

# World Teachers' Day 2018

*Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife*

–John Dewey

## Standing on the Frontlines for Democracy

25 Lessons Learnt on  
Education and Democracy

Education International at 25



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1. **Educate** for democracy
2. **Stimulate** critical thinking
3. **Shape** global citizens
4. **Do not** be the obedient servant of the state
5. **Be aware** of the thin lines between patriotism and nationalism
6. **Advocate** gender equality, diversity and inclusion
7. **Protect** the right to learn in one's native language
8. **Burst** internet bubbles and value privacy
9. **Embrace** new technologies with prudence
10. **Question** standardized testing
11. **Keep** schools safe sanctuaries of learning
12. **Refuse** to bear arms or wear police badges
13. **Oppose** segregation
14. **Do not deny** undocumented children access to schools
15. **Fight** discrimination on grounds of gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, social background and sexual orientation
16. **Build** resilience when inequality muffles voice
17. **Open** the school to the community
18. **Protect** education for the common good
19. **Keep** the market at a safe distance
20. **Don't let** politicians interfere in the classroom
21. **Stand up** for your rights
22. **Protect** your democratic organizations and institutions
23. **Defend** and extend your collective bargaining rights
24. **Insist** on the application of international standards
25. **Be proud** of your profession

# 25 Lessons Learnt on Education and Democracy

## 1. Educate for democracy

Democracy and human rights are not a gift of nature. Their underlying values are to be instilled to future generations. This is the unwritten clause in the assignment of the teaching profession globally. Pedagogy and didactic methods imbued with democratic values should inform all teaching, irrespective of the subject. This is a formidable challenge, particularly in non-democratic countries, where sometimes educators are required to pursue ideological or religious objectives set by the state; but also in countries where school systems are expected to first and foremost serve the needs of markets and the economy educating future consumers, leaving educators little time or space to contribute to the development of responsible citizens. Educating for democracy requires that educators are properly trained, qualified and that they enjoy the professional freedom needed to carry out that task.

## 2. Stimulate critical thinking

A fundamental capacity and competency for democracy is the ability to think critically. Without that ability one is subject to control and manipulation by others. This requires a broad curriculum and pedagogies that cultivate students' responsibility, imagination and creativity, as implied by UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.7.

## 3. Shape global citizens

The world is changing rapidly, and schools must evolve to prepare young people to understand the world in which they live, in all its complexity, to recognize the way in which global and local affairs are intertwined, to understand globalization and its consequences, including global risks, and to have the skills and the desire to contribute to improving the world. Being "global citizens" does not mean abandoning national allegiances, ethnic identities or political beliefs. On the contrary, a global citizen is also an engaged "national citizen", who balances and integrates the local, the national and the international.

## 4. Do not be the obedient servant of the state

Notwithstanding the responsibility of public authorities to finance education and to set education goals, educators must always use their professional discretion to interrogate and to reject curricular directives that defy facts, falsify history, lead to xenophobia and hate or are otherwise at odds with international human rights standards. There is a professional and ethical responsibility that may outweigh the authority of education employers, or even of governments where they have abdicated democracy and human rights.

## 5. Be aware of the thin lines between patriotism and nationalism

Patriotism may be positive to the extent that it emphasizes the positive values of a nation and is not based on division. However, the term has often been distorted and confused. The line between patriotism and nationalism can be difficult to define. Nationalism tends to express itself as being in opposition to others and slips easily into chauvinism and nativism, which are a fertile ground for discrimination and other anti-democratic practices. In countries where rightwing populism is on the rise, schools and educators may be under pressure to have nationalistic sentiments reflected in the curriculum.

## 6. Advocate gender equality, diversity and inclusion

Gender equality, diversity and inclusion start in schools and classrooms. The achievement of these values will boost democratic development. "Gender equality" means, according to UNICEF, "that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. It does not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike". "Diversity" is about taking account of the differences between people and groups of people, and placing a positive value on those

differences, while 'inclusion' is to ensure that everybody irrespective of gender, race or background be enabled and given the opportunity to participate. If equality is the end goal, equity, which is defined as the quality of being fair and impartial, is the means to get there. Although in many countries progress has been made towards equal access to resources and opportunities, there are still too many places where ignorance, bias or indifference hamper fair and impartial treatment of girls and minorities. Public school systems, when adequately funded, are the single most effective social instruments to remove barriers to equality, diversity and inclusion, where professional educators can create a learning environment to achieve those same values at classroom level.

## 7. Protect the right to learn in one's native language

Language, culture and ethnicity are deeply intertwined. They are also intertwined with inequity, discrimination and conflict. Anti-democratic forces often target linguistic minorities. In 2007 the United Nations called upon Member States "to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world". Ignoring that call and denying indigenous people the rights to teach and learn in their own language is a form of oppression unbecoming democratic societies. Moreover, children whose primary language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out of school or fail in early grades. Research has shown that children's first language is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout primary school. However, learning and becoming proficient in the nation's official language, either as primary or secondary language, should always remain a mandatory objective to be achieved upon completion of the school career.

## 8. Burst internet bubbles and value privacy

The internet offers enormous benefits, but it entails risks too. It makes true, but also false information available instantly and globally. It is important for young people to learn how to use the internet to benefit from it, but also to learn to filter out untruths and use it responsibly in social networks. In many schools cyberbullying has become a plague. Furthermore, there are issues of privacy. Internet operations are dominated by a few giant corporations and there is little or no democratic control on the collecting and use of data, while in some places public authorities are eagerly collecting and storing personal data without much regard for invading their citizens' privacy.

## 9. Embrace new technologies with prudence

New technologies provide valuable tools to improve teaching and learning. They can enhance education opportunities for students and may help educators improve learning processes. There are dangers also, including an aggressive technology market determining what should be learned and how it should be taught. "Robotizing" teaching is not just wishful thinking in some technology circles. Public authorities may be attracted to the idea for financial reasons. However, inculcating and developing democracy competencies, motivating students and influencing their behaviors and attitudes depend to a large extent on human interactions between student and educator. New technologies cannot replace the most vital functions of trained, professional teachers.

## 10. Question standardized testing

In a growing number of countries, the expansion and reliance on standardized testing and allied techniques has crowded out education processes needed to develop critical thinking and impart democratic values. It puts a premium on scores rather than learning, it tends to narrow the range of teaching and learning and turns school systems into competitive markets. Testing is important – when used as the diagnostic

tool of educators helping students to improve their learning performance, not as governments' instrument to evaluate the performance of educators and schools.

## 11. Keep schools safe sanctuaries of learning

Schools have been targets in warfare and of terrorism. In conflict areas around the world students and teachers have been victims of violent attacks while in school. In other parts of the world, schools and universities have not always been "safe sanctuaries" either. Tragic school shootings in the US and Europe have shown the vulnerability of educational institutions, particularly in countries without adequate arms control. But schools do not only require protection against violence coming from outside. Just as important are schools' own policies and measures to ban violence by students and to create a safe learning environment protecting students against bigotry and bullying.

## 12. Refuse to bear arms or wear police badges

Educators should not bear arms. The presence of arms in schools do not contribute to a safe learning environment. Neither do they enhance mutual trust between students and educators, which is an important condition for successful teaching and learning. Educators are not law enforcement agents. It is not their task to report information concerning their students to law enforcement agencies, unless school safety is under threat.

## 13. Oppose segregation

"A country that educates its children together has a better chance of being at ease with itself than one that segregates different parts of the population from an early age". Keeping children apart, unless for the purpose of giving extra attention to students with special needs, creates inequality, and solidifies rather than overcomes barriers to social cohesion, and poses challenges to the achievement of democracy.

## 14. Do not deny undocumented children access to schools

The right to free primary and secondary education is universal. No child should be denied that right, including undocumented minors. Like access to health care services, children, irrespective of their legal status, should have access to schooling.

## 15. Fight discrimination on grounds of gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, social background and sexual orientation

Discrimination is often based on fear and bigotry. It is irrational and brings out the worst in human character. It is to be addressed throughout the education system, beginning when people are still young but able to understand that discrimination is not just intellectually unsound, but also against values of democracy and simple fairness.

## 16. Build resilience when inequality muffles voice

Political equality, which is fundamental to democracy, involves a wide range of issues including eligibility to vote, run for office and access to the political process. It also involves trade union and civil society engagement, access to free media, and the exercise of basic rights. Political equality may be undermined by socio-economic inequality. Free public education accessible to all citizens provides the best opportunity to reduce those inequalities. Schools and educators can build resilience with a broad curriculum, not only ensuring the delivery of the appropriate knowledge, skills and values, but also constituting a solid basis for lifelong learning.

## 17. Open the school to the community

Schools are no islands. As the old African proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child." Preparing students to live in an inclusive democratic society is an educational challenge. It can be met successfully when schools invite parents and the local communities in which they

operate to play their part. Partnerships with community groups, businesses and local agencies may not only help achieving the school's educational targets, they may also strengthen the community's commitment to public schooling and enhance local democracy.

## 18. Protect education for the common good

Education is both an individual and collective right. It gives every person an opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for a meaningful life. It is also a nation's most precious tool to achieve economic growth, social progress and democratic development. Education is a basic social service and one of the cornerstones of democracy. It is one of the core responsibilities of governments to facilitate the delivery of quality education by building and funding strong public-school systems.

## 19. Keep the market at a safe distance

In too many places public school systems are being carved up and outsourced to private businesses. Some believe that education can be delivered more cheaply and efficiently by the free market, preferably with fewer, less qualified staff and a liberal dose of one-size-fits-all online programs and standardized testing. This is an illusion. The simplistic transfer of ideas from the corporate world, the introduction of league tables, performance pay and school rankings will not advance education quality. The market has an important role to play in the construction of school buildings, in manufacturing school equipment and in publishing teaching and learning materials. However, one should draw a line so that corporations will not run schools on a for profit basis causing social inequity or where they would invade teachers' professional space and tell educators what and how to teach.

## 20. Don't let politicians interfere in the classroom

It is the responsibility of public authorities to set general objectives and targets for their education systems. Schools and educators, however, must be autonomous in applying educational methods and in selecting the teaching and learning materials that will help them reach those targets. Politicians should not interfere in the work of professional educators, by prescribing educational methods and content.

## 21. Stand up for your rights

Protecting our democratic systems means speaking out, engaging and standing up for your rights and for those of your colleagues and students. The most effective and sustainable means to improve the fate of our students, the profession and our communities remains collective action through democratic, independent trade unions.

## 22. Protect your democratic organizations and institutions

Democracy entails more than a democratically elected government. An independent trade union movement, like a free press, a vibrant civil society and a strong public-school system, is one of the pillars on which democratic societies rest. In some countries the right to form independent trade unions does not exist; in other countries trade unions are under attack or their rights are restricted. Anti-democratic forces are often leery of representative democratic unions and their ability to mobilize their membership to exert pressure on governments and employers. There are many ways to undermine the functioning of free trade unions, including education unions – portraying them as organizations that are against change and not representative of their members, not inviting representative unions to consultations of importance to their members or weakening them by establishing alternative associations.

## 23. Defend and extend your collective bargaining rights

Collective bargaining is a right that is fundamental to democracy and to ensuring that societies, and not just

elections, are democratic. Collective bargaining in education is closely linked with education quality. Making collective bargaining illegal or limiting its scope limits democracy. In some countries, education unions, which are the guardians and representatives of the teaching profession, are no longer considered privileged partners for education policy discussions. In some situations, handpicked "experts" are substituted for educators' elected representatives which makes it much less likely that the experience of educators will inform education reform.

## 24. Insist on the application of international standards

In addition to the international human and trade union rights standards protected by the United Nations and the International Labor Organization, global standards exist for the teaching profession. These standards are laid down in the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers (1966) and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel (1997). These Recommendations provide the most authoritative global standards for the teaching profession and are, perhaps, even more relevant now than they were at the time of their adoption.

## 25. Be proud of your profession

The teaching profession was once described as 'the noblest of professions'. Around the world, with some notable exceptions, educators are increasingly working on limited contracts, their work load is increasing, their professional space is shrinking, their autonomy challenged, their access to professional development limited, they earn salaries often below the average wage, and in some countries they even lack the qualifications, skills, support, and learning materials to teach and teach well. It is called 'de-professionalization'. Governments that allow the teaching profession to erode, put the future of their nations at risk. But educators, proud of their profession and organizations, will not abandon their place on the frontlines of democracy.



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Education International is the voice of educators and education support staff in the international community. It represents 400 national education unions in 170 countries and territories with a combined membership of 32.5 million.

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