



## Quick Guide: Democratic Classrooms

*Source: RMC Research Corporation, Denver, CO, May 2004*

*For additional resources on these and other service-learning topics visit the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse Website at [www.servicelarning.org](http://www.servicelarning.org)*

---

Democratic classrooms are those in which the curriculum actively engages students in collaborative inquiry, decision making is shared between students and staff, and students choose their daily activities. Compared with traditional classrooms, students in democratic classrooms take more ownership of and responsibility for their own learning. Helping students become active citizens and preparing them for participation in a democratic society are two purposes of service-learning.

While there are different models of democratic schooling, the following characteristics, developed by the League of Professional Schools (Allen, 1994), are typical and overlap with several components of high quality service-learning:

- Students and teachers work together to make students' learning a contribution to their community;
- Students demonstrate their learning in public settings and receive public feedback;
- Students have escalating degrees of choice, both as individuals and as groups, within the parameters provided by the teacher;
- Students actively work with problems, ideas, materials, and people as they learn skills and content; and
- Students are held to high degrees of excellence in both their academic objectives learned and their contributions made to a larger community.

In democratic classrooms, students help to create ground rules, values, and norms for how their learning community will operate. There is widespread participation by educators, students, parents, and other members of the school community in issues of governance and policy making. For younger students, class meetings can be held so that the children can make responsible decisions and experience the impact of these decisions on their classroom community.

### Web Resources

### **The Alternative Education Resource Organization**

<http://www.educationrevolution.org/demschool.html>

Serves as a reference for democratic schools and the International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC). AERO's mission is to promote learner-centered education and unite all forms of educational alternatives.

### **Center for Educational and Community Renewal-Local School and Community Renewal Network - University of Oklahoma**

<http://www.ou.edu/org/one/local.htm>

The Oklahoma Networks for Excellence in Education (O.N.E) is a consortium of schools whose purpose is to facilitate movement from conventional schools to democratic school communities and to facilitate student learning for democratic citizenship.

### **Educators for Social Responsibility**

<http://www.esrnational.org>

Helps educators create safe, caring, respectful, and productive learning environments to foster democratic participation and change.

### **League of Professional Schools**

<http://www.coe.uga.edu/lps/democratic.html>

Introduces the covenant of teaching and learning that is realized through shared governance and action research, as a guide for participating schools.

### **North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)**

<http://www.ncrel.org/cscd/pubs/lead41/41check.htm>

New Leaders for Tomorrow's Schools – “Educating for Democracy”  
Explores how best to prepare students for full participation in a democracy with the necessary complex knowledge and skills. Focuses on the distinction between educating *for* democracy and education *as* democracy.

### **Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)**

[http://www.nwrel.org/msec/just\\_good/10/index.html](http://www.nwrel.org/msec/just_good/10/index.html)

“It’s Just Good Teaching: Mathematics and Science Classrooms: Building a Community of Learners”

Emphasizes creating classrooms that embrace the characteristics of a community of learners and connects that attitude with rigorous mathematics and science teaching and learning.

### **Public Achievement**

<http://www.publicachievement.org>

People of all backgrounds, ages and walks of life come together to face challenges, solve problems, and learn the true meaning of citizenship and democracy.

### **The Sudbury Education Resource Network**

<http://www.sudburynetwork.org/>

Provides an in depth discussion of the Sudbury Model. The ideals of *Freedom, Democracy, Trust, and Responsibility* are at its core.

### **Print Resources**

*Democratic Schools*. Edited by Michael W. Apple and James A. Beane. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), 1995.

[http://www.servicelearning.org/wg\\_php/library/index.php?library\\_id=1564](http://www.servicelearning.org/wg_php/library/index.php?library_id=1564)

Narratives written by those intimately involved in school reform efforts have been gathered to show how educators in four communities in the United States have committed themselves to preparing students for the democratic way of life.

Glickman, Carl. *Renewing America's Schools: A Guide for School-Based Action*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.

Shows teachers, principals, students, parents, central office personnel, school boards, and community members exactly what they need to do to create schools that are purposeful, moral, and successful places.

*A Special Section on Democracy and Civic Engagement*. Edited by Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne. *Phi Delta Kappan* 85, no. 1, 2003.

Provides information and resources regarding democratic schools, service-learning and civic education from a variety of perspectives.