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# The role of education in a democracy: continuing the debate

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## ABSTRACT



At a time when there are renewed expressions of concern about how our societies are organised and the health of our democracies, this paper focuses on the role of education in a democracy. Informed by John Dewey's and Martin Buber's accounts of what it is to be educated, and Homi Bhabha's concept of third space work, the paper presents the case for a progressive education for democratic citizenship. Adopting an ethnologically-informed approach, the paper provides an in-depth look at two Catalan and two English schools, focussing on the ways in which they look to provide a democracy enabling education. The findings reveal how and why mutual cooperation, collaboration and dialogue in relationships are key elements in the modelling of an education for democratic citizenship.

## KEYWORDS

Education's democracy enabling role; dialogic relationships; ethnographic content; Martin Buber; John Dewey; Homi Bhabha

## Introduction

At a time when there are renewed expressions of concern about how our societies are organised and the health of our democracies, this paper focuses on the role of education in a democracy. Informed by Dewey's (1897, 1916/1944, 1936, 1963) and Buber's (1925/2004, 1947/2002) accounts of what it is to be educated, and Homi Bhabha's concept of third space work, the paper presents the case for a progressive education for democratic citizenship. For Dewey, 'democracy is more than a form of government: it is primarily a mode of associated living, a conjoint communicated experience' (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 87); and being active citizens in the life of a community, personal growth and the growth of democracy are all key elements in his philosophy of education. Unless democratic habits of thought and action are part of the fibre of a people, political democracy is insecure. It must be buttressed by the presence of democratic methods in all social relationships. Arguing that learning in school should be connected to, value and reflect the learning that goes on in the home, the neighbourhood and the playground (Dewey, 1897), Dewey also believed that it is through the school and schooling that social reform can and should take place (Dewey, 1909, 1916/1944).

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Our argument here is built up as follows. In the first part of the paper, we examine the dominant discourses that have long been associated with the neoliberal positioning of education and its purpose in public policy in the UK and Catalonia, paying particular attention to questions over their alignment with the notion of inspiring the creation of democratic learning environments in the classroom and across the school, and in the dialogic relationships schools have with the students, families and the communities they serve (Ball, 2015). Then, to appreciate how John Dewey's and Martin Buber's views on education's democratising role might work in the contemporary global educational setting, in the second part of the paper we present and examine original ethnographic material collected in England and Catalonia that shows schools can create new opportunities to engage in creative and ethical ways with their students and the wider communities they serve.

## **The education and social policy backdrop**

The reform of public educational services continues to be a high priority in government policy across the globe. These policy reforms have deep roots in long-standing decisions to finance the expansion of compulsory and post-compulsory education in the belief that this 'investment' will deliver a knowledgeable and highly skilled workforce to meet the needs of business and the expanding economy.<sup>1,2,3</sup> In this environment where the school is expected to perform, be useful and give society what it needs (Biesta, 2019), the restless search for continuous improvement supported by effective school self-evaluation of teaching practice, and a nationwide deployment of standardised methods of measuring and tracking student learning outcomes, are said to be the hallmark of school effectiveness (Collet-Sabé & Ball, 2019).

Accelerating this agenda in the UK, the incoming coalition government in 2010 and subsequent Conservative governments claim to have embarked on a programme of giving schools more of the responsibility for managing their continued improvement. However, claims to be enhancing school autonomy while at the same time imposing a regime of curriculum delivery guidance<sup>4</sup> and standardised testing to assess and measure improvements in student learning, and school inspection to ensure they are performing well, are contradictory (Ball, 2013; Hurley, 2013; Demetriou & Kyriakides, 2012). Step into a typical English school and often noticeable will be the systematic privileging, and delivery by teachers, of these 'top-down' policy-inspired initiatives and practices to 'fix' perceived failings in the English education system; and the kind of school oversight and accountability we should have to ensure the 'fixes' take hold, and thereby improve standards of learning among students (Ball, 2015; Pring, 2012; Winter, 2017). The upshot is that faced with the ever-present prospect of an Ofsted inspection<sup>5</sup> to ensure schools continue to improve, there is pressure on schools and teachers to cooperate with, rather than challenge, a system of schooling that acts to silence and marginalise the democratic voices of teachers and students in major decisions about curriculum reform, teaching and learning.

## The Catalanian (Spanish) context

The neoliberal policies used to accelerate the reform of public education services across Spain are similar to the ones used by the UK government. Spain's central government is responsible for the overall organisation of the education system and its inspection, while the autonomous regions are responsible for the regulation and administration of teaching at all levels. Whereas in England there are opportunities for some students to attend schools that are exempted from the prescribed curriculum, there are few similar opportunities available for Catalan students. In part, this might explain the strength of Catalan movements of resistance against the national and regional imposition of a regime of curriculum reform and high-stakes standardised assessment tests (SATs) of student learning. Organised by the Catalan Ministry of Education, the SATs were controversially introduced for the first time in 2009 for Year 6 students (11–12-year-olds), and in the fourth year of secondary education for 15–16-year-olds. In 2013, the Spanish government introduced the LOMCE<sup>6</sup> policy for school large-scale curriculum reform (Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa: Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality). Then, in the 2014–15 school year, SATs were introduced by the Catalan Ministry of Education into Year 3 (8–9-year-olds).

The birth of the subsequent resistance movements against these policy decisions comprised three elements: the resistance of families and teachers against the financial cutbacks of the Catalan government and in defence of public education; a movement of families and some teachers against the LOMCE and its policies; and a movement to boycott the SATs. Signalling the beginnings of the SATs 'opt out' boycott movement, during the 2013–14 school year, dozens of families from a primary school in Barcelona withdrew their children from school on the days of the SATs in Year 6. By 2015, 1,035 families and 52 primary schools throughout the Catalan region had publicly expressed their rejection of the SATs, and families were refusing to take their children to schools on the days of the external tests. On these days, the families delivered a self-organised programme of home-schooling (Collet-Sabé & Ball, 2019).

The actions of these families are a useful reminder that the assumed need for schooling is questionable since there are many examples of successful home education, as well as other forms of education conducted outside schools – in families, communities and the workplace (Illich, 1971; Stern, 2018). Whereas Dewey criticised the narrowness of schooling, Illich has criticised 'the attempt to expand the pedagogue's responsibility until it engulfs his pupils' lifetimes' (Illich, 1971, p. 7), and 'makes the teacher into custodian, preacher, and therapist' (Illich, 1971, p. 37). Believing that schools do more harm than good, and that most people acquire most of their knowledge outside school, Illich has popularised the process of comprehensive deschooling (Illich, 1971). It is hard to argue against much of what Illich says about the controlling nature of modern-day institutionalised schooling, but, at the same time, it is hard to imagine an age of liberated education happening in a society without schools. Although they can and often are a source of positive life-enhancing education, friends, families, local communities and workplaces can also be sources of restricted and sometimes harmful education.

In contrast to the global fixation with pursuing a 'top-down' approach for school and education reform, an alternative debate about school self-development adopts a more 'bottom-up' approach, taking as its starting point the notion of democratic schooling, and

the argument for the emancipation, or liberation, of students, teachers and educational establishments from knowledge and practices prescribed by others (Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Stenhouse, 1983; Wilkins, 2011). For democracy to thrive in schools, it is not enough to merely teach about it as an abstract concept, where enculturation and assimilation rather than empowerment can so easily become driving concerns in citizenship education (Leach & Lewis, 2012). Rather, we should focus on the teacher-student relationship and how it can be developed, improved and maintained. For democratic teaching to succeed in schools, critics argue that it must be conceptualised and practiced as an ongoing dialogue between students and the teacher (Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Hall, 2017; Print et al., 2002). Conceived in this way, education can be an integrating force, not for creating uniformity, or the denial of contested views, opinions and practices, but in the sense of empowering future citizens to make sense of the experienced world, and, hopefully, to make ethically-based judgements about matters of shared concern in the school and the wider community and to engage in collective action (Olssen et al., 2004, pp. 270–271; Pring, 2012).

### **Martin Buber and the *I and Thou* (*Ich and Du*) in educational practice**

A system of schooling that acts to silence and marginalise the democratic voices of teachers and students in major decisions about teaching, learning and curriculum development is the very antithesis of Buber's views on learning in dialogue (Buber, 1947/2002). Rather, a context is created in which 'evidence-based' practice becomes the means whereby *I-It* strategies are justified in schools. Drawing on Martin Buber's best-known work, *I and Thou* (*Ich and Du*) (1925/2004), we present the case for *I-Thou* informed practice in the classroom, across the school, and in the school's relationships with the families and the communities it serves. Just as Dewey focused on the teacher's role and responsibilities as the guardian of the 'accumulated wisdom' handed down through the ages (Dewey, 1916/1944, 1936, 1963), so Buber also recognises the need for teacher-guided as well as student-informed practice in the classroom. Using the analogy of the sculptor and the gardener to explain this, Buber outlines two basic *I-It* forms of education (1947/2002).<sup>7</sup> Modelled as a gardener in the first form, the teacher creates and tends the classroom environment so that students can make the most of their innate abilities, whereas in the sculptor model, the teacher's role is to shape the student's natural abilities into an envisaged outcome. Because we process experiences in objective as well as subjective ways, Buber contrasts the *I-It* way of knowing with *I-Thou* knowledge. Within the *I-It* relationship there is a notable absence of dialogue and, rather than being recognised as an equal, the other being is objectified and at risk of being manipulated and controlled (Guilherme & Morgan, 2009). Whereas, when describing *I-Thou* relationships, words such as dialogue, meeting, encounter and exchange are often used to reflect the importance placed on the existence of two beings who recognise and are in mutual dialogue with one another (Biesta, 2019;; Buber, 1947/2002, 1925/2004; Guilherme & Morgan, 2009).

Hence, for Buber, the teacher can only educate when there is an authentic dialogic teacher-student relationship based on mutual trust and respect, and when the teacher can see and begin to understand things from the student's perspective without losing control of his/her teacher perspective, and when the student agrees to accept the

teacher's guidance (Guilherme & Morgan, 2009). Consequently, while being aware of how easy the *I-Thou* can become an *I-It* relationship, communion and dialogue are key terms in Buber's philosophy of education.

Given the importance of dialogue, community and mutuality in Dewey's and Buber's philosophies of education, it is notable how, in contrast, practice in schools today is often informed by *I-It* conceptualisations of teacher-student relationships. Faced with the threat of being judged to be a 'failing' school or 'in need of improvement', the enforced concerns of school leaders are typically short term and involve the 'top-down' imposition of proven methods of improving teaching practice, student behaviours and learning (Wilkins, 2011). The journey from this position, and towards a situation where pedagogy is teacher guided and student informed, while being challenging, is also likely to be full of surprises for both students and teachers (Buber, 1947/2002; Stern, 2013).

Today, being a citizen means living in a world where it is necessary to play a role that is active, critical and committed to overcoming the all-too-familiar social inequalities and unfairness in society (De Groot, 2018). We also know that schools can neither face nor solve these issues on their own. The unlocking and generation of social capital within and beyond the school will require the creation of new 'spaces' for *I-Thou* relationship thinking and informed practice, and this is why, on an everyday level, being active members in the construction of an educational community is a powerful means whereby students can learn about, and appreciate, the processes of democracy and democratic citizenship (Lawy & Biesta, 2006; Osler & Starkey, 2003). This is why, as with Dewey, dialogue, communion and mutuality are key terms in Buber's philosophy of education; and it is this sociocultural perspective on working in 'in-between spaces' which has encouraged us to explore examples of *I-Thou* democracy-enabling practice in English and Catalan schools.

## The ethnographic studies

Completed between 2012 and 2019, the ethnographic field work for our paper employed participant observations and semi-structured interviews with key members of staff in two Catalan schools and two schools in north-east England. Being familiar with the schools and their practice and building trusting relationships with them beforehand was important. The first of the Catalan schools has been given the pseudonym of 'La Casa' and is a nursery and primary school in the southern part of Vic, a city with a population of 43,000, 70 kilometres north of Barcelona, with 23.14% (2016) of its population born outside Spain. This is well above the Catalan average of 14.48%. Compared with other parts of the city where the social composition of the schools favours native Catalan and Spanish speaking middle-class families, the southern part of the city is where the greatest number of people of foreign origin are concentrated, most of them from the vulnerable working class, reaching, in some neighbourhoods, over 50% of the population (Baena et al., 2020). It is in one of these areas where 'La Casa', a school for 3–12 year-olds with two classes per year and with 470 pupils, is located. Ninety-five per cent of the children attending the school are members of migrant African, Asian and European families experiencing high levels of social and economic deprivation. Predominantly housed in social accommodation with rents many of the occupants can ill-afford to pay, families are separated from one another

and the Catalan host community by their language and cultures of origin. Consequently, it is normal each day for 20 different languages to be spoken in the classroom.

The second Catalan school, founded in September 2008 and anonymised as Tramuntana, is located in a town not far from the city of Girona in the north-east of Catalonia. The surrounding inland municipality is home to approximately 6,000 people with varying ethnic and social backgrounds and status, and the 12–16 school hosts around 350 students drawn from the town and from neighbouring urban centres.

Completing the sample, the two English schools are: a non-selective 11–16 Church of England Academy secondary school located on the outskirts of York (UK), whose 1,047 students are from families with varying social backgrounds and status; and a Roman Catholic Academy primary school located in one of the most economically deprived communities in a post-industrial town in north-east England. The secondary school has been given the pseudonym Southfield and the primary school the pseudonym Castleton.

### **In-between space work, I-Thou relationship building and the shock of truth**

In this paper our aim has been to explore and reflect on education's democracy enabling role and, specifically, the notion of an education to equip students for democratic citizenship. In seeking to align theoretical reflections on what this would mean in practice with the ethnographic evidence from two English schools and two Catalan schools, the research has signalled that it will involve *I-Thou* relationship thinking and practice, and an acknowledgement of the depths and entrenchment of 'top-down' policy initiatives that so often encourage *I-It* rather than *I-Thou* relationships in normal schooling.

In social theory, the concept of a '*third space*' is used when exploring Bhabha's (1994, p. 2) notion of the '*in-between spaces*' that are seen to exist between binary descriptors of difference, for example, the *I-It* relational positioning of teachers as the source of knowledge, wisdom and understanding, and students as '*in-need*' beneficiaries of prescribed programmes of teaching. In contrast, the concept of working in '*in-between spaces*' is used when exploring alternative *I-Thou* informed ways of teaching (for example, Flessner, 2009; Ryan & Barton, 2013), and when working at the boundaries of established professional activity and expertise to support vulnerable young people and families (for example, Allan & Catts, 2014; Edwards et al., 2010; Gamarnikow & Green, 2011; Timm, 2013). An important feature of these in-between spaces is that they 'are likely to be invisible in that they are not written into organisational charts or job descriptions' (Whitchurch, 2013, p. 21). They are also, potentially, 'sites of struggle' (Law, 1992, p. 386), in which the 'relational effect' can give rise to what Buber describes as the 'shock of truth' (1999, p. 4, cited in Stern, 2013, p. 48), resistance, refusal and disruption (Collet-Sabé & Ball, 2019; Foucault, 1982).

The 'relational effect' and the resulting 'shock of truth' was evident in Southfield School when teachers and students designed and conducted a pilot study to explore the implications for the participants when lesson observation systems allow and empower students to observe and offer teachers feedback on their teaching practice. Participants in the study were a senior member of staff; a teaching colleague, the teacher's critical friend; and four 15-year-old student observers. Acknowledging their different positions in the school and potential relational tensions in the study is important. None of them could claim impartiality. The senior member of staff had line-management responsibility for his

teaching colleague; he was also the students' English teacher and trained them in lesson observations, which involved them observing and giving him feedback on two of his lessons. In addition, he had worked with the students and the teacher to help prepare them for the planned observations of two separate lessons taught over a period of three months by the teacher.

The 'shock of truth' moment when learning to move beyond the *I-It* relationship (Buber, 1941/1999, p. 4) is reflected in the students' and the teacher's expressed anxieties over the uncertainty of what was to come; their anxieties over the giving and receiving feedback; and a shared sense of excitement when contemplating the challenging and troublesome newness of the *I-Thou* relationship:

Right now, I'm wondering why I umm volunteered [pause] only joking! It's just a strange feeling that I'm allowing students to step over a, over a [long pause] line that's been drawn in the sand for a long time. A big part of me wants to give it a go and inside me I know it's the right thing to do' (Participating teacher)

I'm really looking forward to seeing a lesson from a new point of view, and I know what I'm looking for but [long pause] the idea of sitting in front of a teacher, even a nice one like [pause] and telling her what I really think of her teaching – well it just feels a bit weird; like I'm doing something I'm not meant to. (Student 1)

What if the lesson goes really wrong? I want to be positive but I've also got to tell the truth. If this means anything it must be truthful, mustn't it? Students don't always tell teachers the truth, do they? (Student 2)

Admitting that 'students don't always tell teachers the truth, do they?' shows awareness of the power-related *I-Thou* relationship, and the 'pressures on students to tell teachers what they want to hear. Meanwhile, the use of the phrase 'if this means anything' seems to signal the student's expressed hope that their observations will bring change, but fears this will not be allowed to happen. All too aware of normally being 'allowed' a token voice (Ruddock & Flutter, 2004), the students' unprompted decision to draft a 'charter of values' to be agreed by all the participants acknowledges the dangers as well as the democratic rewards, as they navigate this previously uncharted space for learning:

- (1) We will respect the trust we have been given by not talking about our work to friends or other teachers unless the teacher we have observed agrees.
- (2) We will meet before and after the lesson with the teacher to discuss what we all want from the process.
- (3) We will meet as a group before we feedback to the teacher. We will do this so we can agree what we're going to say so we don't disagree/argue with each other as we feel this could confuse the teacher.
- (4) Our feedback will always begin with positives and we will try our best to praise what the teacher has done well.
- (5) We will make suggestions from a student's point of view, not as an inspector or other teacher.
- (6) We will ask the teacher what they thought went well and what they would change if they did the lesson again.
- (7) We will always offer to show the teacher our mind maps so they can read all our observations

- (8) We will ask if we can watch them teach again in future.
- (9) We will ask them to give us honest feedback on how useful the process has been.
- (10) We will ask them to tell at least three other teachers to give it a go!

Appreciating the study's potential ground-breaking implications, it represents a strong basis for an *I-Thou* relationship between them and the teacher. It also shows why mutual cooperation, collaboration and dialogue in relationships (Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Print et al., 2002; Sennett, 2013) are key elements in the modelling of an education for democratic citizenship. For a more detailed account of the study's design and outcomes, see Leach and Crisp, (2016), and Leach (2018).

### A progressive education for democratic citizenship

In Tramuntana School (Girona), dialogic relationships and mutual cooperation are central to how a progressive education for democratic citizenship is being modelled. Reflecting Edelstein's (2011) modelling of citizenship education, there are curated *I-Thou* relationship building opportunities for students to: learn **about** democracy in order to become a knowing and conscious democratic actor; learn **through** democracy by participating in a democratic school community; and to learn **for** democracy through their involvement in the construction and ongoing development of democratic forms of life in the school, based on cooperation and participation in local, national and transnational contexts. In the school curriculum there are several curated 'spaces' where the importance of mutual dialogue, active listening, reflection and respect in practice (Apple & Beane, 2007; Leach, 2020; Stern, 2018) is acknowledged. For example, in the first 15 minutes of each day, students in the same year group assemble in a classroom to talk about and discuss something that has happened – an important piece of local, national or international news, or a concern that either they or their teachers want to explore together. There was a researcher-observed example of this on the day when senior Catalan politicians were arrested for actively supporting Catalan independence, and students asked, and were allowed, to meet over lunchtime to talk about and discuss this situation. Class assemblies are another space where students meet to discuss and respond to issues that are of concern to them. Here, the class representative, chosen by the students, chairs the session and also writes the agenda and the minutes of the meeting.

Meeting once a week, the Students Representative Council is another space where students from all the year groups come together to debate and make decisions about matters affecting them and the school. There are several committees in the Council and one delegate from each class is chosen (by consensus) to represent the views and concerns of the class members, and when voting, in those meetings. Interestingly, the *I-Thou* relational learning from this venture is being taken into the surrounding community where students are working with others to develop a constitution for a municipal representative body that will incorporate the active participation of young people and children from nursery and primary schools in community-wide decision-making.

Elsewhere in the curriculum, project work in the school occupies between six and eight hours a week and involves working in cooperative groups of four students on projects that bring together and support applied learning in several subject areas. Students and their parents, as well as teachers, are encouraged to suggest topics for

project work, and decisions over which ones to work on are collectively discussed and agreed. These are opportunities when students can learn to recognise and appreciate why their opinions are important and matter, and that democratic participation involves mutual empathy, respect, tolerance and support; as well as debate, decision-making, self-management and collaboration. To support this learning, flexible timetabling acknowledges the need for students to work in groups for two hours or more on their projects.

Recognising the value of this, there is also encouragement for students to engage in voluntary educational project work in the local community, and thereby extend their learning about democracy in practice. Examples of this work include opportunities for students to go into local primary schools to read to and with children; visits to the local elderly people's Centre where residents 'explain their experiences in life to us and we provide a series of activities that we carry out together'; and visiting elderly people 'who live on their own, to accompany them to the market on Fridays'. Interestingly, this *I-Thou* relationship building work with elderly people in the community is often done outside school hours, and this service work is the most requested by the students. Echoing the 'shock of truth' experiences of the students in the Southfield study, when seeking to align the welcomed uniqueness of their experiences when compared with what they know is often the norm in other schools, two 15–16-year-old Tramuntana students were keen to acknowledge:

We have only been part of this Centre for four years, but they have been enough to give us the necessary tools to leave our childhood behind and help us enter the adult world. The fact that we are not a conventional Centre is helping us to grow as people in a special way and to be prepared to adapt to the world of tomorrow as well as to try to change it.

We would also like to point out that our families are involved in the Centre, and that other external agents have a more or less daily presence in our school reality, ... fostering a democratising and stimulating environment. Examples of this are parents who collaborate with the teaching team by giving workshops (gardening, guitar...) and also through having visits and guests who participate in the projects we carry out.

Similarly, in La Casa nursery and primary school (Vic), dialogic *I-Thou* relationship building is a core feature in the vision for its continued purpose and development. In contrast to other centres in the region where the social composition of the school favours Catalan and Spanish speaking middle-class families, in La Casa where 95% of the children attending the school are members of migrant African, Asian and European families, all the languages spoken in the school are promoted, made visible, valued and known to everyone. In this way it aims to avoid the construction of a school identity based on exclusion – some languages have value, others are not valued (Mouffe, 2013), and bases its identity instead on a democracy that positively values all languages. The school takes this linguistic diversity as the starting point from which to rethink its practice, and to make it more participatory and democratic. In doing so it envisages itself as a 'family of families', and the curriculum is conceived and delivered as the 'Vic Big Families Multicultural Project'. It is in this spirit, and an awareness of its *I-Thou* relationship with families in the surrounding community, that the school's aim is for Catalan to become a common shared language, while at the same time encouraging children to use their mother tongues during lessons when explaining and discussing things with one another.

Shared in art, music and video recordings posted on YouTube, this includes examples of shared family learning activities, including occasions when celebrating together their different cultures of origins and festival occasions.

Acknowledging what it must be like for families living in isolation and extreme deprivation, and appreciating also the language-related difficulties the children and their parents have when navigating the city for essential services; beginning in the nursery school and continuing in the primary school, visits to meet and talk with people in doctors' surgeries, hospitals, social services, museums, libraries, council buildings, churches, sports clubs, shops and other communal spaces and places of work are core elements in the curriculum. Reciprocating and as a way of bringing the community into the curriculum experience, people from these organisations are frequently invited into the school to work alongside teachers, to share information about where they work, the nature of their work, and to help contextualise the children's learning.

Castleton School in North-East England is another primary school in which *I-Thou* relationship building is evident in the school's thinking and practice. The majority of its children (95%) are drawn from a community that is among the 1% most deprived nationally. It is also a school where parents increasingly feel safe to go for support when addressing their family's educational, health and social care needs. The view of the headteacher is that it is about 'capturing hearts and minds', requiring a collective, ongoing commitment from staff, parents and families to the project. Early in the project's development, and not knowing one another, the apparent loneliness of parents when bringing their children to school in the morning and collecting them in the afternoon was noticed by the headteacher and her teaching colleagues, whereas since then, the impact of the school's approach to pastoral care is noticeable in the way it helps parents and families to form and build friendships and to bond together. Step into the school and there is a very real sense in which the project resembles that of a cooperative community-wide workshop (Sennett, 2013). There are many observed opportunities for parents and pre-school toddlers to come into the school on a regular basis. Activities include play therapy sessions and a mothers and toddler group. Also, the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme is one of several opportunities when whole families are invited into the school once a week. A school-run credit union for families is another initiative welcomed by parents, and particularly at important times of the year when there are birthdays and at Christmas. It helps prevent parents from having to go to high-interest loan providers for money.

Building on this work, and mirroring the University of Chicago's Parent Academy research project,<sup>8</sup> the Castleton Family Academy Project is the latest addition to the school's suite of initiatives. Run as a pilot one-afternoon-a-week event over a period of six weeks, parents were introduced to and were able to learn about their children's curriculum content and what it involves. Also, awareness of the school's social capacity-building responsibilities in the surrounding community, and collaborating with the local Further Education College, the school delivers a suite of Level 2 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) courses for parents. Delivered in the school, the courses are free for parents to study, with the aim of helping them gain the qualifications and confidence to move into employment. Augmenting this provision, there is in-school support for writing CVs, job-opportunity searches and interview preparation for parents.

## Conclusion

Writing at time when there are renewed expressions of concern about how our societies are organised and the health of our democracies, in this paper our aim has been to engage with the idealised notion of an education for democratic citizenship. To this end, the results of our research reaffirms how and why mutual cooperation, collaboration and dialogue in relationships (Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Print et al., 2002; Sennett, 2013) are key elements in the modelling of education for democratic citizenship. Sennett (2013) also recalls how, to be successful, cooperation requires skill, ritual, drama and competition – so long as people feel they are in a win-win situation and can take away something they feel is valuable for them.

The collaborative study in Southfield School shows why embedding win-win processes of democratic dialogue in everyday classroom practice is a challenge. It reveals the dynamic, troublesome, and potentially disruptive nature of the journey towards democratic, inclusive schooling, and particularly when the strategies used to bring this about serve to highlight the traditional agential power-related positioning of teacher-student relationships and role identities in the classroom, and cause teachers and students to become ontologically open to each other's *I-It* and *I-Thou* perspectives. What Buber describes as the 'shock of truth' (1941/1999, p. 4, cited in Stern 2013, p. 48) when this happens is evident when the participants recognise and voice their feelings of transgression and vulnerability – hence resulting in statements such as 'doing something I'm not meant to do'; 'crossing a line in the sand', which one is not supposed to transgress; and 'students don't always tell teachers the truth, do they?' On the other hand, despite revealing their sense of vulnerability, the journey the participants take is also seen to be potentially emancipatory and empowering for them. Their emerging ontological openness to one another's *I-Thou* relationship – and an acceptance of individual responsibility, personal agency, and the moral purpose of what they are doing – are said to be key drivers of educational change (Fullan, 1991, 1993).

This is also apparent in Tramuntana School (Girona), where the curriculum and its delivery enable students to experience first-hand what being an active democratic citizen in the world involves. Interestingly, the students' 'shock of truth' awareness of the privileged uniqueness of this experience is evident in the comment – 'Tramuntana is not a conventional Centre', and shows they are only too aware that this is far from being the norm in everyday schooling.

There is a similar uniqueness of democratic practice in the La Casa and Castleton schools, and in the way they relate to, and interact with, the communities they serve. In each case, the centrality of *I-Thou* relationship building and a commitment to the moral purpose of their work is clearly writ large in what they are doing and achieving. Which is why, when gauging the ability of schools to generate social capital and thus function as democracy-enabling institutions, our research shows how and why school-community relationships are forged within particular cultural, socio-economic, historical and temporal contexts (Bagley & Hillyard, 2014; Beneyto et al., 2018; Clarke et al., 2020; Collet-Sabé, 2018). Consequently, the scope and opportunity for developing democratic school-community relationships do not simply fall to the professional desire and values of school leaders and teachers, although, this is shown to be of vital importance. Rather, our data would suggest it is also about the on-going struggle of discovering a way of living and

learning together (Fielding, 2012), and the strength of the school's capacity, opportunities and commitment to establish strong, bonded ties and social networks with others in the community.

## Notes

1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/523396/bis-16-265-success-as-a-knowledge-economy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523396/bis-16-265-success-as-a-knowledge-economy.pdf).
2. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_05\\_445](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_05_445).
3. <https://www.oecd.org/education/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum>.
5. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills is a non-ministerial department of the UK government, reporting to Parliament via the Department for Education. Ofsted is responsible for inspecting a range of educational institutions, including state schools and some independent schools. It also inspects childcare, adoption and fostering agencies and initial teacher training, and regulates a range of early years and children's social care services (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>).
6. (<https://www.uv.es/uvweb/master-policies-administration-management-educational-organisations/en/blog/13-keys-understand-lomce-1285903808674/GasetaRecerca.html?id=1285984313379>).
7. This paper is translated as 'Education' in Buber's *Between Man and Man* (1947). It was an address to the Third International Educational Conference, Heidelberg, August 1925.
8. <https://voices.uchicago.edu/babylab/>.

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