‘DEMOCRACY IS NOT ONLY SOMETHING TO FIGHT FOR, IT IS SOMETHING TO FIGHT WITH’: HOW
DEMOCRACY IS POSSIBLE IN PUBLICLY FUNDED SCHOOLS AND WHY WE SHOULD EXTEND IT.

Michael Fielding
Institute of Education, London, UK

The double argument at the heart of this paper is, firstly, that if we are to develop transformative and socially just educational systems we might fruitfully look to radical democratic traditions within the publicly funded sector of education (Fielding 2011b). Democracy's aspirations require the dignity and eloquence of articulation; their legitimacy requires enacted practical arrangements which embody and enable its living reality and weave its narrative into the fabric of our daily work.

Secondly, the paper urges us to acknowledge and transcend the limitations as well as the necessity of social justice and democracy. Democracy is not enough: social justice is not enough. They provide necessary but not sufficient conditions of human flourishing. They are for something else. Difficulty in naming and articulating a convincing account of their companion desiderata is commensurate with the magnitude of their importance. Drawing particularly, though not exclusively, on 20th century traditions of English socialism an argument is made for the notion of 'democratic fellowship'.

The practicability and the desirability of how schools might go about developing Freedom to Learn in and through radical democratic approaches to schooling is illustrated by reference to historical examples, in particular Lawrence Kohlberg's development of the Just Community School movement in the USA (Kohlberg 1980) and by the work of Alex Bloom at St George-in-the-East Secondary School in the East End of London (Bloom 1953).

Lastly, the achievability of such approaches in publicly funded schools, even within the hostile context of neo-liberalism, is illustrated with reference to the author's 'Patterns of Partnership' typology (Fielding 2011a).


