Title of Presentation: *I think therefore I am vs. I am because we are: Can democratic education be universalized?*

Through both European and African philosophical perspectives, the workshop will explain how communities of color and the working class see the concepts of freedom, independence, literacy, community, learner-centered education, democracy, and social justice. The group will discuss the possibilities and limitations of advancing the development of a culturally desegregated and socio-economically diverse movement of unconventional approaches to education.

Workshop description: Definitions of freedom and democracy by current alternative and democratic education movements are viewed with distrusted by those with whom these movements seek collaboration. Also, these movements' views of community, the status of literacy, or the significance of the individual can contradict the basic culture and needs of non-dominant groups.

Is the cultural/class DNA of current alternative and democratic education movements totally alien to communities of color and working-classes? Can a true family be formed if fundamental differences arise? Can the alternative and democratic education movements be synonymous with social justice? How will such questions around diversity determine these movements' futures?

The workshop reviews the roots and history of alternative education. If IDEC intends to transform education, it must first transform itself. This self-analysis has been encouraged by the Institute of Democratic Education in Israel for some time. The workshop will enable such radical renewal by providing a counter-narrative to definitions of basic terminology long considered universal by free school/democratic education advocates. Issues of social class will be reviewed.

Format of workshop: The workshop will begin by "educe-ing" from participants their definition of terminology used in alternative and democratic education. Their definitions will be compared and contrasted to those by communities of color as well as the white working class of which I am a member. The workshop will conclude with a discussion concerning why these differences in definitions exist, what this means, and what to do about any insights with regard to the goals of the conference.

Outcomes of workshop: The workshop intends to enable the increase the diversity and the meaningful involvement of communities of color and the working poor by making attendees conscious of the cultural and class differences, which may by definition be too great a barrier to any authentic collaboration now and in the future. The desire and ability of alternative and democratic education movement advocates to respect and embrace stark contrasting cultural-class differences all while honestly critiquing parts of their basic worldview will provide these movements an opportunity to renegotiate the details of their initiatives.

Can democratic education be universalized?

"I think therefore I am" vs. "I am because we are"
Learner-centered vs. Community-centered
Free Schools vs. Freedom Schools

The Common Good Responsibilities of Private and Public Learning Alternatives

Summary: This paper shows the historic roots of free schools and democratic schools are in the philosophy of Romanticism and its emphasis on the freedom of the individual and the natural learning abilities of children. It situates these alternatives as mainly non-public schools which also reflect the dominant American culture of independence and individual achievement. It seeks to contrast these alternatives to other worldviews and cultures (as well as public schools) with which democratic education may wish to collaborate. In doing so, the reader is required to consider the ideas of positive and negative freedom (p. 13), and to revisit the American concept of *e pluribus unum* (p. 19). The paper uncovers various barriers to such collaboration(s) and makes several recommendations to overcoming differences and utilizing the distinct strengths and commonalities in both worldviews. This will not only advance the development of private learning alternatives, but will advance the development of a desegregated and socio-economically diverse national movement of unconventional approaches to education which will help all students in all schools. In doing so, private and public learning alternatives are challenged to move beyond the emphasis on an individual student's freedom to choose without interference, personal independence, and self-actualization to also include an ethos of social responsibility and universal inter-connectedness.

"Act only on the maxim whereby thou can at the same time will that it should become a universal law -- Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative

"We can make schools tools of creating a better world. But, we have to redefine learning. Learning should always be in connection with the community. Nothing of what we learn is of value unless it is of value to the community by contributing to its perseverance and well-being." -- Dick de Groot on Ubuntu

"The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom." -- bell hooks, *Teaching to transgress*

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The intent of this paper: ***The stability of and increase in private educational alternatives since 1970 proves there is a need. Yet, is this grand ideal for a wide variety of private educational placements fraught with the specter of class, privilege, and advantage destroyers of the common school ethos and equal opportunity? Do the general characteristics of private (or some public) learning alternatives limit their possibilities for our collective welfare, denying the public interest in the formal learning of their students? Does providing many paths to meet individual needs tend to bypass obligations social justice? In fact, what are the common good responsibilities of learning alternatives and do theses obligations support and validate the case for a desegregated and socio-economically diverse movement of unconventional approaches to education?***

"Unfortunately, the current educational reform movement has moved to a 'one-size-fits-all' model of teaching and testing; the argument and facts just presented indicate this approach is doomed to failure. Children of voluntary minority groups (groups other than the descendents of enslaved Africans) cannot succeed if what is most valued in school—individual achievement—is considered selfish egotism at home. Equally important, the 'one-size-fits-all' model loses sight of how alternative in-puts can enrich the dominant culture. For example, the U.S. ideal of the self-fulfilled individual can, at the extreme, lead to widespread isolation, alienation, and violence. Hence, an emphasis on family responsibility and solidarity, so intrinsic to collectivistic cultures, can impart a moderating influence on our society." --Trumbull, Greenfield, & Quiroz (2003) p. 92

Alternative education implies an option to standard or traditional education. This limits the concept to the growth of standards in education and compulsory schooling. The first compulsory education law in the American colonies was established in Massachusetts in 1647.

Alternative Education: Its European roots and basis in individualism

Much of alternative education's roots can be traced to Romanticism, an 18th century philosophy opposed to the over-emphasis of rationality during the Age of Reason in Europe. Educationally, the Romantics favored freedom of the individual. They viewed human nature as basically good, energetic, and naturally inquisitive. Children should be taught with patience and understanding. Schools need not curb or discipline the natural tendencies of the child, but encourage the student to grow and blossom. Teachers were to appeal to the child's interests and discourage strict discipline and tiresome lessons. Love and sympathy were the guides, not rules and punishment. Teaching by example and direct experience were better for learning than books and lectures. The world should just simply be presented or made available to students. No force or threats were required.

In the 19th century the Swiss humanitarian Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, the American transcendentalists Amos Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau; the founders of progressive education John Dewey and Francis Parker; and educational pioneers such as Maria Montessori and Rudolf

Steiner (founder of the Waldorf schools) among others, all insisted that education should be understood as the art of cultivating the moral, emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of the developing child. Anarchists such as Leo Tolstoy or Francisco Ferrer y Guardia of the Modern School Movement emphasized education as a force for political liberation, secularism, and elimination of class distinctions. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_education

In the late 60's to early 70's, in an effort to improve public education, some public school educators began to try smaller schools, learning options, individualization, and having students and parents share in creating their school's vision and in other decision-making processes. In the private sector, the national criticism of public education met the politics and experiences from the southern freedom schools in the mid-1960s and influenced the creation of the Black Independent Schools and the Free School Movement which inspired urban storefront street academies and a variety of free schools. All of these various schools and programs were studied and promoted as "alternative" schools. As a result of this challenge to the "one best system" professional educators learned that children and their parents were capable of making decisions about how and what they learned, and other important school decisions when given the respect and opportunity. The concepts of magnet schools, charters schools, and the current small schools movement are the legacy of these courageous innovators and their non-traditional schooling styles (Neumann, 2003).

A variety of paths: Proof of a need for alternatives to public schools

Over the last four decades, the numbers and types of alternative have fluctuated. Currently there are a variety of learning alternatives: Montessori, Waldorf, Summerhill, Reggio Emilia, Sudbury, Indigo, and Krishnamurti. General approaches are: Non-coercive, Public Choice, Democratic, Homeschool, Open, Charter, Quaker, Free, Holistic, Virtual, Magnet, Early Childhood, Independent, Progressive, Community, Cooperative, and Unschooling.

Widening the circle: Countering the lack of diversity at AERO conferences

The theme of the 4th Annual/2007 Alternative Education Resource Organization conference was "Widening the Circle." The topic arose after analysis of the first three AERO conferences. Organizers began to wonder why, in a diverse society such as America, those attending the first three events did not represent more of this diversity. This concern grew into workshop presentations and on-line discussions--some of which are presented here. One of the discussion group members stated the issue very well and directly: *"How can we de-segregate the national movement of unconventional approaches to education?"*

What are characteristics of those with whom AERO seek to associate?

In contrast, those with whom AERO seeks respect and collaboration, share very little of its values. To make this clear, a review of philosophy, values, and moreover, the disposition of communities of color and other non-dominant groups compared to those same categories with respect to America's dominant culture is needed. The following is information and chart on individualism and collectivism.

	Characteristics of Dominant American Culture	Characteristics of Non-dominant American Culture
Social history	Individualism--emphasizes independence*	Collectivism--emphasizes inter-dependence
Worldview	Western—Anglo-Saxon Northern European	Non-western
Main orientation to	Objects	People
Relationships	Egalitarian	Hierarchical--respect for tradition & authority
Child-development	Primarily an individual matter (ala Piaget)—it happens in stages & is the same for everyone	Primarily a social matter--takes different paths depending on the goals of child rearing in a particular community
Parents define & place value on early cognitive development in terms of child's:	Knowledge of the physical world (defining/describing objects) & linguistic communication skills	Development of social intelligence—interpersonal relationships, responsibility for others, & cooperation
Conceptualizations of intelligence	An intelligent child is one who is aggressive and competitive	An intelligent child may be one who knows how to complete chores for family
Parental communications Emphasize	Distal modes of communication through linguistic means	Proximal modes of communication such as touching and holding
School's emphasis on developing each child's potential	Views this as normal & healthy for development	May perceive this as encouraging undesirable selfishness
Classroom learning style	Prefer to work alone—in some cases, asking for help is a sign of weakness	Prefer to work in groups & to "seek out classmates & teachers for discussion, clarification, elaboration, & aid"

From "Cultural Values in Learning and Education" (Trumbull, Greenfield & Quiroz, 2003)

*****A study by Geert Hofstede of 53 countries across 5 continents found the United States to be the most individualist country in the world along a continuum of individualism versus collectivism. (Kozulin.2003).

European perspective: The Cartesian method "*cogito ergo sum"*
In an attempt to understand his existence, 17th century French philosopher Rene Descartes initially arrives at only a single principle: thought exists. Thinking is thus every activity of a person of which he/she is immediately conscious. Thought cannot be separated from the person, therefore, the person exists: I think, therefore I am. This opened the possibility that reason is the only reliable method of attaining knowledge. Decartes' first person perspective becomes the essence of the individualism of European thought and culture.

Thus, learning concerns self discovery, self-development and fulfillment, self-reliance, and personal autonomy.

African perspective: The ubuntu principle "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"
The "I think therefore I am" of Descartes is translated in Africa in: "I am because we are." In "ubuntu" culture, the manner of greeting if you meet someone, you say: "Sawu bona," which means: "I see you." The return greeting is: "Sikhona" or "Here I am." Ubuntu comes from a Zulu proverb: "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" or "a human being only becomes a human being through other human beings." We exist because we are seen, because the people around us respect and acknowledge us as a person (de Groot, 2006).

Thus, learning should always be in connection with the community, because nothing of what we learn is of value unless it is of significance to the community. Everyone's learning should contribute to the perseverance and well-being of the community. This is de Groot's *"***communal constructivism**." See Dick de Groot's Ted Talk: "What happens when we empower schools through our communities?" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O343xlVKQzw

Further explanations (Trumbull, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2003)**
To help democratic/alternative education supporters, as well as public school educators and policy makers, understand the significance of the individual vs. group orientations, further explanations are needed. Definitions of the two cultures and how each views the purpose of knowledge, cheating in school, individual achievement, and the use of toys will be used.

Individualism is a cultural value orientation stressing personal autonomy, individual development, self-reliance, individual expression, and individual achievement. Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and desires, while opposing most external interference upon one's choices, whether by society, or any other group or institution.

Collectivism is a cultural value orientation that stresses human interdependence and the importance of a collective, rather than the importance of separate individuals. Collectivists focus on community and society, and seek to give priority to values emphasizing the preservation and permanence of prescribed relationships that are hierarchically structured around family roles and multiple generations. A collectivistic history is part of the cultural and cross-cultural roots

of Native American, Native Hawaiians, Native Alaskans, Latin Americans, Africans, Asians, and Arabs.

What is the purpose of knowledge, the individual, the society or both?

Mainstream culture values knowledge for its own sake, apart from the social uses to which it is put.

Non-dominant cultures seek to incorporate an ethical and social dimension to education, exploring the impact of knowledge on human beings (and all life) for generations to come. The well-being of the human community is at the heart of their concerns.

Achievement: A sign of individual effort and success or good news for the family?

To the dominant culture, the educational achievement of students is a personal matter for personal advancement. Children are viewed as self-contained independent achievers with unique capabilities and potential. Their personal achievement proves they are capable, and increases their chances for success.

In non-dominant cultures the students deserve credit for doing well, but they should not separate personal achievement from their relationship to the group. Giving too much praise could make students think too much of themselves and see other children as less worthy.

***As in Trumbull, Greenfield, & Quiroz (p. 68), this paper uses the term "mainstream" interchangeably with "dominant" to refer to those who share a set of values that are normative in major societal institutions such as schools and government. The term "non-dominant cultures/communities" is used along with "minorities." Minorities/non-dominant groups are those whose values the mainstream/dominant culture either does not recognize or actively devalues.*

Cheating or helping

Over the last decade, especially due to the growing numbers Latino/a students in schools, there is a growing concern by educators regarding the attempts by minority students to help each other with assignments or test questions.

The individualistic-oriented education mainstream which stresses competition, views this as cheating. In one study, African American high school students noted they were helping each other out, viewing "cheating" and sharing information not as inappropriate, but as a responsibility.

Toys: The use/purpose of physical objects

A parent from the dominant culture might provide a baby toys for amusement while also intending the toy will develop skills in manipulating objects. This is because their culture emphasizes knowledge of the physical world via defining and describing objects. These isolated physical entities have nothing to do with social relationships and are the property of a single individual/group. Parents are likely to hope and believe their children will be verbally competent and able to

construct knowledge of the physical world from observing and manipulating toys that stimulate personal independence and technological mastery.

To parents of collectivist cultures, a toy would be of little value outside its role in an interaction with another person. The value of physical objects is primarily that they mediate social interactions. In an extended family, material objects are shared.

SECTION 2 A VARIETY OF PATHS: POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

De-segregating a movement of unconventional approaches to education

How can we open the mainstream to many paths?; How can we "…make democratic education relevant beyond the narrow circle of the white middle class"; "Does IDEC have any structure in place that focuses on political and legislative agendas and on outreaching the message of democratic education to the larger community?"; or, the insightful question from one AERO staff person, "…it's what can we do to create the various educational environments needed for all different kinds of children?"

Two main barriers to de-segregating a movement of unconventional approaches to education

This paper, "What are the common good responsibilities of private alternatives?" argues there are two sets of barriers to de-segregating a movement of unconventional approaches to education:

1. Barriers within AERO

- Do a majority of AERO supporters want to reach out to public schools?
- Why hasn't democratic education caught on?: The limitations of many paths.

Barrier: **Widening the Circle: AERO and our public schools**

During discussion thread, "Widening the Circle: AERO into the mainstream, the mainstream into AERO," supporters discussed the extent AERO wanted to influence the non-AERO community (all education, but particularly the public schools) and to what extent AERO was open to having/welcoming the non-AERO community (particularly public schools) into the AERO circle.

What lay in the back of people's minds involved in the discussion was that historically AERO members are some of those courageous education innovators who in the 1960s were compelled to reject public education. They developed viable alternatives to it and turned their ideas into a global movement developing learning alternatives that are highly respected and located around the world.

Thus, on one hand, the specter of regarding a public school system some view as "deeply destructive and highly propagandized" was simply dangerous. This is true.

On the other hand, this critique of compulsory education worried some AERO supporters: "Are the alternative people really concerned about the education of every child in the United States and the world or is the concern just about

glorifying their little niche? For the sake of the children, it is time to stop the blame game and move forward together to build a better educational system for all children. In order to widen the circle I think the perspective of a 'we' [rather than the 'them' and 'us' attitude] has to be developed...."

An AERO member remarked, "AERO hasn't given up on the public schools. There are public school oriented people in [AERO's] school starters course. We support anyone who wants to make learner centered education part of a public school program. We are trying to help save [public schools]... But you can't blame people for being skeptical as we watch great [public alternative] schools forced to close or stop being learner centered."

Later, another AERO supporter ventured this, "The fight, in my humble opinion, is not to destroy public education, but to open it up to a spectrum of options, or as [it has been called], the many paths." This was an endorsement of another AERO member who recommended more private "…learning alternatives, putting positive 'people power' pressure on our institutionalized education system and drag it into the 21st Century."

In response came this E-mail: "Many paths, public paths, whatever the path, it ought not be compulsory. I do not support any law that says my child or any child must participate in a public or in any state approved or certified educational program. Nor do I support any law that mandates uniform curriculum standards. There must be an opt-out clause. Period. Democratizing the public system that is in place is a laudable goal. Part of democratizing it is making participation voluntary."

This important debate about AERO and public schools asks the question, "What does the 2007 AERO conference theme of 'Widening the Circle' mean exactly?" Here are the ideas from AERO staff member Isaac Graves, a response setting the benchmark for AERO's efforts to be inclusive: ***"What does 'Widening the Circle mean?***

- **Widening the circle means** that we reach out to all known educational alternatives to network and work together as a more cohesive movement. We need to "Find our commonalities and celebrate our differences."
- **Widening the circle means** that we reach out to all individuals in mainstream education settings looking to change their own personal and institutional practices. We often ostracize those working in mainstream settings and polarize ourselves because of it. Does working in a public school make someone bad?--Absolutely not. Should we pay better attention to the words we use when interacting with groups and people from different backgrounds? Absolutely. All words have power--whether we intend them to or not.
- **Widening the circle means** that we need to reach out in a very concerted way to all individuals and families, many of whom know very little about educational alternatives. We need to inform, educate, and make alternatives more accessible to families from every background--race, culture, money, and language.

- **Widening the circle means** that we need to stop getting caught up in unnecessary squabbles and do what is best and right for the children. Let us not forget that this is why we all are here...or should be here. It's not who has the "best" philosophy or alternative, it's what can we do to create the various educational environments needed for all different kinds of children.

"The reason for this is because I don't subscribe to one alternative--even democratic education. I believe that we need as many different alternatives as can be thought up. My school alone has changed dramatically over the course of only three years to meet the needs of our children--not what sounds best as a school in our heads."

Barrier: **AERO critiques itself: Why has democratic Ed. not caught hold?**
"You said something here that made me think, you wrote: '...it is crucial we build alternative models in the private sector which can be referenced when struggling to open the public sector to accept authentic alternative schooling.' So my question is: Why have we failed to inspire the public to give kids more freedom, when in fact they have much less freedom than they had in the past?"

"Many paths" revisited
The thought that democratic education is not popular because it lacks focus due to the importance alternative education places on diversity, including individualism, brought forth a fundamental insight about the present status of AERO-supported learning alternatives by this same E-mailer:

"So, if 'we can all create a shift in the way the mass of society views 'school' through 'more alternative models,' to the point that 'I found a model that resonates with what I believe works best for me and my children and work at it every day,' then I have to wonder of what comes of the common school ethos and equal opportunity. And you know who will be left out if and when there are all these 'better schools.'

"It strikes me that, *while paying attention to our individuality and to the needs each one has, we need to be very mindful of our larger responsibility to others and see in taking care of our own we also take care of others* (italics mine). A wide variety of school placements for our children is a grand ideal, but it is fraught with the specter of class, of privilege and of advantage, destroyers of equal opportunity."

2. What do non-dominant groups see as barriers?
We know AERO wants to reach out, but why haven't minority communities expanded their circles to include AERO?

Barrier: **Compared to what: How "non-traditional" are private alternatives?**
Admitting there is no exact definition or requirement for a free/democratic school, schools both public and private which have described themselves as democratic, or have been described as democratic by researchers generally involve some or all of the characteristics noted below (Education Revolution, 2008):

- shared decision-making among the students and staff;
- a learner-centered approach in which students choose their daily activities;
- equality among staff and students; and,
- the community as an extension of the classroom.

From the above grid (see p. 5) and its elaborations, the private alternatives AERO supports fit better with European individualistic orientations than with the collectivist ones. Even though AERO and the learning alternatives it supports are, when compared to the dominant culture, representative of anti-establishment/non-traditional themes, when compared to the values of non-dominant cultures, they are more mainstream--squarely more within the individualism tradition than not. Thus, non-dominant cultures may not feel at home with private alternatives.

Barrier: **African American progressive educators critique free/democratic schools** (Loflin, 2007)
There are progressive educators, in this case African American, who believe there are limitations and drawbacks to democratic education (as defined in this paper) with respect to African American children and families.

To these same educators, American descendants of enslaved Africans can not politically and educationally "afford" free schools. Why? To be black in America is to be conscious of being black and of whites at all times. Black people do not have resources and power to protect themselves if they fail. There is risk involved in allowing black children to exercise their freedom (choosing their daily learning activities) in school. The consequences of what can be viewed as "experimenting" turning out poorly are devastating.

Blacks, a minority still at-risk, cannot be as "creative" as whites. They can not fall back on "the majority Eurocentric system" as well as white children can if their time at a free/democratic school is unproductive.

Another way of looking at the situation is that white children are advantaged from the start and can well be more "free" or leisurely with learning and schooling, thus taking more chances. They will not pay as high a price as black children, who may never catch up to their white peers, if they do not get the basic 3Rs.

Most of the debate concerning the possibilities of democratic education for African American students concerns the **definition of liberal: those whose beliefs include striving for a society based on maximum individual freedom and autonomy. Both traditional and current democratic schools center on the white middle-class value of individual self-validation through self-reliance, autonomy, and achievement.** These values can go against the more collective (less individualistic) value system of African American and Latino cultures where learning, in many instances, has no value apart from transforming societal relations and confronting other social/economic justice issues that affect their community.

Using the arguments of one black progressive educator, Dr. Lisa Delpit (1995), popular progressive "child-centered" or "holistic" ideas supported by many AERO members can leave some children of color unable to read/write—without the "codes/language of power" necessary for success in American society. Most free schoolers come from middle-class families and acquire the language of power (Standard English) naturally at home. Students of color, most of whom are not middle class and whose home language is Black English (a variety of Standard English [DeBose, 2007]) or Spanish, may not learn to read, write or speak Standard English without teacher-centered direct instruction.

The reason this is important is for some communities, *learning to read is a political necessity, thus a political act.* Black students must be enabled to see learning to read politically and not just in terms of the traditional rationales society gives—academics: schooling and economics: job related.

The tragic point is it's better to be illiterate and white than illiterate and black. Up to 60 % of inmates are illiterate (www.villagelife.org/news/archives/func_illiterate.html) and black men make up 41 % of inmates in federal, state, and local prisons. www.sptimes.com/2004/01/04/Columns/On_campus__grim_stati.shtml

Whether free/democratic school parents and staff know or not, all schools are political sites (Giroux [2001] in Crayton [2008]). Adopting the free school concepts of 1) *allowing children to learn to read when they are ready*, or 2) *viewing having students reading at grade level by the end of the 3rd grade as the worst kind of coercion* would be a form of social suicide, affecting the African American community's political progress and economic development in the worst way. By being able to read, one has acquired the *language of power,* the Standard English needed to gain access to power and political/economic rewards people of color seek. This reality makes literacy a civil right, serving as a vehicle toward agency, critical thought, and social justice (Green, 2008).

In contrast, many democratic education supporters grow up with Standard English in their homes. Having the *language of power* and the acquisition it brings to social-political capital and the "economics" of well-being is the norm.

For Prof. Delpit, the issue is power and how free/democratic school staff/parents deal with it. She states: Those with power are frequently least aware of its existence, while those with less power are most aware. *Liberals have a hard time admitting participation in the culture of power. It is distinctly uncomfortable.* To make her point, she responds as an academic representing the non-dominant culture to three typical liberal statements.

1. "**I want the same thing for everyone else's child as I want for mine."**

Many liberal educators hold that the primary goal of education is to become autonomous, to develop fully who we are in the classroom setting without arbitrary, outside standards forced on us. Delpit's critique of statement 1 is:

- This is a reasonable goal for people whose children are already participants in the culture of power, who have already internalized its codes and bring this "cultural capital" to school ensuring their success.
- Blacks want to ensure that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that allow them to succeed in the "white man's" larger society.

2. "Child-centered, whole language, and process approaches are needed In order to allow a democratic state of free, autonomous, empowered adults. Research shows children learn best through these methods."

Her critique of statement 2 is:

- For over two centuries, if any groups have, blacks have invested in an ethos of a democratic state of free, autonomous, empowered adults.
- There is no substantial proof that the tenets of a "process approach" work best for a literacy needed to create and maintain this ethos for all Americans--especially for children of color.
- Blacks can't trust "research" as a rationale for action concerning them, i.e., IQ tests or scientific support of eugenics/eugenics laws (Eugenics in Indiana, 2008)

3. "I view a display of power or authority dis-empowers students."

Her critique of statement 3 is:

- Liberals act under the assumption that to make any rules or expectations explicit is to act against liberal principles and thus limit the freedom and autonomy of students.
- This is an unnecessary overemphasis on "individual justice." To not also regard social justice actually skews what freedom is. Because they feel uncomfortable with power, free/democratic school orientations will not act powerfully and stress injustices to students. This deadens consciousness and conscience, and thus indirectly any responsibility for social issues.

Barrier: **Collectivist educators see freedom differently than free/democratic school educators**

Freedom: What is it?

The late Paulo Freire (1921-1997) of Brazil—teacher, philosopher, and activist—is widely regarded in the U.S. and elsewhere as one of the most influential educators of the 20th century. He is the author of more than 20 books, which have been translated and sold widely. Paulo Freire is one of the most important educators to influence alternative education. In the 1970s, along with Ivan Illich, his anti-establishment messages helped make alternative education a global movement. Freire is mentioned since he represents a collectivist point of view. He is also mentioned because liberation is a core characteristic of his philosophy of education.

As is stated in this paper, the essence of private alternatives is also liberty: the practice of freedom--individual students learning without compulsion, choosing their daily activities (Education Revolution, 2008). Yet, through the frame of reference Freire suggests, the freedom practiced at free/democratic school is limited and perhaps less free than these school espouse.

To Freire, the aim of education is to foster, develop, and expand our capacities as human beings. It is a liberatory education which opens minds to higher stages of consciousness. Gaining this deeper awareness and becoming more fully human is the *social act* of critical consciousness. It is not only an *individual act* where a student exercises the right to decide how, when, what, where and with whom they learn.

Now, Freire is no amateur when it comes to freedom; freedom is the theme of many of his writings: *Education, the Practice of Freedom* (1967), *Cultural Action for Freedom* (1968), *Learning to Question: A pedagogy of Liberation* (1989), and *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1997).

To Freire, freedom involves the development of critical consciousness, participation in collective action, active engagement in social agency, and finally, the willingness to imagine a more just and humane world. To teach toward freedom involves an investigation of "what could be, what ought to be, and what is not yet." Freedom is having and using the tools and practices that would help to unmask and uncover the sources of power and privilege in society.

Positive and negative freedom (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom)

What is now obvious, freedom signifies different things to different people. Freedom has a different meaning to African Americans (the descendents of enslaved Africans) than to many European Americans; and, this does not make one idea of "freedom" more or less authentic than the other.

The important distinction here is between "freedom from" (negative freedom) and "freedom to" (positive freedom). For example, free schoolers want freedom from oppression or restraint--an absence of obstacles put in the way of action (especially by other people). It answers the question: What is the area within which a student is or should be left to do or be what he/she is able to do or be, without interference by other persons/governments? This group wants learning without compulsion. The students/staff have freedom and want to exercise it with little or no interference.

For Freire and his liberatory-oriented education, freedom refers to one's power to make choices leading to action. Here students seek freedom (some of which they have, but it's not enough) to develop their potential--having the power and resources to act to fulfill it.

Free schools vs. Freedom schools

To advance the understanding of why collectivist views of freedom can act as a barrier to de-segregating the national movement of unconventional approaches

to education, a review of the characteristics of America's freedom schools and free schools is needed.

In the summer of l964, 41 Freedom Schools opened in the churches, on the back porches, and under the trees of Mississippi. Students were Mississippians, averaging fifteen years of age, often including small children under 5 to the elderly who had spent their lives laboring in the fields (Emery & Gold, 2001). The schools taught self-confidence, voter literacy, political organization skills, and student rights as well as academic skills. Another distinguishing feature was the Black history curriculum--African and US history.
See: educationanddemocracy.org/FSCfiles/C_CC3a_GuideNegroHistory.htm

Legacy of Freedom Schools: Teaching for social justice (Adickes, 2005)
"The [Freedom] Schools raised serious questions about the role of education in our American society: Can teachers bypass the artificial sieve of certification and examination, and meet students on the basis of common attraction to an exciting social goal? Is it possible to declare that the aim of education is to find solutions for poverty, for injustice, for racial and national hatred, and to turn all educational efforts into national striving for these solutions?"

-- Adickes quoting Howard Zinn, p. 194

Southern freedom schools influence the free school movement (Neumann, 2003)
Jonathan Kozol's *Death at an Early Age: The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools* (1967) and James Herndon's *The Way It Spozed To Be* (1968), brought to the attention of white Americans what black Americans knew directly: public schooling was not only authoritarian and oppressive in nature, but racist as well.

These "freedom schools" for personal and collective liberation influenced others who sought social change through education. Anti-establishment activists created "free school" alternatives outside the public system. These visionary innovators believed if children and youth were given the chance to learn and grow in a climate that was non-compulsory, democratic, and child-centered, students would take these values into the larger community, thus affecting social change.

Freedom schools were more community-centered; Free schools were more child-centered
The collectivist-oriented African American community was more concerned with what is best for a child as a member of a community, and not so much as what is best for a child as an individual (personal communication with Chris Mercogliano, June 3, 2007). Free/democrat students have freedom and want to exercise it without interference. In a liberatory education, students do not have enough freedom and seek ways to get it.

Barrier: **Encouraging individual achievement vs. children's sense of social affiliation and responsibility to others**

As stated, AERO endorsed interpretations of education professed by private alternatives and particularly "a learner-centered approach in which students choose their daily activities" which enables independence, individual development, individual freedom, individual expression, and individual achievement can also be viewed as limited and detrimental to others.

Although these schools have a legacy of personal development and success, collectivist, as well as some individualist-oriented educators, are concerned that *encouraging children's individual achievements in school can stimulate an independent sense of self that undermines the child's social affiliation and responsibility for others* (Trumbull, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2003, p. 73). This iterates the concern of the AERO supporter who noted, "It strikes me that, while paying attention to our individuality and to the needs each one has, we need to be very mindful of our larger responsibility to others and see in taking care of our own we also take care of others."

Barrier: **Free and democratic schools are predicated on an optimistic view of America's racial future**

As noted, the freedom of children to follow their own interests and determine their daily learning activities by not being coerced into following a government mandated curriculum is the definition of freedom in a free/democratic school.

An email conversation (personal communication June 15. 2009) with a founder of a democratic school stated, "The development/freedom of the individual student trumps the social justice activities for the greater good. Hal Sodofsky and the Sudbury Valley model has a deliberate stance on not having the school involved in social justice efforts. They believe that such projects are too often an imposition upon the students by an adult perspective and so have no need for such goings on."

Asked if any community projects or a concern for equal educational opportunity were a goal of the school they are affiliated with, the person answered, "Absolutely not....it would be against the Sudbury model. I can not think of any students who showed an interest in equal educational opportunity for all. They were into their own interests. In the democratic school environments it's a matter of bringing a proposal forward for the community to consider which would, if approved by the community, set it on a path to try to effect change and promote social justice. That's a question: Would such a proposal circumvent the mission/goals of the democratic school? I think not, but I expect others would say that such an effort would be an imposition on the children."

To collectivist educators and families this may seem at odds with their values. Yet, those who support, create, or run private free or democratic schools instinctively know the global legacy of "the tyranny and actions of the state," which will, without blinking an eye, use children for it own ends. As noted by

educator Patricia Swisher, “When you control the schools, you control the future.” Every dictator knows this. Even, democratic governments know this.

What is important, collectivist educators studying the history, philosophy, and development of free/democratic schools have pointed out their limitations. Payne & Strickland (2008) in *Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African-American Tradition,* argue progressive liberal democratic education orientations are, “predicated on an optimistic view of America’s racial future” (p. 65), and so presuppose “an elastic, democratic social order in which there are no artificial barriers against the social mobility of the individual. In such a society classes are assumed to be highly fluid and there can be no such thing as caste” (p. 92). Since this is not the case for students of color in America, the more collectivist values do not stress individual achievement and independence from others, but encourage/enable individual achievement toward *social change for the benefit of the group—education and learning for liberation in order to change the current power structure and liberate those oppressed by it.* They assert, free/democratic schools in America are mainly a white middle-class phenomenon, thus students have no stake, per se, in social justice issues because they do not suffer from these injustices.

SECTION 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation: **The next educational movement—A collaboration that will be the most powerful yet in education**

Progressive educators of either dominant or non-dominant cultures/classes are in unique positions to create “A collaboration that will be the most powerful yet in education” (Delpit, 1995). What’s important, the progressives of AERO must continue reaching out to negotiate a collaboration which according to Delpit, will:

- put all issues on the table, creating a dialogue with each side seeking to understand those perspectives that may differ most from theirs;
- bring an understanding of one’s own power (or assumed privilege due to being in the majority);
- encourage whites to:
  - not be afraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of color; and,
  - listen genuinely to try to understand the intended meaning of what black progressives say.

This will, Delpit proclaims, *help all teachers and all children.*

To help such collaboration, it is important to see what both Dr. Delpit and AERO have in common:

- drugs for ADHD/ADD: Families of color, if shown otherwise, will denounce drugging children so they fit into the tiny square of the “sit still, be quiet, and listen” classroom;
- particular families of color, if shown examples, will want to provide a “free school” atmosphere for their child;

- both believe there is no one best way to learn (Delpit, p.132);
- both emphasize the lives of students outside of school so as to recognize strengths and respect their home culture;
- both see the need critique public schools: politics, curriculum, methods, modes of assessment, and definitions of intelligence. AERO educators and supporters, like progressive Black educators, tend to use/promote internal sources of knowledge where students reflect on their own experience and rely on their own ability to asses and create ideas (Delpit, 1995, p. 117)

Obtaining the language of power and the language of democracy

As was stated by Delpit in "*Barrier:* Black progressive educators critique free/democratic schools," the limitations of progressive ideas about child-centered and whole language approaches to reading can keep children of color from obtaining the codes/language of power. This places the onus on progressives to respect the critique of its reading approach and come up with one(s) that works for all students. If the AERO supporters are as child-centered and progressive as they claim, realizing the social/economic/political threat to children when they have not obtained the codes of power will inspire them to create innovative and viable ways to teach reading. Reaching out, listening to, and working closely with progressive black educators will need to be a part of AERO's effort. Such a collaboration will compel a forum where both contingents seek a variety of sound progressive methods in teaching reading as they also influence the many gatekeepers to open their doors, pushing for a variety of codes. This is smart, caring, and democratic.

But, parents from the dominant culture want the 3Rs for their children too

What is interesting and pertains here is the following conversation between two alternative school educators about the fact parents from the dominant culture want their children to have the codes of power and as soon as possible, not when the child's ready.

"I believe that a major sticking point is fear. As a teacher I see that fear places a significant role in both how parents view educational opportunities and how school works to help kids learn about themselves and the world. At my school, there is a very large population of 'alternative' minded parents. They ride their bikes everywhere, they shop at local food markets, buy organic items, support progressive causes. But in their personal lives they are still greatly swayed by what they perceive as the 'skills' their children will need to 'make it' in the world. There is an internalized competitiveness as well as a belief that to be successful their children need the skills that they were taught, and which have been taught for the last 150 years in public schools.

The teacher continues, "They believe they want an alternative education, but they want the results to be the same as a typical public school. They want their child to have freedom, and choice, and spaces for creativity, and happiness, but they also want them to know how to do fractions and multiplication by the fifth grade or be reading a certain type of book which is fine, but doesn't mean the school has to be the one teaching it."

"Traditional academics taught in non-traditional ways"

The other teacher responded, "I have followed this discussion with interest but also stymied by the intensity of it. We can take terminology from traditional academic settings and use it to our advantage. Our slogan 'traditional academics taught in non-traditional ways.' It has caught on. Lately, parents who never thought about a progressive, student-driven environment are repeating the slogan back to me. They find comfort in the words 'traditional' and 'academic,' It doesn't change what we do, it just speaks a language that is more common, palatable and attractive."

Language of democracy: Helping non-dominant cultures/classes see the advantages of school and classroom democracy

Students of non-dominant American cultures must know/be able to use as well as the language of power the language of democracy—the democratic habits of mind and heart needed for political success in the mainstream. Although the manner by which collectivist-oriented communities make decisions is according to tradition and hierarchy, they cannot dismiss the need for individuals and groups in their community to be a part of the wider local and national egalitarian-oriented politics and government. When non-dominant cultures realize the value to their children, and eventually to their community's political capital, of involving their young people at the level of school-related decision-making highly regarded and practiced by private free/democratic schools, they will insist their public schools respond to their democratic mission.

Recommendation: **The educational politics of one-size-fits-all: The problem for both AERO and minorities**

The essence of the concept of learning alternatives is variety: learning styles, teaching styles, schooling styles, and thinking styles. Sternberg adds creative, practical intelligence, and successful intelligence to the traditional areas of memory and analytical abilities. There is also a movement for multiple measures. (Darling-Hammond, Rustique-Forrester & Pecheone, 2005).

This is in contrast to the standards movement. To the extent that the traditional definition of what it means to be smart is narrow and is reinforced by standardization/NCLB and high stakes testing, it acts as a gatekeeper. This not only discourages uniqueness/diversity, but blames failure to fit into the "one size" on race and culture.

e pluribus unum **revisited**

This is not to question the obvious need for commonalities with respect to languages, cultures, or economics. The balance between the need to recognize the individual and also to recognize the group is an American dilemma. *E pluribus unum* is America's attempt to proactively deal with diversity. To most it means, "one from many parts." The was used to Americanize immigrants. Yet, this is now too narrow and must change as America changes. Parker's (2003) interpretation of the motto, "alongside the many, the one," is a better guide to respecting all America's individuals and all its many cultures. What this means to education is alongside the variety of ways to be smart, will be the constantly

critiqued traditional concept of intelligence. This interpretation will democratize intelligence (Williams, 1998). Alongside multiple measures, will be the constantly critiqued standardized test. Students will have an idea of what they know, but also what they can do. Their knowledge of standards via traditional testing styles (i.e. multiple choice) will be supplemented and complemented by authentic assessments which will enable the appreciation and actualization of a student's uniqueness.

Trumbull, Greenfield, & Quiroz (2003) frame the issue this way: **"Unfortunately, the current educational reform movement has moved to a 'one-size-fits-all' model of teaching and testing; the argument and facts just presented indicate this approach is doomed to failure. Children of voluntary minority groups (groups other than the ancestors of enslaved Africans) cannot succeed if what is most valued in school—individual achievement—is considered selfish egotism at home. Equally important, the 'one-size-fits-all' model loses sight of how alternative in-puts can enrich the dominant culture. For example, the U.S. ideal of the self-fulfilled individual can, at the extreme, lead to widespread isolation, alienation, and violence. Hence, an emphasis on family responsibility and solidarity, so intrinsic to collectivistic cultures, can impart a moderating influence on our society"** (p. 92).

When promoted as a common issue with respect to education among democratic ed. supporters/minorities, exposing the politics of one-size-fits-all and putting it in its democratic association with diversity will foster the collaboration they seek.

Recommendation: **Expand the self-actualization qualities of free schools/ democratic schools to include social actualization and cosmic actualization**
The basis of free/democratic schools is the concern for and the development of the individual. A student's particular needs and interests, manifested in their choices, guide their daily activities. Letting children be themselves or providing a climate for self-discovery and self-directed learning, all without adult interference, is the theme and spirit of child-centered alternatives.

Self-actualization: A goal of free school and democratic schools
Self-actualization is the instinctual need of humans to make the most of their unique abilities. Abraham Maslow describes self-actualization as the intrinsic growth of what is already in the organism, or more accurately, of what the organism is. These ideas and definitions, especially in light of the philosophy of the Romantics situate self-directed learning as enabling self-actualization.

"A democratic culture is one that guards the equal right of every individual for self-actualization."

-- Yaacov Hecht, Institute for Democratic Education

Social actualization: A common good responsibility of private alternatives
That self-actualization manifests from the discovery and development of each student's uniqueness, Yaacov introduced the IDE concept of *social actualization*: 1) the ability to know the uniqueness of others--find and see that each person is

different and unique; 2) the ability to know the culture of each person—find that which is beautiful and unique in each person's culture and seeing your culture is not the best; and, 3) the ability to make connections and enable cooperation between individual differences and individual cultures.

There is no doubt the intrinsic need to self-actualize—to be what you potentially are and actualize your uniqueness—is and must be a responsibility of private alternatives. Now, with Yaacov's idea, these alternatives have another responsibility: a responsibility to the common good to enable the social actualization of each student at the school.

Now, enabling self-actualization is not seen as an imposition on children because this is what defines free/democratic schools. Yet, this paper argues an over emphasis on the individual can have unintended consequences for the common good because the major characteristic of independence so prized by free/democratic schools creates the potential to "…undermine the child's social affiliation and responsibility to others." This is not saying child-centered education produces egotistical self-serving idiots. It is saying if the welfare of the whole child and the society they are a part of benefits from the time the child spends in the school, educators and parents must add to their obligation to provide opportunities for self-actualization the opportunity for social actualization.

Is this the bridge between the child-centered theme of individual justice and the collectivist's concern for social justice?

Cosmic actualization: All existence is connected and inter-related

The title of the keynote address at the 2009 AERO Conference by Don "Four Arrows" Jacobs was, "Traditional Indigenous Knowledge." Four Arrows challenged those attending to deeply respect the native concept of humans not being above or separate from nature and calling all "birds, beasts, trees, and flowers" relatives and friends. He called this insight and appreciation "cosmic actualization." This interdependence of all life forms and physical entities is clearly expressed through Chief Seattle's wisdom, "When you spit on the earth, you spit on yourself. What one does to the web of life, one does to itself."

Cosmic actualization is the understanding that much of the DNA in plants and animals is virtually the same (Morgan, 2003) and that rocks and minerals are alive with motion and energy at the sub-atomic level. It is the sense of wonder and connection to the universe which is realized as one views the 1996 Hubble Deep Field photo of a "speck" of outer space which contained at least 1,500 galaxies of every color, every size, and every shape, each at various stages of development…back, back, back into time. Here one senses the Milky Way is just another spinning dot of inter-related and inter-connected life and matter.
http://hubblesite.org/newscenter/archive/releases/1996/01/

"We are creatures of the cosmos… we are star stuff…"
~ Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*

Nurturing cosmic actualization: Imposition or wisdom?

As was noted by Delpit, many educators who are liberals think displaying power or authority "dis-empowers students." Making any expectation explicit "…is to act against liberal principles and thus limit the freedom/autonomy of students." Free/ democratic schools do not impose; children decide their daily activities. In such schools, enabling (or not) the cosmic actualization (the understanding and appreciation of one's interconnection to all life forms and matter/existence in the universe, and acting accordingly) of students would be a question/issue.

In contrast, according to Four Arrows, the authority to facilitate the actualization of our connectedness to the universe for students is not an issue. It is the basis of the authority of/in indigenous cultures. To indigenous peoples, having authority and imposing on children is not problematic. Authority results from personal reflection on lived experiences in light of the inter-connectedness of everything. Note here the importance of basing decisions and actions on past mistakes and successes as well as human kind's global, solar, galactic, and universal inter-relationships. This is profound and powerful.

Therefore, a review of the entire history of our planet makes fostering cosmic actualization in students at free/democratic schools a wise response to the human experience. To not provide a suitable time or "season" for such insights to occur can be the worst of impositions.

Recommendation: **Neutralize the socialization issue around homeschooling**

Regardless of the fact that parents, as individuals or members of organizations, provide a wide variety of community outings for their child/ren, the lack of social experiences meeting, relating to and dealing with a diversity of ideas, persons, groups, and cultures is a constant critique of home schooling (Legg-Goldman, 2009).

Many home/unschoolers feel traditional schools represent an unhealthy social environment and believe their children benefit from coming in contact with people of diverse ages and backgrounds in a variety of contexts. Nonetheless, these schoolers are not known for their social justice efforts.

Enabling social actualization and social justice actions for homeschooled and unschooled children and youth through the conscious efforts of individual families or networks for the common good of everyone is something to seriously consider as helpful to neutralizing criticism. Homeschooling and unschooling families would advance the social intelligence/social-actualization of their child/ren by seriously considering what one AERO supporter in a previous section noted, "...while paying attention to our individuality and to the needs each one has, we need to be very mindful of our larger responsibility to others and see in taking care of our own we also take care of others."

Recommendation: **Appreciate collectivist family culture when making decisions in private alternatives**

For educator Elsie Turnbull (personal communication, January 28, 2008), democracy, with its notion of one-person, one-vote is an individualistic concept. Collectivistic societies are often hierarchical. However, there are certainly societies that are both more collectivistic than the U.S. and democratic. Think of Mexico, Israel, or Peru (actually, a republic like the U.S. is technically). One difference across societies and cultures may be the way democracy is exercised. For example, sub-groups of people may collaborate to come to a decision about what candidate(s) to support. They may regard it as a process of shared decision-making within their reference group (family or larger social group). Classrooms of students from a range of backgrounds can indeed engage in democratic decision-making, however, they may be more comfortable with whole-group consensus building. They may want to talk about how to take the needs of the minority (those who don't agree with a decision) into account and satisfy them in some way.

There are many factors that push people either toward more collectivistic or more individualistic patterns of living and thinking. However, Turnbull believes that Latinos (of any socioeconomic level) are likely to maintain a stronger "group" orientation than European-Americans in general. This is just a starting point for exploration, she notes, and not a prescription. Thus, American educators must consider how students are socialized in their homes in understanding how to engage students in decision-making or problem-solving:

- Are they likely to have been taught to solve problems on their own or to help each other solve problems?
- Have they perhaps been taught to do their own work, or have they been encouraged to help others do their work as well?

As people become more educated they tend to become more individualistic, but that has to do partly with the individualistic nature of American culture. To succeed, the way things are organized now, students almost have to become individualistic. The advantages and disadvantages of this reality must be considered.

Another thought from Turnbull is to simply recognize that students will be coming to the notion of "democracy" from different perspectives. They are all capable of learning how democracy is typically carried out, but their orientations ought to be considered as well. Educators can ask them what they think is "fair," what they think is the "right" way to solve a disputes or make classroom/school decisions.

Recommendation: **Advance toward a multicultural model of development**

The implications of the information expressed on the grid for developmental and educational theory (see page 5) generally revolve around the recognition of one major responsibility for AERO's caring "Widening the Circle" initiative: the need to recognize and appreciate that patterns and norms of development and education previously thought to be universal are often specific to European

American culture, and this is the culture of the schools—even the private alternative schools AERO endorses.

If AERO is to branch out to a variety of families to share the intent and potential of learner-centered/democratic education, supporters must make sure their schools have a realistic understanding of the limitations of liberal orientations/values (individual self-validation through self-reliance, autonomy, and achievement) for educating the "whole child" and for citizenship in a global society.

This implies democratic/alternative education advocates need a broader understanding of the cultural value systems of those they wish to influence, be influenced by, and collaborate with.

Recommendation: **Build and maintain community: Emphasize the values of family responsibility and solidarity so intrinsic in collectivistic cultures**

If community is the guiding characteristic of America's non-dominate cultures, and AERO is widening its circle of influence and seeking partnerships with these groups, it makes sense that AERO reason with free/democratic schools to seriously consider building and maintaining a sense of community/"family responsibility" and belonging/"solidarity" that characterize these groups. This will not only strengthen individual students, families, schools, and the very free/democratic movement they represent, but will help advance the AERO initiative to develop of a desegregated and socio-economically diverse national movement of unconventional approaches to education.

This does not ignore the sense of community free/democratic schools have developed and featured since Summerhill in the early 1920s via school shared decision-making and/or family involvement. In some cases, parents are quite involved both directly and daily in the life of the school. In fact, emphasizing the free/democratic schools' viable and well established version of "family responsibility and solidarity" puts a spotlight on student democratic participation and allows this free/democratic school ethos to be openly reviewed and considered by various collectivist cultures, and our traditional public schools. Windsor House Learning Community/Windsor House School, Vancouver, BC: whs.at.org/ is a fine example.

The point is: we need a discussion on community

This discussion on the "common good responsibilities of private learning alternatives" must include a discussion of community. Longtime free school advocate Chris Mercogliano puts it this way: "…and by community, I mean real community where there is sharing, honesty, mutual caring and support, true and not just token inclusiveness, and where the members work together on common tasks and don't wall themselves off from the rest of the world."

The AERO tribe

Coincidently, the term "tribe" was used by one AERO official during the 2009 AERO conference to describe the feeling of cohesiveness and community people

experienced as they shared ideas, stories, and concerns with other learner-centered education advocates. This sense of an AERO family is natural. In this respect, AERO supporters are more like the non-dominant cultures than they realize; and, this sense of solidarity can be used to facilitate the formation of AERO's collaborations with America's collectivists cultures.

Recommendation: **Help non-dominate cultures/classes see class/school shared decision-making is the multicultural education of the 21st century**

One final way to overcome barrier to the adaptation of school democracy is help progressive African American educators to understand that multi-cultural education, as it is now situated, is passé. Currently, public schools lack a way to actually practice multi-cultural education on a daily basis. Black or women's history month, along with multicultural fairs, class projects or guest speakers are ineffective when compared to having students work together to help determine classroom rules or help run the school.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A review of the roots of free, democratic, and not all, but most of the AERO schools show they share an individualistic approach to education. The concern of this paper is on the limitations associated with this education philosophy. In addition, there is a concern that making available "many paths"--a variety of educational options to families/students--would lead to the balkanization of schools and threaten our larger responsibility to the common good of our American society.

This paper was presented during the 6th AERO (Alternative Education Resource Organization) Conference June 26, 2009 Crowne Plaza Hotel Albany, NY, USA

Special recognition goes out to Leo Fahey for reminding AERO supporters of our responsibilities to the common good, to Isaac Graves for his leadership on this issue, to Chris Mercogliano for his insights and support, and on the 20th anniversary of AERO to Jerry Mintz for his decades of dedication to learner-centered education.

Appendix A

Facilitating a Natural Way: The Native American Approach to Education

Native communities had an organized system for educating young people, based on generations of accumulated knowledge about the natural world. A complex experiential process, which included learning by doing, watching, listening, and experimenting, under the caring mentorship of elders and extended family members, was well developed. Customs, skills, spiritual practices, and languages were effectively transmitted according to locally determined priorities. The extended family, clan, and the larger community provided a safety net for all children.

The understanding that it takes a village to raise a child, commonly attributed to African tradition, was the norm in Native communities. There was no concept

of "other people's" children. A child was regarded as a gift from the Creator and members of the community shared responsibility for the upbringing. Many tribes were matrilineal, tracing relationships through the mother's lineage, reflecting the deep reverence for Mother Earth. The traditional indigenous ways were egalitarian and respectful of both sexes.

Learning was understood to be a lifelong experience, which began before birth. Through songs and ceremonies for the unborn child, infants were prepared for a place in the community. Children commonly spent the first months of life in a cradleboard. Generally, the cradleboard was taken everywhere and was propped up, allowing the child to observe the activities of the family, community, and the environment.

Learning of appropriate roles was accomplished through emulating examples observed in the community. There was great respect given to individuals and individual differences. There was a lot of flexibility shown in the adoption of sex roles, as children grew older. Mentoring occurred, both on the individual level as well as with groups of youth. Games were also an important vehicle for teaching and learning. Young people were generally free to develop at their own pace.

Vine Deloria, the Lakota educator and author, provides important insight into the traditional approach. "The old ways of educating affirmed the basic principle that the human personality was derived from accepting the responsibility to be a contributing member of a society," he states in his book, Indian Education in America (1991). Further, he reminds us that "Kinship and clan were built upon the idea that individuals owed each other certain kinds of behaviors and that if each person performed his or her task properly, society would function." Deloria continues, "Education in the traditional setting occurs by example and is not a process of indoctrination." He adds, "The final ingredient of traditional tribal education is that accomplishments are regarded as the accomplishments of the group or family, not the individual."

The concept of punishment was not part of the traditional learning process. As an example, the Dakota, of the Northern plains, believed that physical punishment would "enslave the child's spirit." The concept of natural, logical consequences for behavior was well understood as the result of intimate involvement in nature and provided further parameters for appropriate behavior.

Indigenous educational approaches provide the foundation for learning based on context and relationship. By expanding the boundaries of the classroom through involvement with the broader community, including the environment, schools can build new relationships, validate the cultures of the young people they serve, and make learning meaningful and appropriate for our future.

This appendix is a compilation of information, quotes, and ideas from “Facilitating a Natural Way: The Native American Approach to Education” by McClellan Hall (2000).

Appendix B

Democracy is a flawed system for African Americans

To social critic Mari Evans, democracy is a flawed system. It is based on a tenet where an identifiable minority, clearly distinguishable from the majority population, is not supposed to be in control of itself.

As an African American, Evans writes about skin color being a visible and ever present referent which is not supposed to be able to overturn or impede the controls applied to it. She frames democracy (majority rule) as a concept of systemic powerlessness and a paradigm for colonization—which she defines as suppression and exploitation designed to keep a people "powerless, mystified, dependent and subordinate."

The question for Evans is: How does an identifiable minority population survive a political system based on a commitment to the controls/processes it has in place to ensure its own survival? Mari Evans suggests:

- Envision a peaceful world of acknowledged, cherished differences.
- Demand governments be flexible, balanced, and creative in ways for diverse groups to share controls.
- Realize the inability to affect power is a lack of cohesiveness, consensus, focus, and direction.
- Leverage to achieve goals through courage, intellectual freedom, energy, and focus.
    - Blacks also organize, monitor elections, deliver the vote, and form coalitions with other minorities

Reference: Evans, M. (2006). *Clarity as Concept: A Poet's Perspective*. Trenton, NJ: Third World Press.

Appendix C

The effect of social class culture on American conceptions of democratic practices: Rethinking democratic education with working-class students

Although this paper intends to show that most attempts by public schools at democratic empowerment and citizenship skills in the US are an academic "civics" that lacks practice and real world engagement, Aaron Schutz argues that past and current progressive attempts may also be lacking.

Progressive curricula/teachers value the more middle-class forms (the active ideas put forth by progressive John Dewey) which foster practices enhancing individuality within informal collaborations; however, are they best for all students? Do middle-class teachers often misapply perspectives derived from their own life-world to the very different experiences of the poor?

Schutz sees current forms of democratic engagement as quite limited when compared to practices of "*democratic solidarity*" developed by the working class that emphasize tradition, hierarchy, and the pragmatic importance of speaking in a collective voice. Many progressive middle-class teachers tend to ignore the potential resources of the "democratic solidarity'' concept, limiting their ability to foster effective practices of social action among working-class children.

A brief history of social class in America

Schultz explores the clear distinction between how the middle and working classes emerged in America after 1850 during rapid urbanization and industrialization. Well educated and using professional certifications and credentials, the emerging middle class had to learn to act as relatively

independent and mobile individuals to obtain and keep their status. A new character ideal emerged in this impersonal world: the "team player" able to constantly shift relational ties and work closely with relative strangers.

Industrialization molded the new working class. In factories, the holistic skills of artisans were broken down into separate operations, reducing worker control and holding wages down. In response, workers developed pragmatic strategies of collective solidarity very different from the individualism of the more privileged. They stressed the importance of "mutualism" and "reciprocity," depending on their long-term relationships and closely knit communities for survival.

Parenting practices: Key characteristics of middle and working class culture in America

Schultz also explores parenting styles. Middle-class children learn at an early age to monitor themselves and make their own judgments. They pick up their parents' preferences for relatively abstract forms of reasoning. Independent and individualistic, they learn to interact with a shifting cast of characters and form mainly "weak" social ties. This prepares them well for the kind of information-driven, symbolic management contexts they will face at the corporation or as employers.

Working-class parents, in contrast, tend not to focus on encouraging individual expression with their children, emphasizing the importance of tradition, authority, and membership in a strong network of community and family ties--practices and attitudes that fit well with the demands of working-class jobs

John Dewey vs. Saul Alinsky: Discursive democracy vs. democratic solidarity

Schultz points out two distinct approaches to democratic social action are associated with these class cultures: "Discursive democracy" and John Dewey, and the working-class approach, "democratic solidarity," represented Saul Alinsky.

In Dewey's essentially middle-class vision, authentic democratic practices were those that nurtured individual distinctiveness amidst collective action—reasoned dialogue leading to consensus**.** Alinsky developed an approach to community organizing that focused on the enhancement of the *collective* power and voice of the impoverished--strategies for democratic collective empowerment that seem much more relevant to the socially and economically oppressed than the time-intensive and often culturally alien forms of discursive democracy preferred by the middle class.

Social class democratic empowerment and public schools

Public schools are environments dominated by middle-class practices and values, ignoring working-class ways of being and rarely acknowledging this exclusion. Because abilities in discursive practices are general requirements of middle-class advancement, John Dewey's form of democratic education has become so dominant that it is rarely challenged.

According to Schutz, democratic education that intends to empower the urban working class must acknowledge the limitations of deeply held and largely class-

based commitments to discursive democracy and give new regard for grassroots approaches to collective empowerment.

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