

# Connection between education and democracy

[Education](#)



## **Education: the Backbone of Democratic Society**

The role of education in a democratic society, like our current society in the United States, is to impart citizens with the knowledge necessary to make important decisions in their communities when the time to do so arises. In democratic societies where the education provided to citizens is lacking, some serious problems can come about. Uneducated, misinformed citizens voting on important decisions that determine the institutional and moral fabric of their communities is arguably the worst thing that could befall a democratic society. And so, education exists to prevent this very predicament from happening. But this leaves the questions, what should that education consist of, and at what point should a citizen be considered “well-educated”? When examining the writings of social critics and philosophers such as bell hooks and John Dewey, one can find answers to these questions, as well as great insight as to why this is the role of education in democratic societies, and how to implement strategies to enhance the quality of democratic society via proper education.

Democracy, of course, exists within such communities at different levels, but probably the most important form of democracy in our country is democracy at a central or federal level, as this is where the most important decisions are made, which affect all areas of life in smaller-scale communities. Voting in primary and congressional elections is also, not coincidentally, the most popular and exciting way to exercise our democracy in the United States. Every two years, American citizens are given the opportunity to choose their preferred leaders by casting votes based on their opinions, regardless of whether or not those opinions are well formulated or even justifiable. Many

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would argue that, in numerous cases, American citizens do not practice much forethought before casting a vote. For example, people may choose to vote for a particular candidate simply because their peers voted for that candidate, or because doing so supports their families' political ideologies. I believe that it is absolutely vital that people break away from this paradigm of dependent thinking and become educated in such a way that they can take a Socratic stance towards the opinions that they are exposed to in their immediate communities and ultimately form their own opinions on issues of all kinds.

Bell hooks, quoting the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. refers to this model of independent thinking as “ developing a world perspective”. She explains in *Teaching to Transgress* that “ what we are witnessing in our everyday life is not an eagerness on the part of neighbors and strangers to develop a world perspective but a return to a narrow nationalism, isolationisms, and xenophobia” (hooks, 28). In other words, people are growing increasingly comfortable in their biases and are therefore losing the willingness to think for themselves. hooks goes on to explain that these people and groups are becoming comfortable with their biases because their biases are reinforced by the media. For this reason, I believe that if we are to begin educating our citizens so that they become independent thinkers, a great place to start would be with reforming the media and the kinds of things presented therein.

John Dewey writes in *Democracy and Education* that being a dependent thinker is simply a matter of being human. Children and adults alike turn to the media, much like they turn to family members and friends, to find role

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models who they can relate to. They move on to effectively shape their lives after the values conveyed to them by these role models. Dewey calls this phenomenon the “imitative instinct” and says that, “The imitative instinct is so strong that the young devote themselves to conforming to the patterns set by others and reproducing them in their own scheme of behavior” (Dewey, 22). If the opinions of the masses depend so heavily on the role models of individuals, then I believe it is necessary to reform the media such that role models exhibit the right kind of behavior, namely, expression, acceptance, and acknowledgement of a range of different opinions on a number of issues. If media-based role models adopt more appropriate ideologies, I believe that real world role models, such as teachers, politicians, parents and so on will do the same and encourage younger generations to adopt similar values.

Citizens need to be able to approach things critically, especially things that can have lasting profound effects on how large populations in democratic societies go about living their lives. The possibility to do this, especially for incoming generations, is waning because of the misinformation and closed-minded opinions portrayed in ever popular mass media. Therefore, it is necessary to change the nature of mass media so that notions of acceptance and multiculturalism can permeate entire cultures. If this change takes place, I believe the systematic social decline being witnessed today would be reversed very quickly, and democratic societies would be able to act collectively and care for one another, not just on the smaller scale of interest groups or social cliques, but on a national or even global scale.