Democracy & Education

Refocusing the Agenda of Public Education

District Mission Statements and the Manners of Democracy as a Way of Life

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Abstract

Mission statements and public statements of values are widely recognized as important for educational improvement, even if often ignored. The mission statements and supporting documents of Utah's 41 school districts were analyzed to locate prominent themes and significant omissions. An unexpected and disturbing neglect of democratic citizenship aims was found. Recognizing democracy is a complex educational ideal, the author argues for refocusing mission aims on the distinctive qualities of democracy as a way of life to be lived in schools by identifying for both modeling and practice across the curriculum the distinctive manners of democracy beginning with but moving beyond voice and listening.

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A few days after the January 6 insurrection in Washington, D.C., Kristi Noem, governor of South Dakota and a darling of the far right, located the cause in failed public education. "Today," she wrote, "we have an opportunity to address the root cause of this problem: we must reform Americans' civic education" (Noem, 2021). She went on to say that students need to be "taught our nation's history and all that makes America unique." Social studies teachers need better preparation, she said, and better curriculum materials and she promised $900,000 to support the initiative. A few months earlier, the Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship (CPDC), established by the National Academy of the Arts and Sciences, released its report, *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century*. The report followed deliberation by CPDC members of the results of "nearly fifty deep listening sessions with citizens in diverse communities around the country" (Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship, CPDC, 2020, p. 5). Both documents represent responses to the growing concern for the health of American democracy but represent very different takes on what can and should be done.

This article grew out of my response to reading the governor's statement and the CPDC report, among other related materials (e.g., Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021). As an educator, I was not surprised by Governor Noem's attack. She is not alone in blaming schoolteachers for America's civic challenges. *Public schooling* has

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long been understood as holding fundamental citizenship responsibilities, a view championed by Horace Mann (see Messerli, 1972). But over time, other social institutions have jettisoned their educational responsibilities so that virtually every social problem imaginable is now understood to be a problem for schools to fix. *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), for example, made public schools responsible for winning (or losing) the international economic competition with Japan. Goals 2000 promised that by 2000 every school would be free of illegal drugs and violence (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). And the trend continues. With expectations that reach well beyond the redemptive powers of even the most skilled and hardest working teachers and the best of schools, inevitably disappointment and sometimes disillusionment follows. Disillusionment with public schooling has been channeled to support school choice and the privatization of education for profit (see Schneider, 2016).

Recognizing the challenges of democratic citizenship as part of larger, insistent, institutional, economic, political, and cultural concerns, in contrast to the governor's civics beliefs and plan, the CPDC (2020) offers six wide-ranging strategies to "Empower Voters," "Ensure the Responsiveness of Political Institutions," and inspire a "Culture of Commitment to American Constitutional Democracy and One Another" (pp. 20–57). Remarkably, the CPDC report failed to mention public schooling. In the commission's view, as part of the "civic infrastructure," schools, like parks, libraries, churches, and museums, have value because they "bring people together in their communities" where they develop "social capital" (pp. 48–49). Accordingly, schools, not necessarily public schools, have value for community building, but it seems that in the CPDC's view, public education has little if any particular significance or unique responsibility for "reinventing American democracy." I could not help but contrast this view with that of Benjamin Barber (1998), a political scientist, when he wrote: "The logic of democracy begins with public education, proceeds to informed citizenship, and comes to fruition in the securing of rights and liberties" (p. 220).

The Study

School District Mission and Vision Statements

Considering Barber's (1998) comment in relationship to the neglect of public schooling in *Our Common Purpose* and to Governor Noem's charge that the events in Washington, D.C., were caused by failed civics education in public schools, I wondered, how are the public purposes of public education currently understood? And: Is the strengthening of democracy a recognized and valued aim as Barber suggests it ought to be? Because virtually every school district has a public mission statement, usually coupled with some sort of vision statement, both typically produced by school board members, sometimes with expanded public participation, the analysis of these documents seemed to be a promising way to address these questions. As Schafft and Biddle (2013) suggested, mission statements

> *represent a valuable source of data for understanding the way in which educational leadership articulates the purpose of schooling and how that articulation may be affected by a variety of factors including the local contexts of school districts and communities, as well as the broader institutional discourses around education. (p. 57)*

For this study, the mission statements of the 41 public school districts of Utah responsible for educating the state's roughly 600,000 students and, when available, related vision and goal statements, were analyzed. The districts vary in size from a small rural district serving about 200 students to a large urban district serving nearly 80,000 K–12 students. Most of the mission statements and related documents were located following a series of web searches. Materials for two districts proved elusive, so requests were made directly to the superintendents.

Ubiquitous within educational organizations, mission statements answer the question of why an organization exists. Vision statements offer a picture of what a school or district should be (see Ingle et al., 2020). Whether speaking of business, government, or education, generally mission statements are understood to capture "the core purpose . . . the core philosophy and values . . . and the core competencies" of an organization (Davis et al., 2007, p. 101; see also Allen et al., 2018).

Although often unnoticed (Gurley et al., 2015), mission statements are widely recognized as important for organizational improvement.

> *The crafting of mission statements, vision statements and improvement plans without thought, strategy and intentionality is akin to raising a sail on a ship without any thought to existing conditions or destination; it is like saying,* we have a sail, so just raise it. *One may reach a favorable destination by chance, but getting lost, running aground, or crashing on the rocks are more likely outcomes. (Ingle et al., 2020, p. 335)*

Additionally, those who require and those who produce mission statements and their supporting vision statements understand they are normative and serve an institutional legitimating function (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Understood by policymakers as a credo essential to institutional health and vitality, justification depends on how compelling the aims and vision offered are found to be, how they resonate with and support personal as well as common valued goods. To be powerful, the claims that flow from the credo must also be recognized as legitimate, not only responsive but also achievable. More than merely a marketing tool, mission statements, even when poorly conceived, represent a moral claim, that of all the possible reasons for being, those stated in the document matter most educationally. As such, mission and vision statements ought to be taken as seriously by both producers and consumers in public schools as they are in private and for-profit schools. Indeed, one would expect that the missions and visions offered by public schools ought to differ in significant ways from those offered by system competitors, including charters. That said, even when poorly crafted, mission statements deserve attention and also critical consideration in part because while locally they may be ignored, they certainly are important to those at state and federal levels who make policy and set funding priorities.

That district (and school) mission statements are often brief may suggest they are trivial. This conclusion is a mistake. As part of the effort to reveal and clarify the "what" and "why" of educational practice, even when brief, mission statements bring with them a normalizing agenda, a conceptual framework, that structures conversation about institutional purposes and practices. This is so in part because organizations and the social practices that constitute institutionally embodied and valued patterns of living have histories reflected in the ways in which they are talked about, understood, and enacted. Hence, preservation of established practices may be a dominating mission priority potentially masked by new ways of speaking; improvement, however, requires something else, a stretching and perhaps a reconsideration of both the "what" and "why" of practice. To this end, especially when unrecognized by local practitioners who nevertheless operate within a wider policy context than their own schools or classrooms, mission and vision statements ought to be interrogated to reveal the conceptual frameworks, the priorities, and the normalizing agendas that reside within them.

Methods: Content Analysis and Rhetorical Analysis

Content analysis is the most common approach to the study of mission statements, usually undertaken to sort out values (see Bialik & Merhav, 2020; Schafft & Biddle, 2013). Content analysis involves identifying, counting, and collapsing words into themes, concepts, or patterns to make "replicable and valid inferences from texts . . . to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). It is a "useful technique for allowing us to discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention" (Stemler, 2000, p. 2). It also enables contrast and comparison of what is present with what is missing, a concern of central importance to this study.

Seeking to unpack mission statement meaning, a rhetorical analysis followed the content analysis. The initial analysis was to identify key terms (and identify related lacunae) of the dominating "terministic screens" (Burke, 1989) underpinning the documents. Representing language systems or conceptual frameworks, terministic screens shape perception and thereby direct action. The basis for meaning-making, screens cut two ways: They both limit and enable meaning. Dewey (1938) recognized the limiting function when he stated: "Failure to examine the conceptual structures and frames of reference which are unconsciously implicated in even the seemingly most innocent factual inquires is the greatest single defect that can be found in any field of inquiry" (p. 507). More broadly, screens operate as preunderstandings, prejudices, or implicit theories that, as they enable meaning, also limit and distort it. As Burke (1989) stated: "Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (p. 115). Definitions of civic development, for example, as it quickly became apparent, vary widely, making it necessary to carefully consider the concept in relationship to the constellation of terms within which it resides and in relationship to consequences for meaning-making. Furthermore, as Burke suggested, attention must be given not only to what is said but to what is not said. Absences also indicate values and signal deflections. Finally, the form of presentation itself has rhetorical importance as it shapes expectation, how something is read, and what meaning is made of it. In the discussion that follows, form is considered first, then content, themes, and key terms.

Context and Sample

Neoliberalism

Over the past several decades, educational policy in the U.S. has been dominated by an "on-going national concern over student academic performance in public schools [so that] the wider social aims of education have been undermined in favor of reforms that emphasize the market values of competition, choice, efficiency, and individual achievement" (Hernández & Castillo, 2020, p. 2), the stuff of neoliberalism (see Bullough, 2019, chapter 1; Karaba, 2016). Raising standardized test scores as proof of learning along with gainful employment, the getting of a "good" job, have been dominating purposes of school reformers for at least three decades, probably longer. In addition, the entire purpose of "higher" education is simply assumed and sharply vocational; for a few, those of the "exclusive meritocracy" (Brooks, 2019, p. A29), this means gaining access to boardrooms and the hallways of power. In a society obsessed with merit and committed to maintaining privilege, reinvigorating the conversation about the purposes of public schooling may seem impossible, but it is essential.

As in most of the 50 states, since passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), standardized testing has reshaped public schooling in Utah, the specific context for this study. Although recently the emphasis on standardized testing that initially came with the law has softened slightly, what remains is a tightly prescriptive, standards- and test-driven curriculum for most children, particularly within elementary schools. As elsewhere in the U.S., the "increased focus on math and reading in K–12 education—while critical to preparing all students for success—pushed out civics and other important subjects" (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). Notably, in the belief that tested subjects matter most, various efforts have been underway to increase civics testing (Railey, 2016). Untested, in elementary school, civics in the U.S. appears mostly to be an afterthought (see Journell, 2015).

State "Targets" and Learning

For 2022, the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) identified student proficiency "targets" for math, science, and English language acquisition. In addition, the board produced a "Portrait of a Graduate Competencies" (USBE May, 2021b) intended to portray the "ideal" high school graduate. Grade-level standards are stated for 13 areas of development: academic mastery; wellness; civic, financial, and economic literacy ("understand various governmental and economic systems and develop practical financial skills"); digital literacy; communication; critical thinking and problem solving ("access, evaluate and analyze information to make informed decisions, recognize bias and find solutions"); creativity and innovation; collaboration and teamwork; honesty, integrity, and responsibility ("are trustworthy, ethical, reliable and

are accountable for the results they produce"); hard work and resilience; lifelong learning and personal growth ("continue to seek knowledge and develop skills in all settings"); service; and respect.

As in many states, in addition to standards setting, the Utah State Legislature, through the State School Board, has been very actively involved in curriculum development. For example, the curriculum for civics education and social studies, which includes, as noted in the Strategic Plan, "financial and economic literacy" (economics), is 58 pages long and contains content standards, questions for teachers, and specific guidelines for class instruction. "The Utah Social Studies standards are based on four social studies *disciplines* [emphasis added]: history, geography, economics, and civics" (USBE, 2016, p. 10). Twenty-four credits are required for high school graduation: four in English; three in mathematics; two in physical education; two in science; 3.5 of "directed coursework" (fine arts, careers, digital studies, financial literacy); and three in social studies (0.5 at district discretion), plus electives. In social studies a yearlong course in U.S. history and half-year courses in geography, civilization (world history) and U.S. government and citizenship are required. Nationally, nine states and the District of Columbia require a single, yearlong civics course. Eleven states have no requirements.

Mission Statement Analysis

Form and Language

Review of the mission statements began with a focus on form, since form influences meaning. Nearly all of the 41 school districts mission statements were embedded in or fleshed out by vision statements or statements of "commitment" and occasionally of "goals" and of "core beliefs:" For example, "All students will attain proficiency or better (mastery) of the basic skills of reading/language arts and math when given appropriate time." One district document presented what was described as a "district philosophy." Surprisingly, the various statements are often disconnected from one another—mission, vision, goals—and fail to present a unified whole.

As they understand these as public statements of purpose and aspiration, readers no doubt expect that mission statements be clear and easily read and understood. For a very few school districts, the burden of clarity found expression in very specific goals and, for one, "objectives." Similar to the findings of Ingle and his colleagues (2020) from their study of district mission statements in Kentucky, the language used in the Utah documents was generally "homogenous" and, similar to Pennsylvania district mission statements, composed of a "set of tropes" and sometimes "slogans" (Schafft & Biddle, 2013, pp. 73, 62). Also, as Schrafft and Biddle found, they are generally brief and simply puzzling: "Dream, Work, Achieve" and "Success is the only option" (Schafft & Biddle, 2013, p. 62). Vision statements are also often lofty, as might be expected. The virtue of clarity often clashes with brevity.

One Utah district mission statement is six words long: "Put each student first, every day." Unfortunately, this small rural district, which serves approximately 1,500 students K–12, lacks a supporting vision statement that might have provided helpful context needed for understanding. District purposes are apparently taken for granted. What does putting each student first, every day mean? Needing to respond to innumerable insistent demands, educators must set priorities and necessarily engage in an ongoing triage as they invest their limited energies. How would being charged with putting each child first helpfully inform a teachers' actions and shape decision making is uncertain. First? Every day? Always? Moreover, one wonders what sort of child would result if it were in fact possible for that child to always be placed first, whatever that means?

A second Utah mission statement reads: "Our mission is to educate students for success in a changing world." The district's supporting vision statement in part states: The district "is to provide an equitable, challenging, and well-rounded educational learning experience in a measurable way so all students can achieve learning, thinking, character and life skills necessary for success . . ." While how this district's mission links with its vision is unclear, both statements use the noun "success," a heavily laden term, while tying it to the provision within school of "measurable experiences," an important and seductive neoliberal trope. Experience is here understood as encounters that generate predictable responses. The questions loom: Which social vision does such a statement represent? Which changes in a "changing world" are to be honored—any and all of them? And upon what basis would one decide on preferred changes?

Are those changes that are preferred those that are most easily measured? Finally, which changes reasonably and rightly fall within the school's purview and therefore require serious and consistent educator and student attention? Neoliberalism links success to material consumption: On this view, as stated earlier, the school district's mission could reasonably be thought of as assuring consistent consumer purchasing power as economies evolve and change. Is this a reasonable and morally responsible aim of schools?

A third mission statement reads: "Through its educational alliances, [the district] will empower all students to become successful, productive, life-long learners." In addition to use of the term "successful," the phrase "life-long learner" appears in several of the Utah mission statements. The phrase is valued despite implicitly suggesting the existence of people who live but do not learn and suggests schools have responsibilities that reach across individual lifetimes. Accordingly, one wonders: What is one supposed to learn while living (into old age)?

While accompanying goal statements and statements of values help to reveal some of the missions' meaning, the forms and language used tend to obscure more than they illuminate the purposes of public education. The suggestion seems to be that public schools are supposed to be all things to all people at all times.

Themes identified in the 41 mission statements generally paralleled those identified by Stemler et al. (2011) in their analysis of school mission statements. For civic development, the first category Stemler et al. identified a generous definition was used, one that counted a focus on community participation and well-being and not only specific mention of citizen education or

citizenship as an aim. This theme appeared in 56% of the Utah statements, compared to 58% in the Stemler et al. study. Only 9 of the 41 Utah districts mentioned civic education or citizenship specifically: "Students will acquire the critical skills and attributes of a productive citizen;" "Education must be appropriate to the needs of each pupil and the needs of the community and society in general." Fifty-one percent of the Utah district statements included focus on cognitive development (51%), compared to 53% in the Stemler et al. study. For several of the districts, one or the other of these first two categories captured their reason for being: "Mission: Improve [Tested] Student Achievement." Promoting emotional development was present in 73% of the Utah district statements, which is higher than that reported in the Stemler et al. study (55%). This difference likely reflects the difficulty of drawing clear and consistent distinctions in the current study between what Stemler et al. meant by emotional development (55%) and safe and nurturing environment (29%). This finding may underscore aspects of how district missions differ from school mission statements but also may indicate a general and increasing concern for student and teacher safety in the wider culture since publication in 2011 of the Stemler et al. study. The Utah district mission and values statements frequently include mention of both teacher and student safety and well-being; well-being includes experiencing personal success and feelings of self-worth as primary aims. In the current study, job preparation (48%), sometimes combined with preparation for further education, was prominently featured. Personal development of various kinds was present in the majority of the mission statements reviewed ("Empowering our Students to Discover and Pursue their Dreams!").

Across the mission statements and supporting documents several terms—tropes—are featured consistently and occupy prominent places in the screens employed. Taking many forms, the most prominent term is "excellence." Generously spreading its seductive magic, *excellence* in one form or another is sought in teaching and in student achievement across most of the district missions ("mastery," "high quality," to "excel," "best practice," "educational excellence," "world class," "Every student will . . . [have] met or exceeded the essential learning standards, fully prepared for the next grade/course."). While goals are not presented as promises, the distinction may be missed by readers and patrons: "Excellence in Student Achievement [for one district meant] growth in percentile grades 4–10 in all tested subjects by a minimum of 3%." For another, it meant maintaining a "graduation [rate] of 90%."

As prominent as talk of excellence is across the documents, excellence it is not connected to civics or civic development. When appearing and in its various forms, in a neoliberal echo, citizenship is often paired with "productive," "responsible," and "good" but not with "excellence." When civic development is mentioned within the mission statements, a strong linkage to economic considerations appears evident. An assumption that "good" citizens have jobs and pay taxes lingers in the background. Such citizens are deemed "productive." But good students and citizens are also kind, tolerant, thoughtful, trustworthy, and committed to one good thing or another, including lifelong learning and sometimes community "engagement." Especially, good citizens are respectful—the last of the "Ideal characteristics of a Utah graduate" mentioned in the "Portrait of a Graduate Competencies" (USBE May, 2021b)—including, as one document stated, "of the rights of others." On this view, as Westheimer (2019) observed, when present, good citizenship mostly is equated to good character, which he described as the "personally responsible citizen" (p. 8).

Omissions: Democracy, a Missing Concept

Words matter because concepts—part of terministic screens—create social reality. As noted previously, part of the analysis conducted of the missions and supporting documents focused on identification of missing concepts or terms. Because of the position taken within the Utah Core State Standards for Social Studies, each use of the terms "democratic" and "democracy," including "democratic republic," the specific term used in the state standards, was noted.

> *Civic engagement is one of the fundamental purposes of education. The preparation of young people for participation in America's* democratic republic *is vital. The progress of our communities, state, nation, and world rests upon the preparation of young people to collaboratively and deliberatively address problems, to defend their own rights and the rights of others, and to balance personal interests with the common good.* Social studies classrooms are the ideal locations *to foster civic virtue . . . These skills, habits, and qualities of character will prepare students to accept responsibility for preserving and defending their liberties. (USBE, 2016, p. 2)*

The state document continues: "Students should have ample opportunities" to "engage in deliberative, collaborative, and civil dialogue regarding historical and current issues . . . [and] engage with solutions to these problems," among other activities. The expectation is that students will "develop and demonstrate values that sustain America's *democratic republic* [emphasis added], such as open-mindedness, engagement, honesty, problem-solving, responsibility, diligence, resilience, empathy, self-control, cooperation" (USBE, 2016, p. 2).

Unexpectedly, and despite the State Board of Education's constitutionally prescribed power over the public school system, only four of the 41 district mission statements and supporting documents were found to include such terms. Only one mission statement clearly drew upon the language of the state social studies curriculum: "civic education cultivates informed, responsible participation in political life by competent citizens committed to the fundamental values and principles of representative democracy . . . [and] shall include instruction in [the] values and qualities of character that promote an upright and desirable citizenry." The remaining three mission statements included the following sentences: (a) "to think independently and clearly and educate them in a sound body of knowledge which will help prepare them for the responsibilities of living in a democracy;" (b) "prepare [students] for the world of work and develop attributes of citizenship necessary in a democratic society;" and (c) "each student shall be provided opportunities to gain the skills necessary to function in a democratic society."

Even though the words "democracy" and "democratic" do not appear in any form in the current mission statement of a fifth district, the largest in the state with nearly 80,000 students, this document will be described more fully because the term was prominently featured in the earlier mission statement but was removed in revision. This change—the creation of an absence indicating a screen shift—is included because it illustrates the power of words to stir action and the difficulty and importance of achieving shared, functional and compelling social ideals. As such, it is directly related to the issues that underpin this inquiry and to the interest of the CPDC to develop forums to promote the shared values of and create experiences with democratic citizenship.

One of five member districts of a large university/public school partnership, the district's mission statement underwent a revision prompted by attacks of an aggressive and small special interest group opposed to use of the phrase, "enculturating the young into a social and political democracy," to describe the central aim of the work of the district. That phrase, generated by John Goodlad and his colleagues (2004) at the Institute for Educational Inquiry as part of the Agenda for Educational Renewal, focused the work of the partnership. Characterized by critics as a "dangerous man," Goodlad was charged with wanting to "transform our form of government and sever ties between parents and children" (Norton, 2010, p. 1) and, worse, of seeking to undermine "our moral standards" (Norton, 2010, p. 27). The lightning rod was inclusion in the district mission statement of the phrase "Our current government is best symbolized as a representative democracy" and the assertion that "the primary purpose of [public] education is developing democratic citizens. Every teacher should have this major broad objective in mind as he/she prepares the curriculum" (Norton, 2010, p. 18). This goal, when combined with three others—providing content knowledge access for all children, nurturing pedagogy, and promoting responsible stewardship of schools (Goodlad et al., 2004, pp. 19–34)—formed what Goodlad called the Moral Dimensions of Teaching. To the critics, social democracy meant socialism, which led to a call for the removal of the entire school board and district leadership.

The attacks grew increasingly shrill. The local newspaper picked up the story and championed the crusaders. On the defensive and distracted by the disruption, a decision was made by district administrators and university partners to revise the partnership goals, which also served as the district mission statement, in the hope of bridging differences and calming tempers. Over several months and through multiple revisions by a large and diverse committee and with considerable community input, the document, once approved by the school board, was greeted triumphantly by critics (who were excluded from the deliberations), even though nowhere was their preferred term, "compound constitutional republic," mentioned. In effect, offering a participatory model of democracy (Westheimer, 2019) but without use of the word, the mission represents a consequential revision of its predecessor (see Bullough & Rosenberg, 2018). Within the district, the expectation was and apparently is still that each of its 87 schools will carefully attend to the mission when setting the required annual "improvement goals."

The revised mission statement in part reads: The mission is "educating all students to inspire learning and to protect our freedoms," an echo of the state curriculum guideline's focus on defending liberties and rights. No other of the reviewed district statements say anything like the importance of protecting freedoms. The connection between schooling and the protection of freedoms is not self-evident—there is no strong sense of citizenship offered in the document although there certainly is a lively commitment to a form of individualism (see Howe, 2017). A supporting vision statement is included composed of "five commitments" that represent promises made to district patrons that are related to but are shadows of the four Moral Dimensions noted previously.

The commitments[1] are intended to move the mission closer to school practice. They do this in part by the implicit evaluative questions they suggest about knowledge access, the quality of the pedagogical relationship had with students (e.g., whether they are nurturing or not), the nature and extent of parental and community involvement in decision making, the social values supported by the educational program, and the effort directed to personal and institutional improvement. Thinking again about rights rather than freedoms, the suggestion is that students have a right to a high-quality curriculum taught well and in nurturing ways; that parents and community members have a right (and responsibility) to be involved in efforts to improve public education and student learning; that students have rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and finally, that students and patrons have a right to expect educators who continuously improve their practice.

Just as the word "democracy" was removed from the revised mission statement and supporting documents, so too was the term "enculturate" deleted, a key concept present in the first Moral Dimension of Teaching (and the first mission statement) and a trigger term for those who looked for what they thought were signs of creeping socialism in the U.S. The removal of "enculturate" is consequential, a word that recognizes that the entire culture of a school is educational, for good or for ill. The suggestion is that the life lived within a school—norms, customs, practices—ought to be of a certain kind and quality that is recognizably democratic. The absence of the word suggests a shift in understanding of the processes involved in acquiring virtue. The problem is evident in the state social studies standards: "Social studies classrooms are the ideal locations" for the development of these qualities. As previously noted, that this charge is placed entirely on history,

1 "Civic preparation and engagement: The Partnership prepares educators who model and teach the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for civic virtue and engagement in our society." 2. "Engaged learning through nurturing pedagogy: The Partnership develops educators who are competent and caring, who promote engaged learning through appropriate instructional strategies and positive classroom environments and relationships." 3. "Equitable access to knowledge and achievement: The Partnership develops educators who are committed to and actively provide equitable access to academic knowledge and achievement through rigorous master of curriculum content and instruction skills." 4. "Stewardship in School and Community" and 5. "Commitment to renewal" (Bullough & Rosenberg, 2018, p. 154).

economics, government, and civic teachers and classes alone is troubling, but matters are worsened by realization that students spend so few hours in such courses. One is not a citizen only when sitting in a social studies classroom.

"To enculturate" reaches beyond citizenship as a subject matter, thought of as a knowledge problem, and calls attention to the processes involved in cultural learning, of engaging in behaviors that build the habits and enable assimilation of the values—and language—of a social environment and its way of life in order to more fully and appropriately participate in that environment. Clearly, all school cultures present a curriculum—hidden, informal, and explicit—that in one way or another educates. An insight offered by Bode (1937) at a time when worldwide democracies were reeling under the growing threat of fascism, nicely makes the point: "A democratic system of education is ordinarily supposed to mean a system which is made freely accessible to all members of the group. That it should also be distinctive in quality or content is not taken for granted in the same way" (p. 63). Use of the term "enculturate" calls attention to the importance of social philosophy, of thinking carefully about how people ought to and need to live together for their mutual benefit, to all educational decision-making since both teaching and learning are relationally embedded social practices. To say a mission is to be "consistent with the principles and values on which our country was founded" is to say nothing helpful since understanding of those principles is an achievement, not a legacy, as Foa and Mounk (2017, 2018) have argued. Moreover, as an attempt to skirt the problem of reconciling differences in opinion and understanding, it fails educationally.

As a work of culture building, the qualities of citizenship generally are not taught—although the skills of citizenship certainly ought to be taught—as might be assumed when reading the majority of the mission statements and the state standards, but they are learned. They are inspired, invited, praised, rewarded, modeled, discussed, and potentially emulated. Together they capture the tone and substance of an institutional way of life, an ethos, a spirit. At some point, since there are many forms of life, that spirit must be clearly articulated, which, presumably, is one important reason for generating mission and supporting value statements. That spirit must be articulated so that it can be criticized but also celebrated. Modeling, an expectation for educators and of all citizens regardless of institutional commitments, gains in power with clear articulation of the model valued, the process of putting into words, and stories, the practices associated with valued (or discouraged) qualities so their fruits—found in feelings, in social sensibilities, in understandings, in actions, and in relationships—can be refined or sometimes reconstituted. Modeling, of course, is what everyone in schools do all the time as they live together and interact; modeling of civic values is not just the responsibility of social studies educators. Hence, every teacher, every student, every custodian, every administrator, every cafeteria worker is in some profound sense a civics teacher. Social studies classrooms are just one of many civics learning environments, each of which is more or less intentionally planned, and they may not be educationally most powerful.

Getting Democracy on the Agenda and into Mission Statements

Reading the district mission statements, one gets the sense that those who produced them had rather little difficulty locating worthy aims and outcomes for personal, cognitive, and emotional development, three of the categories used by Stemler et al. (2011), but considerable difficulty deciding on citizenship aims. Once specific knowledge related to the organization and function of government was identified, the sort of knowledge captured by the immigrant citizenship exam, troubles followed. The difficult questions come when deciding how we ought to live together and the responsibilities and obligations we share for one another's well-being. In effect, the cart appears generally to be put before the horse: Clarity about the imperatives of citizenship development ought to come first since citizenship, as Goodlad and his colleagues (2004) suggested, has profound implications for determining what is included in each of the remaining areas of development. Moreover, to separate the categories is to ignore how human development is of a whole; to speak of distinctive categories of development may be helpful analytically, but it is also potentially dangerous educationally.

Definitions of democracy certainly vary (see Lowham & Lowham, 2015), and meaning is often twisted for a variety of purposes (consider: "The Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea"), hence the recognition of the CPDC of the need for citizenship experience within local levels of government. But democracy is more than a form of government. It is a distinctive "way of life" (Bode, 1937, p. 103) that reaches across and touches upon all social aspects of living and thereby produces communities that are distinctive (see Bellah et al., 1991), a view only hinted at in a few of the mission statements reviewed but which is evident in *Our Common Purpose* (Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship, 2020). As Dewey (1916) argued:

> *A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers . . . which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. (p. 101)*

The challenge for educators and for those who produce mission statements, not only for social studies teachers, is to identify what democracy as a way of life requires of citizen-students and citizen-educators with sufficient specificity to enable recognition of exemplary and contrary instances of desired thought and action and to think meaningfully about the sorts of experiences that can be had within schools that are most likely to encourage the desired development. Discussing the "bridging capacity" of informal institutions, the commission called attention to the need for opportunities to "practice the habits of democracy" (Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship, 2020, p. 47; also Bellah et al., 1985). What, then, are the habits of democracy? The challenge is to think through how we ought to live together and treat one another.

Turning to Manners: Conversation, Voice and Listening

Pondering what Europeans thought of America following his stay in the U.S., Tocqueville (1835/1840/1947), a French lawyer interested in prison reform, concluded that "too much importance is attributed to legislation (the workings of government) [and] too little to manners [of the people]" (p. 213). From his observations of and conversations with Americans, Tocqueville concluded that "the manners of the Americans of the United States are . . . the real cause which renders that people the only one of the American nations that is able to support a democratic Government; it is the influence of manners which produces different degrees of order and of prosperity that may be distinguished in the several Anglo-American democracies" (p. 212). What Tocqueville noted is that Americans thought and behaved in ways that differed from Europeans, and in this difference, he found the meaning of democracy. Accordingly, to be educationally powerful and morally responsible district (and school) mission statements ought to give careful attention to the manners—habits, customs, and convictions—that characterize democratic citizenship and set the conditions that are needful for learning about and practicing those manners. The value of focusing on manners over habits, virtues or character traits is considerable because it enables "focus on the manifestation or display of virtue rather than on the possession of virtue" (Osguthorpe, 2009, p. 94).

To identify the manners of democracy, a task central to realizing the educational value of mission statements, Dewey's insight, uttered at his 90th birthday party (Lamont, 1959, p. 58), that democracy begins in conversation, provides a helpful point of departure. "Voice" enjoys a prominent place in current political and social discourse and is the focus of the first strategy for reinventing democracy in *Our Common Purpose* (Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship, 2020, p. 6). Currently reflecting an almost unbridled individualism, "choice and voice" are widely assumed to be guiding concepts of democracy (Kleine & Lunsmann, 2019): Maximize choice, maximize voice. When describing a politically mature person, Wolfe (2018), for example, emphasized voice, an educated voice: "A politically mature person votes after careful consideration of what is at stake both for herself and her country. It is perfectly permissible for a politically mature person to act out of anger, but she ought to be able to communicate to both her conscience and to other people what she is angry about" (p. 160). Voting is widely understood to be the central citizen responsibility within democracies, an expression of both choice and voice, even as many citizens choose not to vote (or are prevented from voting), an issue addressed by the commission in strategy two, "Empower Voters" (p. 7).

Since the rise of the free speech movement of the 1960s in the U.S., having voice and supporting the voices of dispossessed persons have been widely understood as progressive democratic practices essential to gaining a measure of power for oneself and for others. The appeal to voice is an echo of a basic if not always appreciated insight.

> *To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community; one who understands and appreciates its beliefs, desires and methods, and who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and value. (Dewey, 1927, p. 154)*

However, too easily reduced to shouting, "voice" proves to be a troubling metaphor both educationally and politically. The increasingly common social practice of shouting down a speaker reveals the problem: the triumph of silence and disengagement from otherness. Yet shouting also brings with it an implicit expectation of, or desperate hope for, recognition and of being heard while typically dismissing outright another speaker's identical desire. Dewey's reminder is that the communication by which we become human requires both giving and taking, speaking and listening—in order to locate where our shared problems and interests meet, overlap, and friction against one another and as an expression of our humanity. This expectation sets the purpose of forums but also of interaction that is educational.

Conversation is not debate; the manners of debate, which center on winning a point, not cultivating communion or expanding shared understanding, are quite different from those of conversation. As a dominant form of political discourse, debate seeks persuasion and domination: When seeking to persuade, refining distinctions in points of view leads to the hardening of differences and the production of charged, and perhaps even dismissive, phrases with the result that rather than building bridges, walls arise. Rather than enlarging a shared language and extending the range of shared interests and concerns, debate divides and separates participants into opposing camps. Loyalties thereby become exclusive, and rather than broadening and enriching a moral sphere and discourse, both shrink and fracture. Conversation, in contrast to debate, is driven by a quest for shared understanding and communion and is intellectually and morally enlarging.

That understanding is a conversational aim sets chatting apart from conversing. We converse when something of significance needs to be said, something that matters not only to ourselves but, we think, to those with whom we seek connection, perhaps confirmation. While conversing, as we listen attentively and "attune" (see Lipari, 2014), participants enter into one another's life spaces and are given glimpses into another's world. In the course of conversation, when differences in understanding or belief arise that heighten uncertainty to the point where defensiveness is felt or curiosity is sparked and effortful resolution is needed for interaction to continue, dialogue may arise. The distinctive feature of dialogue is inquiry, and inquiry calls for a sharing of problems and identifying, negotiating, and weighing evidence that may produce an expectation of action or recognition of a need for some sort of change in understanding, behavior, and relationship. When genuine and fruitful, dialogue is respectful, a manifestation of the desire and of a willingness to learn and to support another's learning.

The giving and taking involved in conversation and the emphasis in dialogue on inquiry (requiring evidence and reasons)

suggest a cluster of manners essential to democracy and to those who seek to increase schools' democratic commitments. Gaining voice then speaking requires courage as well as knowledge of when and how to speak. Speaking, then, has both a knowledge and a skill dimension that bring a moral expectation; one needs to be able and willing to speak truthfully, clearly, and appropriately and to have something worth saying and being heard. Accordingly, manners are about how humans ought to interact and of how they should go about meeting their social and civic obligations; what they do with what they know so they are able to "swing along"—get along—as Clark (2015) put it in his comparison of the workings of democracy with performing of jazz. Little wonder that Dewey argued democracy is a theory of education.

Successful conversation and productive dialogue require maximal participation and maximal openness, both conditions that support engagement across differences. "Maximal participation supports voice [and the] willingness to speak up and with an informed voice certainly is a manner of democracy. But maximal openness requires something different, something more: a robust commitment to listening and 'listening out for' the other" (Bullough & Rosenberg, 2018, p. 90). Within an aspiring democracy, including within a school, listening is more than a skill; it is a virtue and desired manner, an expression of both generosity and of concern for the other and their well-being, not just of one's own interests. The skill of listening can be taught; the virtue comes, if it comes, from the experience of listening and of being listened to by fellow students and most certainly by one's own teachers; listening signals recognition of and respect for another. As the matched twin of voice in the quest to understand and be understood, listening attentively (see Burwell & Huyser, 2013), carefully, and well while conversing opens the possibility that empathy and trust may grow, curiosity deepen, tolerance increase, and hope strengthen. Much sought after byproducts of living democratically, empathy and trust are essential to and the results of the extension and deepening of common interests, of recognition that "we are all in this together," the first of Palmer's "Five Habits of the Heart that Help Make Democracy Possible" (2011, pp. 44–46). Because, like chatting, conversation is often both interesting and generally enjoyable, friendships may form, and friendship is both an outcome and a cause for the extension and expansion of shared interests. When conversation moves to dialogue, expectations shift, increase, and get more complicated—for, if participation is sincere and openness more rather than less genuine, dialogue opens the possibility of consequential learning.

In addition to speaking and listening thoughtfully and well, there are manners that are conditions for conversation, and these too must be developed; even if only rarely directly taught, they need to be consistently demonstrated, a matter of habit. First among these is hospitality, being welcoming and generous to those who occupy and enter my classroom, my school, my understanding, and, at some point, even my head. Hospitality supports border or threshold crossing, an essential requirement for learning and growing morally and intellectually. For educators, the ideal is "pure hospitality" to newcomers, new ideas, and one's guests. "The power of pure hospitality comes from its status as an insistent ethical ideal, an aspiration" (Bullough & Rosenberg, 2018, p. 52). Democracy must be welcoming, for learning requires engagement with difference and the confrontation with one's own limitations in knowledge, understanding, and openness. The faith is that while no one can know what gifts will be brought into the commons by newcomers or visitors, all will have gifts of some kind and to discover those gifts; as Elbow (1986) suggested, one needs to strive to develop "methodological belief," by which he meant: "The disciplined procedure of not just listening but actually trying to believe any view or hypothesis that a participant seriously wants to advance" (p. 260). Starting an interaction with skepticism only assures defensiveness and undermines the potential for learning. In the willingness to give (and to receive appreciatively), an entire community, including school community, is enriched, and perhaps even subtly transformed for the better. There are also geographical requirements that school and district mission statements and policies most certainly must attend to. Having a public space, a commons, like the Agora of ancient Athens, that is simultaneously charged but safe because ownership is shared, two qualities that can and sometimes do exist in classrooms, increases the likelihood of engagement—the exchanging of things and of ideas—and of realizing in learning the educational promise of dialogue. Within such places, human and material resources, ideas and things, needed to support the inquiry of dialogue are promised and found.

Place and space matter when seeking to create a democratic ethos and underscore the essential reason for public education. To provide a moral space, not merely a "warehouse," within the public school, students and educators must come to belong to one another and to the place that holds them and that supports their engagement and interaction. In this space, they determine how they want and need to live together as citizens who happen to be students, educators, parents, and also custodians, counselors, and so on.

Conclusion

Reading the mission statements and supporting documents, the omission of talk about democracy is both striking and worrisome. But its absence cannot be fully explained by aggressive political factions within the school districts as in the case described above that resulted in mission revision. No doubt the persistence of a national test score fetish, along with an insistent hunger fed by anxious, ill-informed, and neoliberal-worshiping politicians for national, state, and district comparisons, however inappropriate given differences in institutional aims, makes matters much worse. That said, the very complexity of the concept of democracy is likely an important contributing factor to its absence. Addressing the problem of omission, in turn, reveals yet another challenge: the scarcity of thick understandings of democracy among even well-schooled citizens, including teachers (see, for example, Zyngier, 2013). Developing thicker understanding of democracy ought to be a central aim of in-service education of various kinds for teachers (see Bullough & Rosenberg, 2018). As an ongoing, evolving, and likely fragile social experiment and not a simple form of government, democracy must become a living educational ideal.

As has been suggested here, a focus on the manners of democracy—ways of doing in the faith that ways of being will follow the doing—is one means for thickening and deepening understanding. Clearly, as the research noted earlier by Foa and Mounk (2017, 2018) suggested, for too long, democracy has been taken for granted, set aside in favor of other concerns, other ambitions, as evident within the Utah district mission statements. That must change. Paying attention to what is said in mission statements and statements of educational value is a tiny but important first step, among many steps, needed to revitalize democracy as a central topic in conversation about the aims of education. To reduce citizenship to general matters associated with good character as so often happens in mission statements such as those traits required to get and keep a job or to kindness and honesty, or other such qualities, is to set citizenship aside as an aim. The larger question is what do good citizens, citizens in a democracy, not some other national, social, cultural, and political arrangement, think and do and value and how do they treat one another? As Barber (1998) argued, democracy is a "system of conduct concerned with what we *will* together and *do* together and how we agree on what we will to do. It is practical not speculative, about action rather than about truth" (p. 19). Moreover, democracy as a way of life is, as Bode (1937) said, "distinctive in quality [and] content [and must not be] taken for granted" (p. 63). Certainly, it must not be taken for granted by educators or by those who are charged with writing district mission and value statements.

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