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ABSTRACT

In the tradition of critical ethnography, this study demonstrates the development and use of a structured approach to the qualitative study of an urban alternative public high school. It responds to the need for research that begins to connect the language of possibility in critical educational theory with an emerging language of possibility in democratic educational practice. It identifies two major competing democratic ideological traditions that have struggled to shape the understandings and practices of U.S. democratic citizenship: a dominant, privately-oriented citizenship tradition, and an alternative tradition of public democratic citizenship. Based on the second tradition, a set of values, attributes, and capacities is outlined that a public school should possess, as well as some ideal school practices for promoting these qualities in students. These ideal practices and citizenship qualities are used as a framework to guide a sample analysis of one particularly rich component (a video documentary class) of the curriculum of a democratic urban alternative high school. The findings should spark discussion, debate, and research into the kinds of curriculum and organizational features that progressive educators should and should not use to promote public democratic citizenship. (SLD)

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Studying the Democratic School: A Theoretically Framed, Qualitative Approach

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In recent years, numerous writers have taken up the call for "democratic education," or "critical" or "empowering education."[1] These theorists have contributed much to creating a "language of possibility for curriculum theory and practice," focusing particularly on the connections among educational, cultural and political theory.[2] It is important now to begin to connect more directly the language of possibility in theory with an emerging language of possibility in democratic educational practice. As Jesse Goodman puts it:

> What is needed is to build upon the language of possibility by developing an educational language of democratic imagery, that is, a theoretical language which is informed by and rooted in images of real (or hypothesized) people involved in tangible actions that take place in actual settings.[3]

There is a need for research that explores and analyzes the concrete curriculum and teaching practices, as well as the lived experiences of students and teachers, in schools which seek to provide democratic education. Ethnographic studies of such schools can make valuable contributions to our understanding of some of the curricular and organizational features which may help students develop into effective democratic citizens. However, ethnographies of democratic schooling cannot be interpreted as

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[1] To name just a few: M. Apple, Ideology and Curriculum (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); S. Aronowitz and H. Giroux, Education Under Siege (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) and Postmodern Education (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Giroux, Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life; J. Goodman, Elementary Schooling for Critical Democracy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); I. Shor, Critical Teaching and Everyday Life (Boston: South End Press, 1980) and Empowering Education (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992; K. Weiler, Women Teaching for Change (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1988.

[2] Aronowitz and Giroux, Education Under Siege, 154.

[3] Goodman, 173.

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merely self-referential, closed-system studies of the socially constructed cultures of individual schools. To attempt to interpret them in this way is to disassociate what goes on in schools from the larger culture and society.[4]

Instead, researchers of democratic education must take into account the ideological history that forms the basis of current understandings of democracy and citizenship. They must comprehend the larger context of ongoing struggles between historically dominant social understandings and practices of democracy in the United States, and alternative democratic conceptions and practices.

Within this context, researchers must determine what they, as well as the people in the schools they study, understand democratic citizenship to be. To assist in interpreting their findings in the democratic schools they study, researchers should develop a systematic description of the personal qualities and abilities an individual would need to function effectively as a democratic citizen.

Based on their own construction of an ideal of citizenship, researchers can formulate ideas on the types of educational practices that will help students develop the qualities necessary for effective citizenship. With clearly formulated ideas of democratic citizenship and democratic schooling in mind, researchers can systematically analyze the curriculum and teaching practices they find in schools which seek to promote democratic citizenship.

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[4] An example of this phenomenon: Jesse Goodman notes that Alan Peshkin's otherwise insightful ethnography of a fundamentalist Christian school, fails to make an important connection between what goes on in the school and the larger social and ideological context. The "study fails to illuminate the way in which the teachings of this school reflect the secular, conservative ideology that dominates our society, which in turn keeps current relations of power and privilege intact." See Goodman, 36, on A. Peshkin, God's Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986).

The present study, in the tradition of critical ethnography, demonstrates the development and employment of such a structured approach to the qualitative study of an urban alternative public high school which aspires to democratic education.[5] However, it should be emphasized that the structure or framework for analysis was not simply imposed a priori on the study. As is natural, the researcher went into the field with some general ideas about what constitutes democratic citizenship and democratic education. But a conscious effort was made to record students' and teachers' accounts of their school experiences as they saw and interpreted them in their own terms. Only after most of the field work was completed did the researcher begin to construct the theoretical framework for analyzing the school data. This was a dialectical process which drew both on focused readings of democratic and educational theory, and on insights provided by the school data, which forced important additions and modifications in the emerging theoretical framework, as new or more precise analytical categories suggested themselves.

This process produced an outline of some of the key qualities and abilities necessary for "public" democratic citizenship; and an outline of educational practices likely to promote students' development of these public democratic qualities and capacities. The outlines were then used as a set of categories for analyzing the observed curriculum and teaching practices, and student responses to them, at the school in the study.

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[5] This paper draws from field research and analysis conducted as part of a larger theoretical and qualitative research project focusing on democratic educational practices in two urban alternative high schools. The author spent one to two days a week at the school described in this paper, from January through June 1990, observing classes and staff meetings, and conducting informal interviews with students and teachers. A number of follow-up observations and interviews were conducted in the spring of 1991 as well. A fuller elaboration of theoretical arguments and sample analyses of various aspects of the curriculum and teaching practices of this school and another school will appear in D. Sehr, Education for Public Democracy (Albany: State University of New York Press, in press).

Because of space limitations, this paper employs its analytical tools on only one particularly rich component of the school's curriculum -- a video documentary class. Discussion of this class serves as an illustration of how the theoretical and analytical tools developed for this study can be used in the analysis of many aspects of the curriculum and teaching practices of democratic schools. It illustrates a way of reading ethnographies of democratic schooling which connects curriculum and teaching practice to a particular tradition of democratic ideas -- the tradition of public democracy.

The Historical Ideological Context: Competing Conceptions of Democratic Citizenship

Although there are perhaps as many differing conceptions of democratic citizenship in the United States as there are democratic theorists, it is possible to identify two major ideological strains which have been in conflict since the country's founding.

The first ideological tradition is a hegemonic one that sees democracy as a privately-oriented, individualistic system with little room for most people to participate in self-rule. This tradition is rooted in the political thought of Hobbes and Locke, the authors of the Federalist Papers, Adam Smith and the Utilitarian Liberals, and twentieth century American pluralist theorists and free market economists. The democratic conception that flows from this tradition minimizes the role of ordinary citizens as political actors who can shape their own individual and collective destiny through participation with others in public life. Instead, it reinforces an egoistic individualism, and a glorification of materialism and consumerism as the keys to personal happiness and fulfillment. Its faith in the powers of a "free market" of self-serving individuals, guided by an invisible hand of Providence, in the political as well as the economic realms, denies the possibility of collective efforts to serve a public good. It denies, in principal, that people can come together to govern themselves.

This hegemonic ideological tradition contributes to a distrust of all that is public. In American society in the 1990's, alienation from public life seems especially marked among young people. In a telling comment recorded in a focus group study conducted for People For the American Way, a social studies teacher sums up his students' attitudes toward involvement in community life in this way:

> My kids are going to look at [community involvement] and say, 'Well, that's not going to buy me a Gucci shirt.... What's in it for me?'[6]

Robert Bellah and his co-authors uncover and analyze similar attitudes among Americans about their connections to communities, institutions and public life.[7] Such attitudes are often characterized by "desire for private benefits at the expense of public provision."[8] These attitudes, which Bellah, et al. trace to "Lockean individualism," might be understood more simply as part of an ideology of irresponsible individualism. Irresponsible individualism contributes to, and helps justify, individual and collective immobilization in the face of the decay of the nation's economic infrastructure; the deterioration of our cities; mounting social inequality; heightening bias-related conflict stemming from racism, sexism and homophobia; and mushrooming violence in cities, suburbs and rural areas throughout the nation. It has exacerbated the centrifugal social forces that threaten to tear our society apart.

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[6] People For the American Way, Democracy's Next Generation. A Study of Youth and Teachers (Washington, D.C.: People For the American Way, 1989), 57.

[7] R. Bellah, R. Masden, W. Sullivan, A. Swidler, S. Tipton, Habits of the Heart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Bellah et al., The Good Society (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

[8] Bellah et al., The Good Society, 139.

In order to begin to confront the myriad social problems that the U.S. now faces, it will be necessary to challenge dominant, privatized, individualistic understandings of democracy and citizenship, and replace them with counter-hegemonic, publicly-oriented visions and practices of democratic citizenship. Such a "reinvigoration [of public life] is not an idealistic whim but the only realistic basis on which we can move ahead as a free people."[9]

An alternative ideological tradition provides a counter-hegemonic vision of democracy, grounded in the work of Rousseau, Jefferson, Dewey, Mills and several important feminist theorists such as Carol Gould, Nancy Fraser, Carole Pateman and Carol Gilligan. This ideological tradition of public democracy sees people's participation in public life as the essential ingredient in democratic government. In this view, public participation arises out of an ethic of care and responsibility, not only for oneself as an isolated individual, but for one's fellow citizens as co-builders and co-beneficiaries of the public good.

The struggle for a new democratic hegemony embraces both democratic ideology and political practice. Since education is a key institution for social and ideological reproduction, as well as resistance, schools become sites of ideological and political struggle.[10] When our educational system is allowed to contribute to reproducing the current hegemonic democratic ideologies,

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[9] Ibid., 141.

> ...schools produce spectators, not citizens. We are trained to watch and observe, to drop our franchise in a box, to support interest groups, and to seek private satisfaction while shunning the public world.[11]

But schools can become crucial institutions for helping young people begin to question and challenge hegemonic notions of democracy. Progressive educators can gain control of their schools and remake them into sites of experience and learning which support counter-hegemonic visions of democracy. Such schools can help young people develop the values, attributes and capacities necessary for public democratic citizenship.

Drawing on the work of theorists in the public democratic tradition, what follows is a (non-exhaustive) inventory of some of the key personal qualities and capacities that would be required for an individual to function as an effective public democratic citizen.

Values, Attributes and Capacities Needed for Public Democratic Citizenship

1) An ethic of care and responsibility as a foundation for community and public life[12]

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[10] This argument has been made by numerous theorists, foremost among whom are A. Gramsci, in Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (editors and translators), (New York: International Publishers, 1971); and L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)," in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-186. Among the many more recent theorists to take up this argument are H. Giroux, Theory and Resistance in Education (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1983); and P. Willis, Learning to Labor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[11] George H. Wood, Schools That Work (New York: Dutton, 1992), 80.

[12] This concept is drawn from the work of C. Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); J. Tronto, "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care," in Signs, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1987; and M. Belenky, B. Clinchy, N. Goldberger, and J. Tarule, Women's Ways of Knowing: The

- a) understanding of the interdependence of people as "individuals-in-relations"[13]
- b) understanding of the need for individuals to live as responsible members of communities

2) Respect for the equal right of everyone to the conditions necessary for their self-development as individuals-in-relations[14]
- a) a sense of justice based on that right
- b) principles of equal individual civil and political rights, and equal political power and voice, within context of a publicly-oriented concept of democracy, in which the rights of individuals are balanced by their responsibilities to the larger community.
- c) acceptance of the fundamental equality of members of all social groups in society, including that of social groups other than one's own.
    1. acceptance of a person or a group's right to be different from oneself, or from the accepted norms and values of the community, as long as they don't threaten the equal rights of other community members

3) appreciation of the importance of the public[15]
- a) appreciating need to participate in public discussion and debate, and to take action to address public issues
- b) recognizing need to expand and create new public spheres as sites for discussion and debate of public issues
- c) understanding public nature of certain "personal" problems

4) A critical/analytical social outlook[16]
- a) habits of examining critically the nature of social

Development of Self, Voice, and Mind (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

[13] C. Gould, Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economics and Society, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[14] Ibid.

[15] John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1988, orig. 1927); C. W. Mills, Power, Politics and People, ed. I. L. Horowitz, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963); C. W. Mills, The Sociological Imagination, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in Social Text, No. 25/26, 1990.

[16] Mills, Power, Politics and People, 367-373; Giroux, Schooling and the Struggle for a Public Life, 155-161.

reality, including the "common sense" realities of everyday life
- b) habits of examining underlying relations of power in any given social situation.

5) The capacities necessary for public democratic participation
- a) analysis of written, spoken and image language[17]
- b) clear oral and written expression of one's ideas
- c) habits of active listening as a key to communication
- d) facility in working collaboratively with others
- e) knowledge of U.S. constitutional rights and political processes
- f) knowledge of some of complexities and inter-connections of major public issues to each other and to issues in the past
- g) knowledge of how to learn more about any important issue or set of issues that arises
- h) self-confidence, self-reliance and ability to act independently (within context of community)

Political learning or "socialization" as it takes place in schools is a negotiated social process.[18] Thus even if a school takes seriously the task of preparing students for democratic citizenship, and designs its programs around this goal, it will have little success unless students are fully engaged in the schools' educational program. Democratic education must be organized and practiced in ways that involve students actively in their work and their school life. Fred Newmann has suggested a set of school characteristics that are likely to enhance student engagement in academic work.[19] Although Newmann is interested in student engagement in academic work generally, the organizational principles he suggests for schools are also applicable to the task of engaging students in school work and experiences that specifically promote democratic thinking and action. The list below draws on some of the principle school characteristics identified by Newmann for promoting student engagement in school life.

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[17] Stewart Ewen contends that images in mass culture are "a prime way ideas get expressed in our society." Control of images constitutes "a form of power." Consequently, the ability to analyze images is also an important form of power. Stuart Ewen, lecture, the City University of New York Graduate Center, May 9, 1991.

[18] William Wentworth, Context and Understanding. (NY: Elsevier North Holland, Inc., 1980), 108, 134.

[19] F. Newmann, G. Wehlage, and S. Lamborn, "Significance and Sources of Student Engagement," in F. Newmann (ed.) Student Engagement and Achievement in American Secondary Schools (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992.)

Characteristics of School Life Likely to Engage Students in a School's Programs

1) Schools should create an atmosphere in which students feel a sense of belonging or membership in the school community.

2) Schools should make sure that students are safe, not only physically, but also emotionally/psychologically safe enough to express themselves, try new things and risk making mistakes without fear of embarrassment.

3) School work should have intrinsic interest for students.

4) School work should be meaningful not only within the school and for school purposes, but also in the real world outside school.

5) Schools should create conditions that give students a sense of ownership of them.

If students are engaged in a school's educational programs, there are a number of approaches to curriculum and teaching that the school can take to nurture in students the public democratic citizenship qualities discussed above. The following list provides some general guidelines for the kinds of school practices that will promote public democratic qualities and competencies in young citizens.

School Practices of Ideal-Typical Secondary School for Nurturing Public Democratic Values and Attributes

1) Create opportunities for students to explore their interdependence with others, both through study and through experiential learning.

2) Promote study of the concept of community, and the experience of publicly-oriented community service.

3) Encourage study of cultural diversity in students' own school, local and national communities

4) Encourage students to examine and evaluate critically the social reality in which they live

5) Develop students' capacities for public democratic participation through experiential learning in school decision making processes.

Having enumerated several school characteristics that would be likely to engage students, as well as a series of school practices that an ideal-typical secondary school might use to nurture public democratic values and capacities in young people, it is possible to begin to analyze the curriculum and teaching practices of a school which aspires to democratic education. But before entering into the analysis, it will be useful to provide some brief background information about the school in the study--Uptown High School.

Uptown High School

The school in this study is located in a large city in the Eastern U.S. In order to protect the identities of the teachers, administrators and students in the study, their names, the school's name, and the name of the city in which the field research was conducted, have all been changed. In this paper, the school will be called Uptown High School, and the city, simply Urbantown. This study does not attempt to construct a complete description and analysis of the culture of the school, as might done in a traditional ethnographic study. Instead, it simply offers a demonstration of a method of analyzing one especially rich component of the school's curriculum -- a video documentary class.

Uptown High School is an alternative public high school in a low income and working class, Latino and African American neighborhood. Uptown High School's students are drawn primarily from the surrounding community, with only twenty-five percent coming from outside the neighborhood surrounding the school. Almost half come to Uptown High School from one of several local alternative public elementary schools. The Uptown H. S. student body is 43 percent African American, 37 percent Latino, and 20 percent European American or Asian.

Uptown is a small high school, with about 450 students in all. It is organized into three divisions or "schools": the Lower School comprises the seventh and eighth grades; the Middle School is the ninth and tenth grades; and the Upper School is comprised of the eleventh and twelfth grades. When I began the study in January of 1990, the school encompassed grades 7-11. The first seniors graduated in June of 1991.

During the 1989-1990 school year Uptown High School had a staff of about forty teachers. The teaching staff had about 20 each men and women, and was approximately 69 percent European American, 21 percent African American and 10 percent Latino. Some teachers had many years experience in Urbantown public schools. A number of others had been recruited from teaching in respected, progressive private schools. Upon taking teaching positions at Uptown H.S., all the teachers made a commitment to dedicate themselves to the formidable task of helping create and run the school, from curriculum design to teaching to administrative decision making.

According to curriculum documents and published comments by the principal, Uptown High seeks to educate its students for both personal intellectual development and for empowered public action. The latter goal is expressed in the principal's statement that Uptown High School is working "to create powerful participants in society, active citizens." The fact that Uptown High School serves an inner-city population of young people of color makes it an especially important case. If it is indeed able to provide an effective public democratic education to these students, it will be opening a new door to these members of traditionally disenfranchised groups -- the door to empowered citizenship.

Sample Analysis of One Component of Uptown High School's Curriculum and Teaching Practice

For analytical clarity, the list of school characteristics that promote student engagement has been compiled separately from the list of school practices that nurture public democratic values, attributes and capacities. However, this is something of a false distinction. Several of the school characteristics that enhance student engagement lead naturally to democratic educational practices, just as many school practices that promote democratic thinking and action are by their nature highly engaging to students.

So even though the discussion starts with the characteristics of Uptown H.S. that are likely to encourage student engagement, the discussion often flows directly into an analysis of school practices that nurture public democratic values, attributes and capacities. Such a blending of analytical categories becomes inevitable as soon as one looks at snippets of real life in the school, drawn from field notes on classroom activities and discussions, as well as conversations with students and teachers. Because of the amount of blending between the categories of school characteristics that enhance student engagement and school practices that promote public democratic values and capacities, the complete list of ideal school practices is not dealt with systematically and separately. Rather, democratic school practices are handled as they arise in the discussion of school characteristics that encourage student engagement in school life.

Student Engagement: Intrinsic Interest, Real World Meaning and Student Ownership

At Uptown H.S. many of the classes and much student work were characterized by high levels of intrinsic interest for students, real world meaning, and some degree of student ownership and control. The video documentary class in the Upper School is one class that combined these elements to create a highly engaging experience for students. During the first half of the semester students learned the video production process -- from use of cameras, lighting and sound equipment to editing a final product -- by doing a couple of small video projects based in the school. The class I observed had done short documentaries on how Upper School advanced students feel about their upcoming graduation; and about how Uptown H.S. students and staff feel about an unpopular school dress code rule, the "no hats" rule.

The second half of the term was devoted to creating students' semester projects. The semester project has to be a documentary on a social issue that involves some sort of debate or controversy. The spring, 1991 semester topic was rap music -- its effects on young people, whether there should be censorship of obscene lyrics, sexism in rap, and whether rap artists have a responsibility to "send out positive messages."

Kevin Johnson, the video teacher, offered me some of his thoughts on the project and what he wanted students to get out of it.

> Kevin: Students choose the project topic. It's a democratic process. I didn't think this rap topic was the best one, but that's what they wanted to do. And it has some real possibilities.... I want to have them use people as resources. I want them to talk with experts and learn from

them. That way they can get right out and start taping interviews.

DS: Oh, so this isn't just going to be a public opinion kind of thing?

Kevin: No. I think there's a danger in doing that, going out and taping just anyone's opinion. I want this to be a documentary. I want them to talk with experts and really present some thoughtful ideas. Not that I want them to think students and regular people don't have anything to say. But I want them to learn that there are people out there who have really thought about this a lot, and worked on it. They'll be interviewing people like [a writer for a local arts newspaper who's written a lot on rap music]. And maybe members of the Parents' Music Resource Center....[20] I want them to learn to use people as resources.[21]

On the first day the video class was observed, they were just getting started on video-taping. Although the intention was to solicit the views of "experts" on rap music and its influence on young people, the students felt that they should start with interviews of their fellow students. They developed the following four-question interview guide to use with Uptown H.S. students:

1) What kind of influence does rap music have on you or on people in general?
2) Do you think musicians have the responsibility to send out positive messages?
3) What kind of thoughts run through your mind when you listen to songs with explicit lyrics? Should these lyrics be allowed?
4) Do you think songs like "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" affect the way women are treated?

The class divided into two video crews, got their equipment together and headed out into the halls. Students took turns doing the three different roles on the interview crew -- interviewer (holding microphone), camera person and sound monitor

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[20] This refers to the group that created and publicized a warning label system to be used on recordings that have sexually explicit lyrics. This group was organized under the leadership of Tipper Gore, wife of Vice President Al Gore.

[21] Field Notes, 4/11/91.

(wearing earphones). Below are excerpts from the answers students gave to the interview questions.

Q1: (influence of rap music)
Tammie (African American female): Yes. It has an influence, mostly on guys. They see how rappers dress and they wanna dress like them....
Q3:(Should explicit lyrics be allowed?)
Tammie: [She talks about the labels they now put on tapes, records and CD's if they are judged to be too explicit.] But it doesn't stop anybody from buying them. It probably just makes them more interested.
Q4: (Does "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" affect treatment of women?)
Tammie: I think a lot of factors contribute to the way guys treat women. It's not rap music that makes them treat women bad [or good]. It's the way they're brought up.

....

Q2: (Do musicians have responsibility to send out positive messages?)
Mark (African American male): Yeah, because they might influence people.
Q3:(Should explicit lyrics be allowed?)
Mark: I guess. It's all about freedom of speech.

Q1: (influence of rap music)
Andrew (White male): Well, I write songs. So I think it influences you.
Q2: (Do musicians have responsibility to send out positive messages?)
Andrew: I think musicians should send out a message, but not necessarily a positive one....
Q4: (Does "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" affect treatment of women?)
Andrew: I personally wouldn't write lyrics that are degrading. But if a person is going to go out and rape someone after hearing a song, they're already screwed up.

Q1: (influence of rap music)
Kevin (African American male): Yeah, some. There are different kinds of artists. Some talk about girls, some are political. I listen to all kinds....
Q2: (Do musicians have responsibility to send out positive messages?)
Kevin: Yes. Some use it as a tool to get a point across.
Q3: (Should explicit lyrics be allowed?)
Kevin: You mean pertaining to the First Amendment? Well some kids are too young. They hear about 2 Live Crew and they don't know what they're about. But they hear about them. So they go out and buy the tape.
Q4: (Does "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" affect treatment of women?)
Kevin: Myself, it doesn't affect me. I already have my mind made up.

....

Q3: (Should explicit lyrics be allowed?)
Eduardo (Latino male): Well, the Constitution says free speech is allowed. So they should be able to say what they want.
Q4: (Does "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" affect treatment of women?)
Eduardo: Yeah, I think it does. I think it degrades them. Like [gives name of a popular rapper], he says degrading things about women on one side. But on the other side he says "upgrade the race." It's a contradiction.[22]

Based on the above description it is clear that the video documentary class at Uptown H.S. fulfills three of the characteristics that encourage young people to become engaged in their school life. In focusing on the influence of rap music on young people, it deals with issues that are meaningful in the real world, and indeed are connected to students' own experience and knowledge as participants in urban youth culture. The semester video project is also of great interest to the students, for in fact it was selected by them. Their ability to choose the topic, decide whom to interview, develop interview questions and retain ultimate editorial control over the final product, all contribute to a strong sense of ownership of the video project.

Students appeared to be engaged in the project. For example, on the day they interviewed other Uptown H.S. students, each student participated in some phase of the interviewing process, as well as in a technical critique session back in the classroom during the last half hour of the class.

In observing the student video crews roam the school's halls in search of interview subjects, another type of ownership was apparent. The students seemed to "own" the halls and rooms of the school. They were totally at ease walking in and out of open classrooms (where classes were not going on), down the corridors, stopping briefly to talk to fellow students who were out of their classes on breaks, in travel to the library, the bathroom, or some other destination, or perhaps on free periods. Teachers and staff members did not stop the student video teams, nor the other students for that matter, to ask for passes or for explanations of where they were "supposed to be," as is commonplace in other schools. And although the halls were not exactly quiet, they were also not particularly noisy or chaotic, and certainly did not feel in any way threatening. This situation of "disorderly orderliness" can perhaps be attributed to the school's small size, and to some combination of other organizational factors which lead to an overall sense of membership and safety in the school.

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[22] Field Notes, 4/11/91.

The semester project investigation of the influence of rap music on young people provides an excellent illustration of one of the ideal secondary school practices for nurturing democratic values and attributes in young people. It leads students into a critical examination of the social reality in which they live. The fact that the students chose this topic shows that they are already beginning to develop a critical social outlook, an essential attribute of citizens in a public democracy.

The questions students developed for interviewing their schoolmates place them, and the interviewees, face-to-face with several vital social issues. For example, the first question on the influence of rap music on students, and the fourth, on whether a particularly misogynistic song affects the way men treat women, both seek to examine the power of popular culture in society. The second question, whether musicians have a responsibility to send out positive messages, raises the issue of one's responsibility to a community or society. This can lead, in turn, to consideration of the need for an ethic of care and responsibility, a necessary foundation of public democratic citizenship. The third question, whether explicit or obscene lyrics should be allowed, opens up the whole issue of the relationship between individual freedom of expression and the common or social good, and the extent or limits of social power to enforce a perceived social good.

The answers students gave to these questions are also worth examining, even though they are by no means a scientific sample of the views of Uptown H.S. students. The three affirmative answers to question one point to at least some recognition among Uptown H.S. students that popular culture may have an influence on social life. Yet this is balanced by their responses to the fourth question, which demonstrate some understanding of the complexity of this relationship. The four negative answers to the question about the effect of a song on the treatment of women, all indicate that these students do not see a simplistic cause and effect relationship between a particular song and men's attitudes toward women. Even Eduardo's positive answer doesn't claim that the song causes men to act in a certain way. He simply says the song degrades women, an assumption made by all the respondents. The implication of all their answers is that they feel that the influence of popular culture works as one part of a complex set of forces to influence individual actions.

Student answers to the second question offer no clear pattern, with two saying musicians do have a responsibility to produce positive messages, and one saying they don't, while the answers of the other two students were not recorded. However, student responses to the third question on whether explicit lyrics should be allowed are revealing, but not for the specific positions the students took. Of the four whose answers I have recorded, three students made specific reference to the question's connection to the Constitution, the First Amendment or freedom of speech. It was significant that they did not simply say, "this is a free country," but that they had some awareness of the foundation in the Constitution of the specific freedom in question. Some knowledge of Constitutional structures and protections is one of the minimal capacities necessary for public democratic citizenship.

The process of producing the video documentary projects is itself a valuable educational exercise for preparing young people for public citizenship. Doing group research on a public issue, identifying activists and experts on the issue, developing interview questions and conducting interviews, all offer students opportunities to analyze written, spoken and image language, practice active listening skills, develop their ability to work collaboratively with others, and gain an understanding of the complexities of a major public issue. These are all capacities that are necessary for public democratic participation. In addition, the experience students get in the technical aspects of video production, from taping to editing to manipulation of the sound track (adding music, voice-overs, etc.) helps to demystify TV for students. It contributes to a critical understanding among students of how professional documentaries and news reports are made, and the degree to which ideological and political decisions play a role at every step in the process. Once students gain this critical understanding of video production, they will never again view TV news, documentaries or interviews with passivity and naive acceptance.

The experiences students had in Kevin's video class seemed to embody many of the ideal organizational features and teaching practices that should lead to high levels of student engagement and the development in students of many of the values, attributes and capacities necessary for public democratic citizenship. Because students chose their own video project topics, and often interviewed the students and staff of Uptown H.S. in at least one part of their projects, the class and its video products served as a window into students' views on issues they considered important. An excellent example of how this worked can be seen in the story of the "No Hats" video.

The "No Hats" Rule

On the way to a record, tape and CD store where the video class was to do some taped interviews with customers for their project, the following conversation took place:

> [Gail and Monica are Upper School students, Latina and African American, respectively, in the video class. I asked them about their first video project for this class. They told me there was one on the school's dress code -- the "no hat" rule. Note: Uptown H. S. students are officially prohibited from wearing hats in the school building. My own impression is that the rule is inconsistently enforced.]
>
> DS: I've never understood that rule. What's it for?
>
> Gail: I don't know. I guess it's because -- I don't know. You know, this is supposed to be such an alternative place and everything, but then they have the same rules as all the other schools....

Monica: And they want us to protest and all....
[She tells of teachers urging students to go to yesterday's student demonstration against education cutbacks at City Hall. She points out the irony that teachers want students to be critical and to be activists, yet also want them to conform to a silly dress code.]

DS: What did you do for that video project?

Gail: We interviewed teachers and students about the hat rule.

DS: What did the teachers say?

Gail: Mostly that they don't like it either, but it's a rule.

DS: What did the students you interviewed say?

Gail: Against it! Nobody likes the rule.

[I asked if they ever protested anything in the school, against any school policies. They said something about one day when everybody wore hats as a protest. But nothing came of it.][23]

This conversation provided several important pieces of information. First, it called attention to a school issue which was important enough to students that they chose it as a topic for their first short video documentary. Second, it demonstrated that however happy Gail and Monica may have been with the school overall, they also harbored a certain frustration with the contradiction between what the school said it wanted them to be outside of school -- critical and active citizens -- and what it seemed to want them to be inside of school-- acquiescent and passive students, at least when it came to certain school rules. Third, it indicated that there was a student-made video that could provide a set of brief taped student and teacher interviews on the issue.

Below are notes from a viewing of the five minute tape.

Narrator: [This video explores students' and teachers' views on the hat rule.] By the end of this video, you the people of Uptown H.S. should be able to determine whether the rule is a valid one.

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[23] Field notes, 4/25/91.

African American male student: I think the rule should be changed.

Mike [white teacher]: What do I think, personally? Probably it wouldn't matter to me.

Joe [African American student interviewer, wearing baseball cap]: What is the big deal on guys and girls wearing hats in school?

Jean Summers [Upper School Director, African American female]: I felt it was important because, especially young black males are often judged on the basis of how they look. And because in the larger society, wearing a hat inside of a building connotes respect or disrespect, you all needed to have some consciousness about that. To make yourselves consciously aware of that, one way would be to make you all take your hats off, so that it would be an automatic response or reflex when you go into other places, in which you want to make an impression, if you want to go on a job interview etc., etc.

[Cut to interview with African American male student.]

Joe: I see you have the Jamaican colors on [referring to the green, yellow and red baseball cap the student is wearing]. Is that to be cultural, I mean, why do you have your hat on? Are you doing this just to disobey the rules?
Ron: Well I'm one of those people you can call a rebel. I really don't feel that the rule is one that I want to follow, so I go against it....

Joe: [Says something, cut off on tape, about getting together with other students to try to change the rule.]

Ron: Well, from my experience in this school, I see that a lot of rules cannot be changed no matter what people try to do, including students. I feel that there's no need for me to try to get together with other students and make a change because there will be no change. And being that I'm gonna be leaving quite soon, I'll just be a rebel for the rest of the time and continue to wear my hat....

[In another interview Amy, an African American female student says she doesn't think students should wear hats in school.]

Amy: Well honestly, as a growing up adult, teaching you, preparing you for life, guys shouldn't wear hats. It's like a general rule....If you're going to be in a working environment, you have to learn how to follow rules and regulations.

Joe: Do you think that it should be different for a male and female? Should they both have to take their hats off inside?

Amy: Yeah. Both should have to take off their hats.... Everything should be equal for everybody....

[Note: Amy looks very much like a "growing up adult." She has a very put-together look, with her fashionable black pants suit, silver earrings and a stylish red and black leather hat. Joe, the interviewer, is wearing a baseball cap. His friend, who stands next to him during the interview, also has a hat on.]

[The video ends with several cuts to students commenting on the no hat rule.]

Students: It sucks!
Bullshit!
Keep rockin' your hats!
That's the nineties.
[Student grabs the mike from interviewer and says]:
Yeah, for the 90's. 'Cause that's the only way we're gonna' change things around here.
[Then he turns and points right into the camera and shouts]:
Suckers! Fresh! For '91!
[End of video.]

Reflecting upon teacher and student comments about the hat rule in the video and in private conversations, and upon enforcement of the rule, the hat issue, silly as it might seem, becomes a window into a serious set of problems with Uptown High School's program for public democratic citizenship preparation.

The two teachers seen in the video had differing views on the no hat rule. The first indicated no personal investment in the rule. The second supported it strongly enough that she at least made an effort to give a rationale for the rule. Yet among the faculty overall, there was no strong commitment on the part of the faculty to enforce the hat rule consistently.

The number of students wearing hats in the video was no doubt a function of the "freedom of hats" sentiment of the video team. However, it is true that many, many students did wear hats regularly in the halls and even in classrooms. Teachers and the principal often asked students to remove their hats, and students usually complied. But often teachers failed to ask. And if they did ask, students tended to take their hats off for a while, and then put them back on later; certainly they put hats back on when they left the room at the end of class. Students were fighting a guerilla war of style against a dress code that had been imposed on them by the teaching staff. And although the teachers were not fully united in their resolve to win the war, they also did not want to give up the principle that they had the exclusive right to impose rules (with the noblest intentions) on their young charges, the students.

Maria Landon, the principal, was aware of this contradiction, and wanted it resolved. At a staff meeting back in January 1990, she brought the issue to the teachers' attention. She asked the faculty to vote to establish a student/parent committee to make rules on such issues as student dress code, gum chewing, and use of radios in school. After some discussion and debate, the teachers voted solidly against creating such a committee. They were not willing to delegate any of their rule-making authority to students and/or parents, even on an issue such as dress code.][24]

The crucial point here is this: students had no institutionalized power over how the school was run. In fact, during the period of this field research, there was no student government of any kind at Uptown H.S. As one teacher explained it, "Helen (one of the teachers) tried to organize one with students last year, but no students turned out to a meeting. Since the administration wasn't too keen on the idea anyway, the idea died."[25] Thus students had no formal authority to make or to change rules and regulations that affected their school lives.

This played itself out on a specific issue such as the hat rule in the following manner. Based on the video and on observations and discussions with students, it seems that most

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[24] Field Notes, 1/22/90.

[25] Field Notes, 1/29/90.

Uptown H.S. students were against the no hat rule. According to Gail and Monica, they tried to organize against the rule by holding a one-day protest, for which everyone wore a hat to school. But nothing came of it. Since the students had no institutionalized power, and their attempt at creating organized, public power through protest seemed to fail, they fell back to a reliance on personal power -- the power of individual resistance. This dynamic could hardly have been articulated more clearly than it was in Ron's statement in the video: "I feel that there's no need for me to try to get together with other students and make a change because there will be no change.... [So] I'll just be a rebel for the rest of the time and continue to wear my hat."

The implications of forcing students into positions of individual resistance to a school rule are of much greater consequence than whether students ultimately wear hats in school or not. The real significance of the issue is that when students are forced into personal resistance, it reinforces in them a certain cynicism about public democratic activity. It tells students public action is futile: Don't bother. Private action is the answer. Withdraw from public life. Just resist. Wear your hat. Exercise your personal freedom. But leave the public world and the power structure intact. Students' growing cynicism about public action, and their resigned reliance on personal resistance, reinforce the hegemonic ideologies and practices of privatized citizenship.

It can be said that individual resistance is itself an expression of a kind of power. But it is a power that is diffuse, spontaneous and fleeting. And as Ron, Gail and Monica's attitudes show, resistance can take on a tone of frustrated resignation. Although individual resistance has the potential to spark organized resistance and lead to formal power, this occurs only under rare conditions. It is at least as likely, when people experience a sense of resignation in the face of a continued lack of power, that resistance will erode or become coopted. In the video, Amy exemplifies this process. Although she resists the hat rule by wearing her hat, she has already internalized the official rationale for the rule. Her position could have come right out of Jean Summers' mouth: "...guys shouldn't wear hats. It's like a general rule....If you're going to be in a working environment, you have to learn how to follow rules and regulations." Amy's resistance is just a step away from desistance.

From the perspective of the analytical categories I have been using on the schools in this study, the fact that students at Uptown H.S. have so little control over school rules imposes a serious limitation on their ability to develop a sense of ownership of their school. It also means that the school fails to employ one of the most important school practices for preparing students for public democratic citizenship -- meaningful participation of students in school governance.

Uptown H.S. students may feel quite safe and comfortable and "at home" walking the corridors of the building. And in many of their classes they may have a high degree of control over the shape and specific content of the work they do. These factors can both contribute to a sense of student ownership of their school. Nevertheless, the lack of a student voice in school governance can lead potentially to resentment of school authority, the formation of oppositional student cultures and the eventual disengagement or resistance of students to the official school agenda.

I do not mean to detract from the many accomplishments of Uptown H.S., nor to minimize the strides it has taken to encourage students to become critical thinkers, and to develop public democratic values and capacities. But it is possible that precisely because of such accomplishments, Uptown H.S. runs a greater risk than other schools of alienating some of its students if it fails to incorporate them into the school governance process.

Warning signals could be heard in the words of Gail and Monica. They both felt that the school should be held to a higher standard than other schools, just as it expects more of them than other schools expect of their students. For Gail, Uptown H.S. "is supposed to be such an alternative place...." Monica notes that "they want us to protest and all..." Both of these students perceived that Uptown H.S.'s agenda had something to do with getting them to be thoughtful social and political actors. Therefore the school's apparent disregard for student concerns on an issue that affected their daily lives such as the no hat rule was seen as an especially blatant contradiction.

It is not that Uptown H.S. students were on the verge of rebellion. On the contrary, students for the most part spoke positively of their overall school experience. Nevertheless, the lack of organized, school-sanctioned student participation in governance is important for two reasons. First, it has the potential to erode students' sense of ownership of their school, and thereby detract from their willingness to become fully engaged in their school's educational project. Second, excluding students from school governance means missing an opportunity to employ one of the key ideal practices for nurturing public democratic values and capacities in young people. It means forfeiting a chance for students to develop, through personal experience, their understanding of democratic processes and their capacities for democratic participation.

Conclusion

This paper has as its starting point the need for educational research to begin to connect the language of possibility in critical educational theory to an emerging language of possibility in democratic educational practice. It is important to learn from the experience of schools which seek to promote democratic citizenship, by examining closely their curriculum and teaching practices, including the hidden curriculum of school organization and social relations. Qualitative field research can be especially useful in exploring the lived experience of students and educators in democratic schools. Studies which take on this project help create a "language of democratic imagery" that progressive administrators and teachers can draw upon as they work to create democratic schools in their own communities.

However, this paper argues that when it comes to analyzing the data generated by qualitative research in democratic schools, it is not enough merely to examine these schools on their own terms. Democratic educational theorists and researchers must establish more precisely what they mean by democratic citizenship and democratic education, within the context of historically competing discourses of U.S. citizenship. Otherwise research on democratic education has no clear connection with current struggles over socially dominant understandings and practices of democratic citizenship.

This paper has identified two major competing democratic ideological traditions that have struggled to shape the understandings and practices of U.S. democratic citizenship: a dominant, privately-oriented citizenship tradition and an alternative tradition of public democratic citizenship. Based on the second tradition, the paper outlines a set of values, attributes and capacities that a public democratic citizen should possess. It then outlines some ideal school practices for promoting these qualities in students. The paper uses these ideal school practices and citizenship qualities as a framework to guide a sample analysis of one particularly rich component (a video documentary class) of the curriculum of a democratic urban alternative high school. The findings from the research should spark discussion and debate about the kinds of curriculum and organizational features progressive educators should and should not employ to promote public democratic citizenship.

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Abstract

Studying the Democratic School: A Theoretically Framed, Qualitative Approach

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This paper responds to the need for research that begins to connect the language of possibility in critical educational theory with an emerging language of possibility in democratic educational practice.

It identifies two major competing democratic ideological traditions that have struggled to shape the understandings and practices of U.S. democratic citizenship: a dominant, privately-oriented citizenship tradition and an alternative tradition of public democratic citizenship. Based on the second tradition, the paper outlines a set of values, attributes and capacities that a public democratic citizen should possess, as well as some ideal school practices for promoting these qualities in students.

The paper uses these ideal school practices and citizenship qualities as a framework to guide a sample analysis of one particularly rich component (a video documentary class) of the curriculum of a democratic urban alternative high school. The findings from the research should spark discussion, debate and further research into the kinds of curriculum and organizational features progressive educators should and should not employ to promote public democratic citizenship.