

Advancing development of national movements of unconventional approaches to education that is diverse according to culture, race, ethnicity, class, ability, language, and age.

2021 European Democratic Education Online Conference video presentation
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The stability of and an increase in private educational alternatives since the 1970s proves there is a need. Yet, is this grand ideal for a wide variety of private educational options associated with alternatives described as “child-centered,” “holistic,” open classrooms, and free schools fraught with the specter of class, privilege, and advantage?

Unfortunately, efforts to engage cultural minorities and those of various ethnicities by those supporting Democratic Education in Europe cannot succeed if what is most valued in school—individual achievement—is considered selfish egotism in many of the homes of these same cultural minorities and ethnicities.

Equally important, the European Democratic Education model loses sight of how cultural schooling differences can enrich the dominant European culture.

For example, “The 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 society.” ~ paraphrase from Trumbull, Greenfield, & Quiroz (2003), p. 92

This presentation will reveal that the historic roots of free schools/democratic schools are in the European 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 European culture of independence and individual achievement. It will contrast these alternatives to other worldviews and cultures with which democratic education may wish to collaborate.

In doing so, democratic education must consider the African concept of ubuntu, the ethos of freedom schools, and the contrast of positive and negative freedom. This will not only advance the development of private learning alternatives, but will advance the development of a desegregated and socio-economically diverse international 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.