerned principally with the content of what is taught and learned, and what happens in the classroom
- *Educational policy (EP)*: concerned principally with the policies that frame the educational experience
- *Institutional culture (IC)*: concerned principally with activities, attitudes, behaviors, and procedures that frame the educational experience, and what happens in the school and educational institutions
- *Epistemology (E)*: concerned principally with how knowledge is constructed by students, educators, administrators, and others, and how this affects the development of the educational experience
- *Leadership (L)*: concerned principally with administration, authority, and supervisors, and how this contributes to the educational experience
- *Lived experience (LE)*: concerned principally with what happens outside of the formal educational experience and the effect of the formal experience, and vice versa

The importance of LE and informal learning is, therefore, an important consideration in tying together the formal components of the model. What is learned and experienced outside of the classroom, the school, and the educational institutional context needs to be integrated into the equation to be relevant, engaging, validating, and critical for individuals, communities, and societies. Some of the components of LE, which bleed over to experiential learning at various levels, that figure within the formal educational experience include: volunteering, organized and unorganized sports, music, drama, social events, ethnocultural relationships, political activities, and other leadership activities. These formative activities, which help frame, round out, and render meaningful the formal educational experience, are often underplayed and/or undervalued within the formal curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and accounting of achievement established by educational authorities. The next section further teases out the notion of EfD with a linkage to LE and formal education.

The *Thick-Thin Spectrum of EfD* (Carr, 2011; see Figure 2) sought to highlight and frame 13 themes or areas, aligned with indicators (beside the titles) in the Conceptual Model presented in Figure 1, aimed at further articulating thick and thin ways of comprehending and engaging with EfD. This model was intended to stimulate thinking around how EfD could be actualized and considered in concrete terms with examples, and how it could be used as a planning and evaluation instrument. The first iteration was not intended to be a binary protocol to definitively label actors and actions but the risk of being reduced to such a model was evident from the beginning. What the model did help us achieve was to more fully encapsulate the diverse, complex, nuanced, and interlocking components of EfD as well as the potential paradoxical approaches, which could include proceeding on one component in a vigorous, social justice-based way, and then in a less critical and engaged way for another. We understood through our work that EfD is about the process of striving for democracy in and through education, and not about one definitive end point. We have found this *Thick-Thin Spectrum* to be helpful in explicating what EfD might contend with but also felt the need to further expand it based on themes/findings from the research.

Thin Democracy	Thick Democracy
Weak Limited Narrow Constrained Superficial Apolitical Neutral Content-focused Unquestioning	Strong Unlimited Deep Open-ended Tangible Political Engaged Context-focused Critical
Linking Education and Democracy (Leadership) (L/EP/LE)	
Nebulous, weakly articulated, uncritical, and unfocused on democracy	Explicit, engaged, multifaceted, and inclusive and aimed at openly cultivating critical forms of democracy
Experiencing Democracy (Vision) (IC/E)	
Cultivating voting, and explaining the mechanics and virtues of elections, is the focus; linkages to the community are not undertaken with a view to addressing problems; when there is service-learning, there is no connection to the curriculum and the educational experience	Understanding that knowledge is constructed, rejection of the “banking model,” and efforts made to have students engage with diverse groups, problems, realities, etc., outside of the mainstream media lens of society; service-learning, for example, is linked directly to the educational experience, and is not simply an add-on with little pedagogical/epistemological value
Linking School and Society (Role of civil society) (IP/IC/LE)	
Not considered a key focus or priority, and there is concern about how to engage with society; emphasis is often on employability, the labor market, and preparing students for work, intertwined within a neoliberal framework	Direct and indirect linkages to civil society, and a focus on how to function in society, how to contribute to building a better society, and how to understand social problems; young people are not simply consumers but also, significantly, are contributors to reproducing or transforming social relations
Agenda Set by Mainstream (Hegemonic gaze) (L/EP)	
Is generally adopted and followed in an uncritical manner; textbooks are not generally critiqued for bias, misrepresentation, omission, etc.	Is critiqued and contextualized in relation to other versions of reality, and corporate control of media is considered; textbooks and curricular materials require contextualization and interpretation
Breadth of Study (Curriculum) (C/EP)	
Often concentrated in one course, subject, or year (i.e., government, social studies, civics); is understood to not be vigorously interwoven throughout the schooling experience; is limited in relation to breadth and scope	Is infused throughout the curriculum, and includes all aspects of how education is organized (i.e., assemblies, extracurricular, staff meetings, parental involvement, hidden curriculum, awards); is open to alternative and nonformal visions, issues, concerns, etc.
Study of Voting and Elections (Relativistic focus) (C/P)	
Considered central to the conceptualization of democracy, and is a continual focus, although from an uncritical vantage point	Is but one component of many, and must be problematized and critiqued; the salience, ethics, and political economy of elections within the context of neoliberalism, social inequalities and globalization is considered
Study of Political Parties (Normative politics) (C/P)	
Parties, processes, and structures (content) considered the major part of the study of democracy; the transmission of information is privileged over a critical analysis	A rigorously critical appraisal of parties, processes, and structures is undertaken; the positioning of temporal, cultural, comparative, and alternative perspectives of political parties is undertaken in a critical manner
Content Related to Conflict, Patriotism, War, and Peace (Macro-level content) (EP/C)	
Limited and uncritical, more focused in terms of conveying information in a static way, with reliance largely on formal sources and official accounts	War, conflict, geopolitics, and human rights are placed within a critical and dynamic frame of reference with an emphasis on diverse perspectives and data sources; dynamic usage of lived experiences of those impacted is highlighted
Concern Over Teaching EfD (Conceptualization of pedagogy) (E/IC)	
Concern about “taking sides,” being “biased,” “indoctrination,” and “being political” is prevalent here and leads to omitting, avoiding, and/or downplaying controversial issues	Understanding that to be neutral is to side with hegemonic powers and that discussing controversial issues does not equate indoctrination; avoiding critical discussions can lead to passive acceptance of injustice, war, and hatred, and also cultivate compliance and docility among students

Deliberative Democracy (Engagement with controversial issues) (P/C/LE)	
Limited and contrived, aimed at comfort more than developing a mindset to critique, and act; students are often dissuaded from engaging with important and controversial issues and challenging texts; teachers limit exposure to alternative perspectives and themes	Students must be afforded opportunities to learn how to debate, critique, listen, and be open to diverse epistemological reflections; engaging in controversial, dialectical, and complex discussions in formal education will prepare students to be actively engaged and critically aware citizens, and also complement lived experiences outside of school
Orientation of Curriculum (Construction of purpose of learning) (C/EP)	
Narrow, limited, and prescriptive, with little questioning of complicity, change, and power; subjects are compartmentalized, teachers are generally not predisposed to critical inquiry, and there is virtually no assessment of democracy	Open to generative themes (Freire) and progressive education (Dewey), there is room to extend formal standards, outcomes, assessments, and learning so as to “do” democracy, as opposed to simply studying voting and democratic institutions; critiquing the panoply of concerns related to power is fundamental
Literacy (Expected outcomes) (EP/P)	
Focus on traditional sense of functional literacy; generally devoid of political insight and engagement; often seeking to have a level of technological literacy without questioning power imbalances, our own implications within social realities, and our own social agency	Focus on political literacy, media literacy, what Giroux called “emancipatory literacy,” and democratic “conscientization,” in Freire’s words, going well beyond the ability to read and write, seeking a more complex, nuanced, and meaningful engagement with society; seeking to eliminate the notion that we must blindly follow the rules presented by elected officials
Social Justice (Connection to power) (E/L/LE)	
Mainstream analysis of discrimination and marginalization of social problems with no real critique of systemic and fundamental problems; broad contention that diversity is good, while critical analysis of identity is muted	Critical understanding of the linkage between social justice and social change as well as the salience of the social construction of identity, privilege, and systemic injustice are highlighted; emphasis placed on engagement as well as critical, dialectical reflection and learning

Figure 2. The Thick-Thin Spectrum of EfD. LEGEND: Pedagogy (P); Curriculum (C); Educational policy (EP); Institutional culture (IC); Epistemology (E); Leadership (L); Lived experience (LE).

The *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* (Figure 3) that we propose next does not infer fixed, stable, binary positions, or judgments. Rather, it is meant as an instrument, tool, or qualitative index to highlight intentions, actions, plans, outcomes, and engagement of those involved in education, including students and educators. It builds on the first iteration (the *Thick-Thin Spectrum of EfD*) and seeks to better explain engagement. Within the context of education, what role do schools, school boards, departments/ ministries of education, and governments actually play in relation to education for democracy? How do they define it, document it, measure it, evaluate it, and engage with it? These questions are not side-bar, add-on, superfluous ones. If we are to achieve some form of meaningful, critical, tangible engagement in and through education that can contribute to EfD, then, arguably, we should be able to articulate it, cultivate it, describe it, and, importantly, have a vision for it that can be supported and enhanced by broad, vibrant (critical) participation at multiple levels. If democracy—and the development of global democratic citizenship—is deemed important for society, and rhetorically there is a great deal of evidence to that effect (Carr, Plum, & Howard, 2014; UNESCO, 2014), then how should it be achieved? Are there specific courses, tests, outcomes, data-collection points, measures, standards, events, milestones, and activities that underpin the quest for education for democracy?

Our research on EfD—and its many variants, including democratic education, citizenship education, global citizenship education, and, to varying degrees, multicultural and social justice education—has documented how teacher-education students in diverse international contexts have acknowledged that

they largely did not have a robust democratic educational experience, and how this affects their vision of EfD as future teachers. Moreover, the research also underscored how democracy and citizenship are often considered somewhat abstract objectives and concepts without well-defined pedagogical, curricular, institutional, financial, and human resource support. Thus, the *Thick-Thin Spectrum of EfD* as well as the *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* are meant to be a framework to present weaknesses and strengths, challenges and opportunities, and barriers and openings as well as the dimensions, pitfalls, and ramifications aimed at advancing EfD.

The *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* presents 16 levels of the educational experience, meshed with the seven-point conceptual framework underscoring the research of the Democracy, Political Literacy and Transformative Education project (Figure 1). These are not the only components in education but ones that we feel are extremely relevant for the purposes of understanding, and engaging with, democracy. Each component can be understood within the diverse points on the spectrum, allowing decision makers, educators, students, parents, civil society, and others, in an engaged way, to better examine what has happened, what is happening, and what should happen concerning EfD. One vigorous critique that has been made against neoliberal education reforms is that they appear to seek “accountability” by measuring all kinds of issues, notably through tests, yet there appears to be almost nonexistent accountability for democracy. How could it be achieved if there are no plans, strategies, or support-systems put in place?

The connection to LE (and experiential learning) in this framework is extremely pertinent: the greater the engagement, conscientization, participation and EfD as we move up the spectrum, we believe, the more that LE is recognized, valued, supported, and integrated within the formal educational experience. In other words, it is difficult and problematic to achieve meaningful, critically engaged EfD without also engaging with the identities, positionalities, experiences, and informal realities of students and educators. When students and educators believe, perceive, and engage in teaching and learning, pedagogy, curriculum, evaluation, activities, and relationships that have resonance with LE, they are better positioned, we contend, to cultivate social justice, political literacy, and *thick* democracy. The spaces for such critical work are wider and more present when LE is considered, without which questions related to academic underachievement, dropping out, and divergent outcomes and evaluations are incomplete and poorly understood.

Another caveat, we came to understand after working with the *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* for some time, is that

it is possible to have a thin level of engagement for one component and a thicker level of engagement for another as such paradoxes reflect the multiple interactions that characterize societal connections/relations related to democracy. The goal here is not so much to evaluate the level of EfD for a specific component, although that could certainly be a helpful and meaningful process. Rather, the focus is on identifying how democracy is taking place within a given educational context. Sincere, open, critical engagement with the “spectrum,” we believe, can lead to enhanced levels of critical epistemological reflection, greater levels of conscientization, transformative education, and a reappraisal of hegemonic processes and measures. The spectrum will be of little interest or utility if the principle objective is cooptation, a rhetorical commitment alone, or muted openness searching for minimal, cosmetic changes only. The formal needs to be informed and buttressed by the informal: In other words, the context is as important, if not more so, as the content. In sum, power relations need to be placed on the table for democracy to flourish within the educational context.

Thick EfD: endless process of seeking, problematizing, cultivating and developing Education for Democracy, focused on a critical, meaningful, inclusive, participatory, social-justice based, thick approach

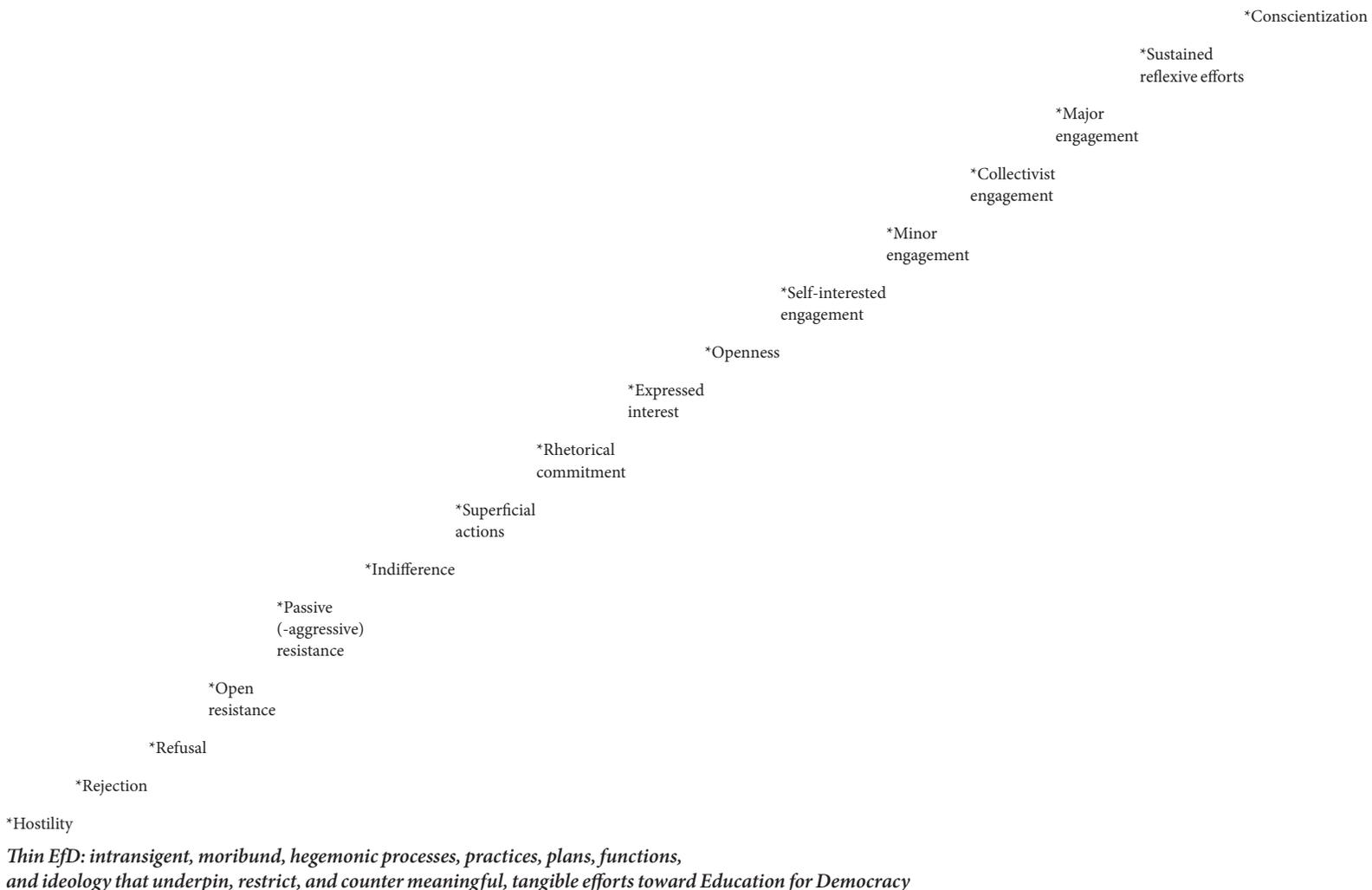


Figure 3. Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD.

The *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* covers a broad range of nuanced phases/categories/indicators (Figure 4). Each phase has a specific meaning but also bleeds into the preceding and succeeding ones. The process of conducting the analysis—what’s happening, why, how, where, what’s included, documented, areas of concern, and data-collection issues, et cetera—is fundamental to understanding how democracy functions. The proposed model, starting at the thin end of the spectrum, and ending with the thick end, contains the levels outlined below. It is important to note that these levels are not

considered mutually exclusive, nor are intended as indicators to encapsulate actions, reflections and realities in a fixed, stagnant way. However, by examining, diagnosing, discussing, and situating specific educational postures, processes and practices, we believe that one can start to develop a portrait of how EfD manifests itself and develops within a particular educational context. The *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* is intended to be used with a critical, inclusive and vigorous analysis of the conceptual components included in Figure 1, and could also be meshed with the *Thick-Thin Spectrum for EfD* for further depth.

- *Hostility*: overt disdain for discussion, proposals, and change directed at engaging with thick democracy; usually politically motivated or, at the very least, imbued with heavy hegemonic tones to denigrate attempts to alter the status quo
- *Rejection*: less openly hostile but equally disparaging of attempts to alter the status quo; usually involves arguments to shut down debate and efforts to reform
- *Refusal*: acknowledgment of context and proposals for change but concerted unwillingness to engage with process; usually involves some informal collaboration to confront power dynamics
- *Open resistance*: consolidated efforts to use institutional and cultural mechanisms and processes to deter engagement with, and implementation of, change process and/or proposed progressive reforms, usually not hidden or masked
- *Passive(-aggressive) resistance*: intuitive efforts to enact noncompliance or concerted efforts to counter progressive reforms; usually organized through informal gestures, symbols, and messages
- *Indifference*: lack of motivation, reflection, and action due to sentiment of uselessness of proposed changes; usually involves a strong institutional and cultural component
- *Superficial actions*: minimalist efforts, gestures, and manifestations to obfuscate and undermine significant movement toward education for democracy; usually involves a weak personal and collective commitment combined with institutional intransigence, which favors some visible support for change over bona fide action
- *Rhetorical commitment*: some formal support at the level of discourse and public relations usually accompanied by superficial actions; while the rhetorical commitment can provide motivation in the short-term but when not followed by bona fide, tangible action, is considered to be counterproductive and can lead to indifference and institutional intransigence
- *Expressed interest*: more enhanced rhetorical commitment, usually accompanied with argumentation and aspects of moral suasion; similar to rhetorical commitment but more engaged, although the same caveat remains in relation to the need for constructive action to follow
- *Openness*: the beginning of engagement and embracing the potential for change; usually involves creating some space for dialogue, consultation, and deliberation but still within a tightly defined institutional context
- *Self-interested engagement*: the next level of engagement that recognizes the advantages of inclusionary development and a rethinking of institutional cultural dimensions of education for democracy; usually involves the initial phases of developing some standards, policies, objectives, and outcomes
- *Minor engagement*: a more enhanced engagement than self-interested engagement, which includes the beginning of institutional commitment with resources, training, and a policy framework
- *Collectivist engagement*: involves a coalition of interests in concerted action in favour of progressive engagement aimed at education for democracy; usually involves a more enhanced consultation and participation with diverse formal and informal stakeholders
- *Major engagement*: Building on collectivist engagement, includes a more defined and robust policy framework with a range of institutional initiatives and practices that seek to build education for democracy; usually involves defined leadership and policy roles
- *Sustained reflexive efforts*: extending major engagement, sustained reflexive efforts include developing a cycle of evaluation, innovation, and capacity building for education for democracy; usually involves an opening for critique and bona fide dialogue to reformulation the approach
- *Conscientization*: this level involves a critical, meaningful, engaged approach to education for democracy, taking into consideration inequitable power relations, political literacy, and social justice; not an end point but, rather, an entry point into a rethinking of epistemological, pedagogical, curricular, educational policy, and institutional cultural dimensions of education for democracy; the importance of humility is central, and inclusive, participatory processes and mechanisms are put in place to allow for critique, change, innovation, dialogue, and reconsideration

Figure 4. Phases and categories for the enhanced Thick-Thin Spectrum of EfD.

Salient Findings from the Research Project

1. *Defining democracy*: The vast majority of participants in the numerous studies undertaken in our research project defined democracy in a normative way, emphasizing elections, government, and hegemonic political structures and process, with little to no stress placed on alternative approaches, a critique of neoliberalism and macroeconomic concerns, social justice, or, somewhat surprisingly, education. When we engaged with participants in interviews, allowing for more time and latitude to tease out lived experiences, there was a greater opportunity to understand problems connected to normative democracy based on the concept of elections and political parties, and to also reinterpret the significance of lived experiences outside of the formal education system. The formulation of democracy in a relatively *thin* way when being asked revealed that future teachers in our study may not have been used to examining, dissecting and discussing democracy. Moreover, a general observation and analysis in our study is that participants had a more difficult time supporting and arguing in a compelling way to justify their quantitative scores for questions through open-ended, narrative questions. Thus, their formative experiences, it can be assumed, did not include unpacking what democracy is, and their non-formal experiences, while extremely important in understanding their relationship to democracy, may have also been affected and shaped by the formal educational experience, weakening the analysis of the subject (Carr & Becker, 2013; Carr, Pluim, & Howard, 2014).
2. *Social justice*: Connecting democracy with education, and also with social justice, seemed to be a nebulous and problematic step for the vast majority of participants. Many mentioned that it should be considered but were not sure how, or doubted that the “system” would permit it. A large number even expressed surprise with the question or the existence of the connection. Teasing out racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of difference and marginalization also appeared to be contested, especially by many who argued that their mission would be to “transmit knowledge” as opposed to “constructing knowledge.” Here, the connection to EL is clear, and the importance of involving diverse people, interests, experiences, and perspectives should equally be considered a fundamental aspect of actually implementing and validating diverse experiences and nonformal learning of diverse people and groups within the formal system, especially in relation to the mission of developing citizenship, political literacy, and social justice. In a considerable proportion of the samples, participants expressed interest and concern over social justice but also indicated that they were unaware of how it might be effectuated (Carr, Pluim, & Howard, 2014, 2015; Carr & Thésée, 2012).
3. *Experience with formal education*: Across the board, when asked about their own experience in relation to democracy during their schooling/education, the vast majority of participants confirmed that they had not experienced critical engagement themselves and did not benefit from a robust, critically engaged democratic formal education. Many even emphasized that they

were discouraged from engaging critically as well as questioning, proposing ideas, and actively partaking in anything related to social justice and political literacy. Most mentioned that the focus was generally on voting and elections but not on questioning power relations and inequalities. The question is: How does/will this lack of democratic experience affect them as future teachers? Many believed that *thick* democratic work should be excluded from the educational experience because of the potential for controversy, and a smaller number envisaged engaging in some form of action, and even conscientisation, but had serious concerns about how to do so. Another important question is, if this democratic consciousness does not come from, or is not cultivated in, schools, where does it come from? This is where LE becomes an essential pillar to the notion of EfD and where it should necessarily find a home within the formal system. Pertaining to the *Thick-Thin Spectrum*, we see that the systemic, institutional parameters framing formal education can have the effect of marginalizing the salience of LE and also diminish the potential for meaningful pedagogy, curriculum, educational policy, and transformative change at the level of the institutional culture (Carr & Pluim, 2015; Carr, Pluim, & Howard, 2014).

4. *Potential for critically engaged education as an educator*: Many participants believed that “politics” had/has no place in education, especially among those teaching math and science, but a significant minority also believed that education for democracy should be a desired outcome. However, within this second group, there was confusion about how to do so, and many were concerned about the potential for discomfort and controversy. Most acknowledged that they were not prepared for such engagement. As we explored this concept further, we learned that those most inclined, willing, and prepared to critically engage with students at multiple levels were those who had highly meaningful and critically engaged LE experiences. This latter group is generally more able to connect with students, to challenge them, and to create a conducive climate in which deliberative democracy can be entertained on highly controversial but fundamental issues such as racism, war, poverty, and violence. For example, in relation to working on racism, those from racialized backgrounds who had engaged with race-related concerns in the community appeared to be better prepared, engaged, and predisposed to innovative/responsive approaches than those who had not, as the formal educational experience can cultivate indifference, thus making the LE all the most salient here. Thus, drawing on LE is indispensable here and can alter the entire framework of analysis and experience of students, especially when the relationships, pedagogy, and curricular experience are based on authenticity. In terms of the *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD*, those aiming to critically address concerns and needs of all students, including those from marginalized backgrounds, can, effectively, mesh with higher levels of engagement (Carr, 2013; Carr, Pluim, & Howard, 2014).
5. *Effect of neoliberalism on education*: Although most participants did not use the term *neoliberalism*, a large number did frame

their responses within the language of neoliberal reforms (testing, standardized curriculum, expectations and outcomes, limited to no place for social justice, “transmitting knowledge,” pressure on students and teachers to achieve standards, which prevented them from doing education for democracy work). The effect is that a majority of future educators in our studies do not believe that the formal schooling experience is the (only) place to engage critically with education for democracy. We have also observed that a small number of critically engaged students in education programs leave their programs because of what they consider to be a limiting/limited sociopolitical context within those very programs. When probing this area, it appears that the disconnect between the engagement and experience of critical LE with the formal education programs is too incongruent and jarring to be able to continue. Similarly, many are critical of the limited exposure to deliberative democracy within their education programs. Regarding the *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD*, the effect of neoliberalism has a predominant influence of placing participants at the bottom end of the scale, and for those willing and able to contest institutional boundaries the rewards can be plentiful in terms of meaningful, critical engagement but which might also be at odds with the formally-prescribed standards. LE is a key driver to positioning future educators to engage and act in relation to education for democracy (Carr, Plum, & Howard, 2014; Carr, Zyngier, & Pruyn, 2012).

Thus, both the *Thick-Thin Spectrum for EfD* (Figure 2) and the *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* (Figure 3) offer insight into how future educators may engage, and cultivate (critical) engagement, with students, colleagues, and others in and through formal education. Is it possible to mesh LE with formal education, or are the two domains meant to be distinct, contrary, and/or disconnected? What are the implications if one does not inform the other? Can social justice and political and media literacy be prominent features and outcomes of formal education if LE is not fully considered, operationalized, and facilitated (Funk, Kellner, & Share, 2016; Marshall & Sensoy, 2011; Martin, 2014)?

Discussion

The article has sought to contextualize the fundamental and critical relationships between LE and the formal, structured educational experience. Our preoccupation is with how the former works to integrate, value, and contextualize the formal experience, especially in relation to social justice, political and media literacy, and democracy. We maintain that EfD requires both formal and nonformal as well as explicit and implicit connections between experiential and formal learning. The reference to our research project underscored the troublesome nature of how teacher-education students, in general, have not experienced robust, critical, engaging democracy in and through their own education and how this may affect their future actions, agency, and engagement in relation to meaningful, participatory, critical, and what we have characterized as thick democracy. LE informs all aspects of teaching and learning, and the connection to democracy and EfD

is enhanced when the individual and collective learning and identity formation that takes place outside of the formalized classroom is seriously considered. Our research has found that LE is not always central because of power considerations that offer little room to include diverse perspectives, issues, realities, and people within the decision-making processes that determine the purpose of education, how it is presented, and how outcomes are evaluated. Ultimately, as noted earlier, we believe that the *Thick-Thin Spectrum for EfD* and *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* can be beneficial in assessing the orientation of, and planning for, educational systems in relation to EfD. By probing what is being done, how and why, as well as the effect, the implications, and the contextual factors, the *Spectrum* can assist in identifying the degree to which educators, objectives, resources, policies, and practices are aligned with critical, conscientized engagement.

The *Thick-Thin Spectrum of Education for Democracy* and *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* seek to provide an analysis of the significant resistance, fragility, indifference, effort, potential, and innovation that can characterize democracy in education and EfD. The *Thick-Thin Spectrum*, although not meant to be a binary instrument, included several areas in education that could help illustrate *thin* and *thick* approaches to EfD. By referencing several conceptual components of how education is structured—including pedagogy, curriculum, educational policy, institutional culture, epistemology, and leadership—we hope to extend the framework of how democracy can be more enhanced, operationalized, and problematized within teaching and learning as well as the institutional educational context. It is important to note that the levels of engagement in the *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* are not exclusive, nor are they meant to encapsulate every dimension of human attitude, comportment, predisposition, action, and experience. However, the *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* could be helpful in engaging those directly involved as well as others to dissect the rhetoric from the reality, to interrogate intentions versus actions, and, significantly, to explore planning for a more robust and meaningful EfD.

Our research has found that, although being underplayed and undervalued by the formal system, LE is fundamental to shaping what the formal educational experience will become and how impactful it might be (Dewey, 1916/1997, 1938, 1958; Freire, 1973, 1974, 1985, 1988). Future educators, when reflecting critically on their own educational experiences, emphasize the significance of how the nonformal was instrumental in shaping their connection to the formal, including, importantly, their socially constructed identities. In many cases, these future educators have concluded that there is little place for innovative, critically engaged work that cuts against or across the grain of neoliberal educational tendencies that favor a standardized curriculum, pedagogy aimed at achieving high test scores, and diminished funding, resources, and support for a host of activities and experiences that are not considered directly connected to “formal” learning (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Dei, 2014; Hill, 2012; Portelli & Konecny, 2013).

Our developing and presenting this conceptualization of EfD has led to a number of insights and revelations. We have welcomed feedback and criticism as well as a range of engagement from

colleagues, civil society members, and those involved in education, notably teachers, and students. One important rethinking of the two models occurred through related work on citizenship and radicalization, which cajoled us to reconsider the normative thinking around the progressive nature of the categories in the *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD* model. This led to the acceptance of the notion that those who are considered to be at the bottom of that spectrum (for example, *open resistance, refusal, rejection, and hostility*) may not be disengaged at all. They may not be engaged the way we would like, pushing for our prescribed goals of social justice, political literacy and conscientization aimed at social change. However, the fact that they have taken a strong position to reject, refuse, or resist may be an affirmation of their political engagement and political literacy, challenging the formal educational experience. Thus, we are reconsidering the middle levels of the spectrum (*passive-aggressive resistance, indifference, superficial actions, and rhetorical commitment*), which seem to be problematic at many levels: for example, why such a muted view and perceived limited engagement? We have also been impressed at how those exposed to the model seem to believe that it has the potential to open up spaces for debate, whether they agree with the foundation or not, something that is missing or downplayed with formal as well as informal educational milieus. Lastly, we have learned how the model could be further adapted to connect more directly with individual, group, collective, institutional, and societal measures and applications to better represent the nuances, complexity, and paradoxes of democracy and EfD.

Future research should be concerned with aligning empirical data with the spectrum to validate its pertinence and application, and also to validate and confirm its orientation, foundation, and conceptual and theoretical underpinning. Efforts should also be made to sensitize education systems, educators, faculty, students, and others to ways of cultivating conversations, debates, and deliberations to be able to critically situate, contextualize, and address education for democracy, something that is not commonly done within a critical, dialectical, and inclusive framework. Connecting inequitable powers relations interwoven in and through the formal educational experience with the lived realities and experiences of future educators requires a shift in paradigms, a problematization of neoliberalism, an acknowledgement of institutional, systemic, and other inequities, and a desire to not control either the process or the outcome, which poses particular problems for normative structures. Thus, inclusion of diverse, traditionally marginalized groups and an embracing of contemporary cultural forces that play a role in shaping debates, identities, and experiences, such as social media, must also be reconciled. The presentation of the *Thick-Thin Spectrum for EfD* and the *Spectrum for Critical Engagement for EfD*, in connection with LE, does not guarantee education for democracy but it can help facilitate, we believe, debate and engagement toward addressing some of the fundamental concerns imbued within the context for achieving more thick democracy in and through education.

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