

# Chapter 1

## On the need for a new democracy of education in a post-pandemic world

### *ACCEPTED VERSION*

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### **Abstract**

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the contemporary landscape for democracy and education, drawing on global challenges facing democratic practices and the increasing strength of anti-democratic forces. Further, the chapter describes the conceptual, ethical and political frameworks that underpin the book. Finally, the chapter presents an overview of the sections and contributing chapters, and explores the thematic contours of the empirical and theoretical perspectives, with a particular emphasis on the global implications for these local encounters with democracy and education in a post-pandemic world.

### **Introduction**

Democracy faces a range of significant and complex challenges in the first decades of the twenty-first century. The Council of the European Union (2019) suggested that democratic processes and institutions are being undermined and limitations are being placed on democratic space, which has resulted in lowered levels of trust in institutions, constraints on democratic activity, increased human rights violations, reduced media pluralism and manipulation of online technology. At times, it appears that the systems that held together throughout much of the twentieth century—liberalism, capitalism and democracy—threaten to entirely collapse.

Since the beginning of 2020, we have borne witness to the devastating effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic, rising authoritarianism in places such as Brazil, Russia and Hungary,

along with increased geopolitical tensions in the Pacific region as the US along with its allies, including Australia, build towards a new Cold War and increased likelihood of armed conflict with China. Lévy (2020) has described our moment as an ‘epidemic of fear, not only of COVID-19, which has descended upon the world’ (p. viii). Rapidly increasing social and economic inequality sit alongside political inaction on the clear and present threat of climate change and ecological collapse, while the rise of populism, extremism and tribalism erode social cohesion and trust in societal institutions, including governments, public services, health and education.

In a piece for *Truthout*, Giroux (2020) argued that we face not only a viral epidemic, but multiple plagues that are causing misery, death and suffering, including ‘ecological destruction, the degradation of civic culture, the possibility of a nuclear war, and the normalization of a brutal culture of cruelty’ (np), driven by neoliberalism, neoconservatism and austerity politics that have weakened the welfare state, public health and public education. Žižek (2020) argued that COVID-19 has also exposed ideological ‘viruses which were lying dormant in our societies: fake news, paranoid conspiracy theories, explosions of racism’ (p. 39). The threats are not simply viral: ‘other catastrophes are looming on the horizon or already taking place: droughts, heatwaves, killer storms, the list is long. In all these cases, the answer is not panic but the hard and urgent work to establish some kind of efficient global coordination’ (Žižek, 2020, p. 42).

Schwab and Malleret (2020) contended that the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the social, economic and political faultlines, ‘most notably social divides, lack of fairness, absence of cooperation, failure of global governance and leadership ... and people feel the time for reinvention has come. A new world will emerge, the contours of which are for us to both imagine and to draw’ (p. 11). Human societies are at a critical moment, in which there is both destructive and productive possibility for change. We agree with Giroux (2020) that the current COVID-19 pandemic will continue to test the limits of democracy:

The coronavirus pandemic has pulled back the curtain to reveal the power of a brutal neoliberalism—and its global financial markets—in all of its cruelty. This is a system that has not only eroded the democratic ideals of equality and popular sovereignty, but has also created a political and economic context in which the looming pandemic puts a severe strain on medical workers and hospitals that lack ventilators and other essential equipment to treat patients and limit the number of deaths caused by the virus. This points to a moment in the current historical conjuncture in which the space between the passing of one period and the beginning of a new age offers the

possibility for the social and political imagination to set in motion a global movement for radical democracy. (np)

This raises the question of what might a global movement for radical democracy look like, and in the case of this book, our contributors have considered some of the ways in which we might encourage an education that is for democracy. The chapters within explore new perspectives on education through a range of diverse empirical, conceptual and methodological encounters with democratic education in practice. This book makes a contribution to the contemporary literature that addresses issues of de-democratisation and the rise of anti-democratic and fascist politics, increasing social disruption and rising inequality.

Sites of education—formal and informal, from birth through to adulthood—provide important microcosms of social change and political action. As such, understanding how education could be for democracy is a live problem, which continues to evolve as we face the increasing challenges and complexities of the twenty-first century. Contributing to the ongoing project of re-imagining education for democracy (Riddle & Apple, 2019), this book considers how we might ‘collectively respond to these anti-democratic forces and what the potential role of education might be in equipping young people with the tools and knowledge to become powerful democratic agents of change in an increasingly unstable and dangerous world’ (Riddle & Heffernan, 2018, p. 319).

## **Overview of this book**

In 2017, the first *Education for Democracy Summit* was held at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. Arising from that summit were several scholarly publications that sought to progress the question of what an education for democracy might be (e.g., Riddle, 2019; Riddle & Apple, 2019; Riddle & Heffernan, 2018). A follow-up summit was planned for June 2020, which progressed to the release of the final program just prior to the first COVID-19 lockdown in April 2020. As was the case with most things planned around the world in 2020, the second summit had to be cancelled. Instead, we approached scholars who had proposed presentations for the summit and invited them to collaborate with us on this collected edition.

This edited book brings together diverse communities of education research in an innovative way to develop a nuanced understanding of the arguments being made regarding education and democracy. We contend that divergent conceptualisations of education and democracy provide

a range of affordances and constraints, which offer potential for innovative research, policy and practice in contemporary local–global contexts. This book synthesises a diverse range of theoretical, conceptual and empirical approaches to address the complex challenges facing young people and societies in the twenty-first century. Chapters explicitly demonstrate relevance to, and engagement with, global debates regarding education and democracy, and incorporate diverse empirical and conceptual approaches to these issues. The central thematic contours running through this book respond to the contention that education is more than education about democracy; education should be *for* democracy.

The contributing chapters have been grouped into three broad themes—new ways of thinking about democracy, enacting democracy through teaching and learning, and future thinking for a new era of democracy. These thematic sections extend theoretical and practical aspects of democratic education across multiple contexts, while considering the application of democratic modes of governance and practice to other educational contexts. Chapter authors considered the empirical and conceptual contribution to both localised forms of democratic knowledge building and broader democratic discourses. Authors were asked to consider application of their work for international contexts and to envision potential implications for a post-pandemic world. We believe the results speak for themselves, and that the book has a coherence and logical flow that moves across sections and chapters. We invite you to join us in this collective act of rethinking democracy and education to generate new perspectives on education for democracy.

### *PART A—New Ways of Thinking About Democracy*

In this introductory chapter, we have considered the need for a new democracy of education, setting the scene for new ways of thinking about education and democracy, reflecting on the contemporary challenges of society and education within a complex context of growing social and economic inequality, a global pandemic and climate change. In Chapter 2, Bev Rogers troubles the notion of declining trust in politics, encouraging us to think differently about how to regenerate democratic interactions between people.

In Chapter 3, Howard Prosser proposes the notion of isonomy to speak back to the problematic nature of democracy and offer an alternative way of working and relating to each other in schools. Further expanding our understanding and opportunities for alternative perspectives on democracy and education, Lara Maia-Pike presents an alternative theoretical framework in

Chapter 4, aimed at expanding current understandings of self-determination in post-school transition planning for students with disability. Her work supports new conceptualisations of post-school transition planning that can pave the way to a more inclusive and democratic society.

*PART B—Enacting Democracy Through Teaching and Learning*

Enacting democracy through teaching and learning opens in Chapter 5, with David Spillman and Benny Wilson’s exploration of how Indigenous place and story-based pedagogies can be located and incorporated into teaching and learning within Australian schools as a challenge to the current neoliberal education paradigms. In Chapter 6, Stephanie Westcott draws our focus away from clinical, neoliberal instructional models and data imperatives, arguing that it is in the ordinary everyday intimacies of teacher practice that an education for democracy may be found. Taking up Biesta’s notion of a pedagogy of the world in Chapter 7, Sarah Healy, Kathryn Coleman, Richard Johnson Sallis and Amanda Belton ask how participating in arts-based educational programs can enable young people from socio-educationally disadvantaged communities to participate differently in higher education.

In Chapter 8, Rafean Daliri-Ngametu draws on Kemmis’ ‘practice architectures’ to explore students’ situated practices in relation to ‘data talk’, offering a powerful example of how students respond in democratic ways to often inequitable and anti-democratic practices of datafied schooling. In Chapter 9, Mihajla Gavin, Susan McGrath-Champ, Rachel Wilson, Scott Fitzgerald and Meghan Stacey take up the plight of teachers, investigating how intensification and datafication of teachers’ work threatens the ways in which schooling can provide an education for democracy.

Alison Wrench, Jenni Carter and Kathryn Paige turn our attention in Chapter 10 to the increasing diversity of schools, making the case for culturally responsive pedagogies as a foundation for an education for democracy both in teaching and teacher education. Finally, Alice Elwell explores the use of feminist pedagogies and critical literacy in Chapter 11 to make space for democratic dialogue and debate in the high school English classroom.

*PART C—Future Thinking For a New Era of Democracy*

The final section of the book focuses our attention towards the future, providing alternative practices and possibilities for democracy and education. In Chapter 12, Fiona Longmuir

considers opportunities for education to mobilise student agency, through authentic voice and choice, to respond to pervasive social, political, environmental and economic challenges. Longmuir presents case studies of educational settings where belonging and empowerment were evident as a result of student voice initiatives. Her work considers how such educational experiences might support students to develop active, resilient citizenship dispositions that enable them to respond to uncertain futures.

In Chapter 13, Bryan Smith takes up the notion of citizenship education and highlights the importance of considering how nationalism and the nation continue to critically shape citizenship, and citizenship education in schools. He encourages us to consider notions of ‘the nation’ through exploring the idea of ‘Australia’ and ‘Australians’, which operates as an invisible force that calls our students to do their civic work for the Australian space and people.

Eve Mayes and Michael Everitt Hartup draw our attention to students’ political activism in Chapter 14. They argue for the importance of reconceptualising young people’s citizenship status in ways that recognise the legitimacy of young people’s political passions. Drawing on Mouffe’s theorisation of politics as passion, they take up the example of 2018 and 2019’s School Strike 4 Climate protests and explore the ways in which young people’s political consciousness is formed, and plays out through schooling, in an ever-shifting world.

Finally, Andrew Hickey, Stewart Riddle, Janean Robinson, Robert Hattam, Barry Down and Alison Wrench explore ‘relational pedagogy’ in Chapter 15. They highlight the centrality of relationality and note that democracy can be evident in the ‘moment of encounter’ between students and teachers. They call on us to understand teacher and student practice to account for the ways in which relationships come to be built and nurtured. At the heart of a democratic education, argue the authors, are relationships.

Each of the chapters presented in this book offer up innovative perspectives on democracy and education, which provide some hopeful ways of progressing the cause of education for democracy in the coming years. We are mindful that once this book is published, we will have begun emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic into some kind of new normal. However, as Žižek (2020) has argued, ‘there is no return to normal, the new “normal” will have to be constructed on the ruins of our old lives, or we will find ourselves in a new barbarism whose signs are already clearly discernible’ (p. 3). We contend that this new normal must include an explicit commitment to a more collective, ecologically sustainable and ethical set of democratic

principles and practices, which better support the health, livelihoods and communities of peoples across the globe.

We require new understandings of civic belonging and democratic modes of living together in a fragile world, in which our shared obligation to each other is the first principle underpinning education, from early childhood settings through to adult and advanced education. We owe it to our children and their future to ensure that their education is for democracy.

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