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.