

LEARNING FOR DEMOCRACY

An international journal of
thought and practice

I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth.

Karl Popper

The Open Society and Its Enemies, Volume 2, chapter 24, § I

Democracy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the promotion of values and practices associated with respect for individuals, freedom, equality of opportunity, the pursuit of truth, and justice for all.

A democratic state is one in which there are formal procedures for limiting the power of leaders without having to resort to violence. But 'democracy' does not denote any one type of social structure, and should not be equated with suffrage. Voting is merely a procedure that may be used within a democracy to facilitate decision-making. Avoiding the tyranny both of majorities and minorities should be a concern for any group or society that accepts a responsibility to abide by democratic processes.

A democracy has to be created and sustained from within; it cannot be imposed and maintained from without, although external factors may be constraining or supporting. Integral to the development of a democracy is the idea of an open society, that is, a society which recognizes that knowledge is conjectural, should be available, and is not in the gift of any particular individual or group. An open society fosters critical discussion. Not all open societies are democratic, and few democracies are entirely open, but for democracy to develop and flourish, criticism must be valued and diversity accepted. This will not come about by chance. Democracy requires education in the broadest sense, not mere training for specific roles.

How can we encourage democracy? This is the practical problem addressed by Learning for Democracy. The journal is premised on the idea that learning – informal and formal, at home, in school and in the workplace – is central to any solution. It explores, in particular, how individuals, groups, and societies throughout the world can promote learning in ways that are consistent with egalitarian values and supportive of democratic processes. A feature of the journal is the presentation of scholarly yet accessible critical discussions between authors who work in different disciplines or hold contrasting points of view¹.

¹ Joanna Swann, (2005). *Learning for Democracy*, 1(1), 1.