

Fall 2016

The Democracy Empowerment Rubric: Assessing Whole Group Conversations in Early Childhood Classrooms

Ben Mardell

Michael Hanna

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp>

Recommended Citation

Mardell, Ben and Hanna, Michael (2016) "The Democracy Empowerment Rubric: Assessing Whole Group Conversations in Early Childhood Classrooms," *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism and Practice*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp/vol8/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism and Practice by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu.

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

The Democracy Empowerment Rubric: Assessing Whole Group Conversations in Early Childhood Classrooms

Ben Mardell

Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education &
Lesley University

Michael Hanna

Arlington, MA Public Schools &
Lesley University

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Abstract

A dramatically shifting economic landscape presents proponents for democratic classrooms with a historic opportunity. To take advantage of this opportunity, a measure of classroom democracy is needed. The Democracy Empowerment Rubric (DER), which analyzes whole class conversations, is presented as a measure. Possibilities and risks associated with deploying such a rubric are discussed.

Keywords: Early childhood education, democracy, assessment

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

21ST CENTURY SKILLS AND DEMOCRACY: AN HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY

Generally, the instruction in American public schools has not sufficiently emphasized the cultivation of skills needed for strong democratic citizenship. Such skills include critical thinking, emotional regulation, compromise, empathy, and group decision-making (Soder, 1996; Soder, Goodland and McMahon, 2002; Edwards, 2011). Promotion of these skills requires instruction that, among many other ingredients, empowers students by releasing some classroom authority to them. In his history of American public school instruction, Larry Cuban (1984) notes a handful of large-scale efforts throughout the 20th century to democratize learning, but concludes that, generally, instruction has remained chained to the hierarchical, efficiency imperative of the industrial age.

Spring (2000) described three reasons that teacher-centered, didactic instruction has endured as the default instructional approach in American schools: 1) the organizational structure of schools reinforces it; 2) the general culture of teaching is conservative and resistant to change; and 3) schools exist to instill the behaviors required in the prevailing economic system.

The prevailing economic system for the latter part of the 19th and much of the 20th centuries required obedient workers, and therefore obedient students. The Superintendent of St. Louis schools, William Harris (in Tyack, 1974), explained in 1871:

The first requisite of the school is Order: each pupil must be taught first and foremost to conform his behavior to a general standard...conformity to the time of the train, to the starting of work in the manufactory. (p. 43)

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

This principle regarding the purpose of the American public school, although critiqued by many postmodern scholars (DeLeon, 2008; Slattery, 2006), and occasionally rejected successfully by some teachers and school leaders, generally prevails.

Yet our economy has undergone profound changes in the past 40 years. Traditional factories have closed and the high tech sector has exploded. Even the assembly line looks different – far more frequently updated with new technology, requiring new skills and dispositions.

Advocacy groups such as the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (p21) have been formed to change this default instructional approach in order to prepare students more appropriately for this new economy. The p21's website explains its organization as one:

[F]ounded in 2002 as a coalition bringing together the business community, education leaders, and policymakers to position 21st century readiness at the center of US K-12 education and to kick-start a national conversation on the importance of 21st century skills for all students. (www.p21.org)

In 2010, p21 and the American Management Association conducted a survey of over 2,000 manager members and customer companies, including Apple, Cisco Systems, and Microsoft, about the skills they look for in hiring and retaining employees. The results show that employers are searching for workers who are adept at collaboration (72.3%) and communication (79.2%) (p21.org). American schools, therefore, are emphasizing the cultivation of these 21st century skills in their students.

An example of the implementation of 21st century skills in schools is the Common Core State Standards. The CCSS integrated the framework of 21st century education prepared by The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). P21 (2006) advocated

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

integrating core academic knowledge, critical thinking and social skills in teaching and learning to help students master the multi-dimensional abilities that are required in the 21st century. These skills can help students succeed in their future careers by supporting 21st century learning systems to improve outcomes...Hence the P21 framework and the Common Core State Standards support each other to achieve the future skills that students need...By integrating cognitive learning and skills into curriculum, students can obtain a deeper understanding of the subject and try to solve complex problems in real world. (Alismail, H. & McGuire, P., 2015, p. 150). Beginning in kindergarten, children are expected to:

- Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups:
 - Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions
 - Continue conversation through multiple exchanges (SL.K.1)
- Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly (SL.K.6)

Learning goals like these also lead to the growth of dispositions needed by competent democratic citizens. Foundational to the research and writings of John Dewey is the conviction that fostering in schools what we now call 21st century skills is the only route to safeguarding the continuation of democracy in America:

Wherever [democracy] has fallen it was too exclusively political in nature. It had not become part of the bone and blood of the people in daily conduct of its life.

Democratic forms were limited to Parliament, elections and combats between parties. What is happening proves conclusively, I think, that unless democratic habits of thought and action are part of the fiber of a people, political democracy is

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

insecure. It can not stand in isolation. It must be buttressed by the presence of democratic methods in all social relationships. The relations that exist in educational institutions are second only in importance in this respect to those which exist in industry and business, perhaps not even to them. (Dewey, 1937, p. 467)

In other words, although the Common Core Standards essentially represent an effort to align schools with new economic realities, the standards are also, “A once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine and reprioritize the special role that schools play in preparing students for active civic participation” (Wiener, 2014).

To the extent that they embrace these standards, proponents of democratic classrooms are no longer at odds with the business community in the desire for autonomous, critically thinking individuals who can collaborate independently and create meaning together.

DEMOCRATIC EARLY CHILDHOOD WHOLE GROUP CONVERSATIONS

In discussions of democratic early childhood classroom practices, the distinction between democracy on national and local levels is useful (Moss, 2011). On a national level (what some call “big D” democracy), Democracy is operationalized through voting and majority rule, adherence to the rule of law, an independent judiciary and a free press. On a local level — in clubs, community organizations, and schools—relationships play a prominent role in actualizing democratic values. While adherence to agreed-upon rules and laws remains important, this view of “small d” democracy also depends on the members of a group listening to each other, trusting each other, and treating each other fairly and with respect. It is on this local level that, as Eleanor Roosevelt (1958)

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

explained, human rights begin – where “every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity”.

Early childhood classrooms operate on the local level, and creating democratic communities here involves managing the tension between individual needs and desires and the requirements of the group. In a democratic classroom community, each child, to the degree appropriate to his/her age, should have equal opportunity to express his or her opinions and have choices about issues that matter to his or her life. This concern for choice and self-expression, however, does not mean that the democratic early childhood classroom is focused solely on individuals doing what they please. Rather, it is a place where individuals act with sensitivity to the needs of other community members; where children learn to develop control over impulses, making decisions based on reason (Dewey, 1986).

Most importantly, a democratic classroom is a community where children have the opportunity to make meaning together and develop ideas collectively. This involves far more than children voting for what kind of crackers they want for snack or having several options of where to play during choice time. It involves children and teachers together creating a culture — the rules, rituals, stories, artifacts and ideas that define their group. It involves a group of children “who are emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically engaged in solving problems, creating products and making meaning” (Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001, p.285). These are exactly the conditions young children need in order to flourish academically and personally in our new economy, where available jobs are those that cannot be preformed by a robot or computer; jobs that require creative, collaborative and communicative skill (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Democracy permeates these classrooms, influencing the physical environment, the schedule of the day, the use of materials and, especially, interactions among children and children and adults. Hence, there are many places to look for, and potentially many ways to measure, democracy in practice.

A FOCUS ON WHOLE GROUP CONVERSATIONS

In our effort to measure and make democracy visible, we have chosen to focus on whole group conversations. Our rationale is two-fold. First, almost all classrooms hold whole group meetings at least once during the day. Second, we anticipate that the conversations in these meetings are a good indicator of the general level of democracy in a classroom. In order for democratic conversations to occur, there needs to be something interesting for the group to talk about in order to draw children in and keep their attention (engaging curriculum). Fortunately, because young children's interests in the world are broad, even with prescribed curricula skilled teachers can find points of engagement. There has to be a high level of trust among children and teachers and an interest among the children in the ideas of their peers (a healthy classroom environment). Likely children will have worked in small groups, gaining practice in collaborative conversations where they listen to one another, exchange ideas and build ideas together. While teachers can set norms and introduce conversational protocols that can enhance conversations, it is unlikely that democratic whole group conversation can occur with regularity in a generally non-democratic classroom.

What do whole group conversations look like in democratic, early childhood classrooms? Naturally, they provide children opportunities for participation, voice,

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

expression of ideas, and agency. They are also occasions for listening. For the meeting to proceed in a satisfactory manner, children need to control some impulses and coordinate their ideas and actions with others – to take turns.

An illustration of a democratic, whole group meeting comes from Eliot Pearson Children’s School (the lab school at Tufts University). Eighteen kindergartners, along with their two teachers, are discussing plans for a classroom mural. While the three-member mural design committee’s proposal for a garden has met with general approval, Luis voices opposition, arguing that a beach would be more calming. Grace, a member of the mural committee, points out that the classroom already has a mural with pirates and a shoreline. Luis responds that the shoreline does not have sand. Daniel offers a compromise: “Maybe you could make the beach under the water. There could be a garden in the beach. I know that under the water they have seaweed and kinds of flowers.” Henry, while supportive of the plan, says, “But I know Luis wants the beach,” and Briana is skeptical because, “What happens if the plants get too much water?” Injecting humor into the conversation, the teachers mention sea cucumbers and the possibility of the classroom scarecrow appearing in the mural with a snorkel and mask. The idea resonates with Henry, who declares, “To scare away sharks and killer whales!” Aya calls out, “We could put in the kindergartners.” Tycho suggests, “We could put in fish.” Their enthusiasm persuades Luis and Grace, and the group agrees that an underwater garden (with sand) should be the mural’s theme. Throughout the conversation, it is clear children are listening to each other. Daniel’s efforts to broker a compromise and Henry’s protection of Luis’s point of view are particularly impressive

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

moments of young children acting democratically, behaving as caring, creative and committed community members.

Steve Seidel (2001) captures the spirit of whole group conversations when he writes:

It is possible to see the group as holding the individual in its arms with care, respect and love... The group that embraces the contributions of each member, however diverse and contradictory, may well provide exactly the right context for the emergence of strong individual identities. Through the debate, experimentation and negotiation that characterize the work of these learning groups, each member comes to see, and in time to value, the particular, even idiosyncratic, qualities of the others. The valuing of each member's contribution means that each person not only develops respect for the others, but also has the experience of being valued for what he or she brings to the problem at hand.

(p.313)

Vivian Paley explains this sense of a democratic early childhood classroom in *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, writing, "The whole point of school is to find a common core of references without blurring our own special profiles" (Paley, 1997, p viii).

Democratic whole group conversations provide context for a collection of children to find common references while maintaining their special profiles; this is "little d" democracy in action.

THE NEED FOR A MEASURE OF DEMOCRACY

Along with "Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups" there are

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

74 other English Language Arts Kindergarten Standards in the Common Core. They include:

- recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet
- read common high-frequency words by sight (e.g., *the, of, to, you, she, my, is, are, do*)
- read emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding

Often it is the standards associated with basic literacy skills, seen by administrators as prerequisites to success in the high stakes testing that begins in third grade, that are directly measured by early childhood evaluations. To our knowledge, there is no measure currently deployed to evaluate the democratic nature of a classroom (or associated skills such as collaboration and critical thinking within a democratic classroom). Frede, Gilliam, and Schweinhart (2011) explain why this is problematic:

Rather than measuring what we value, it may be accurate to say that we all too often value what we measure. Whatever is measured tends to become a focus of concern for preschool providers, policy makers, and the public. Therefore, assessment systems have the potential for driving much of what goes on in early education classes, simply by increasing the saliency of the measured areas of the curriculum relative to the unmeasured (or less well measured) areas. (p. 157)

Susan Engel (2015) offers a challenge to progressive educators. She explains that the alternative to bad testing regimes is not no testing at all. Rather, she asks:

Why not test the things we value, and test them in a way that provides us with an accurate picture of what children really do, not what they can do under the most constrained circumstances after the most constrained test preparation? Nor should

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

this be very difficult. After all, in the past 50 years economists and psychologists have found ways to measure things as subtle and dynamic as the mechanisms that explain when and why we give in to impulse, the forces that govern our moral choices, and the thought processes that underlie unconscious stereotyping. (p. 1)

Engel captures our argument for the need for a rubric to evaluate classroom democracy. Rather than abandoning the search for evidence of the thing we value the most in a classroom in American schools – namely, the cultivation of habits of democracy – we propose an instrument that not only registers the presence of democracy in the functioning of the classroom, but in its deployment, deepens the practice of democratic citizenship by the professionals involved.

THE DEMOCRACY EMPOWERMENT RUBRIC (DER)

The rubric we have created is grounded in the work of Krechevsky, Mardell, Filippini, and Gardner (2012), who describe 4 elements of high-grade, effective, quality early childhood education based in progressive traditions from Reggio Emilia, Italy and American schools that aim to be democratic in nature. The rubric is divided into four lenses through which one may assess the democratic nature of whole group conversations in early childhood classrooms:

- Who is doing the talking?
- Who is in charge?
- The nature of the talk
- The tenor of the talk

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

For each of these lenses, there is at least one data point on which to base assessments.

For example, “Who is doing the talking?” is assessed by looking at the distribution of utterances between teachers and children and among the children themselves (e.g., do one or two children do most of the talking or do almost all children contribute to the conversation?). “The nature of the talk” data points include: how connected the conversation is (are statements linked to previous comments); whether there is a language of thinking, noticing and evaluating; whether there is collective meaning making and if the conversation yields generative ideas. The entire rubric is presented in Appendix A. Appendix B provides an example of how a conversation might be coded using the rubric.

We suggest filming the classroom discussions, which allows for critical moments in the conversations to be revisited. Watching the film several times, focusing with one or two lenses at a time, has proven useful. A five-minute clip, during which there is a goal for children to learn from and with one another (or where opportunities for children to learn from and with each other could be expanded), yields enough data to utilize the rubric effectively. The focus of the camera, while recording these discussions, should be on the entire group, not just the teacher. An omnidirectional microphone is invaluable in capturing the subtleties of young children’s conversations.

Risks and Opportunities

Even given the need just articulated for the DER, there is a risk of jeopardizing strong democratic relationships if the rubric is used simplistically, as a supervisory or accountability measure. Although some policy-makers or administrators may regard the rubric as a convenient addendum to current evaluation instruments, or even as a

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

replacement, it is intended to be used by educators to aid in learning – teacher for teacher, or principal for teacher. It is intended to democratize a learning community -- for the adults to model the democratic behaviors they are attempting to teach and foster in the classrooms with the children. Supervision and evaluation can distort the notion of growing democracy, since supervision can reinforce hierarchy and paternalism.

The DER could, potentially, turn into an example of Campbell’s Law, reinforcing traditional and inherited authority structures in the very classrooms where it is intended to measure an evolution to more democratic structures. As Campbell’s Law (1976) states:

The more any quantitative social indicator (or even some qualitative indicator) is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor. (p. 49)

Accordingly, the degree to which schools and districts focus on quantitatively measuring the quality of teaching and learning from the point of view of an external observer, the less likely they are getting accurate measurements of the quality teaching and learning.

For habits of democracy to be inculcated in students, then, habits of democracy must be modeled by the adults in the school building. Nevertheless, “collaborative, sustained inquiry into teaching and learning is the exception rather than the rule in most U.S. schools” (Weinbaum et al, 2004, p. 13). The Democracy Empowerment Rubric is intended as a tool to move school communities towards democracy, and should therefore be previewed, reviewed, and revised before deployment by one educational professional for another. The observer and the observed should have an established dynamic of democratic, self-directed learning, which is being aided by the observation process.

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Recommendations

The Democracy Empowerment Rubric is flexible in content, and should be adjusted according to the priorities for learning of the teacher. It may be the case that a teacher and reviewer use the rubric as it is published in the appendix, or specific target areas may be inserted, or entire sections could be deleted. Again, the framework should be owned mutually by the observer and the observed in an overall fostering of democratic learning.

The DER may also be useful in research projects that assess the degree to which the level of democracy has been impacted by other influences in a classroom. For example, the rubric could be used after the implementation of a new writing program that intends to increase democracy during the writing process.

Finally, it is recommended that participants engage in reflection and feedback to one another on the process of actually using the rubric, and apply lessons learned in future applications. In this way, it is anticipated that an internal culture of quality will evolve in the school, and the school will become the environment where children develop deep habits of strong democratic citizens, for the sake of democracy, and for the sake of making strong contributions to the culture and economy in which we find ourselves.

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

References

Alismail, A., & McGuire, P. (2015). 21st century standards and curriculum: Current research and practice. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(6), 150-154.

Bryk, et al. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Campbell, D. (1976) Assessing the impact of planned social change. *Occasional Paper Series, Paper #8*, Hanover, NH: The Public Affairs Center, Dartmouth College.

Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Cuban, L. (1984). *How teachers taught: Constancy and change in American Classrooms 1890-1980*. NYC, NY: Longman.

DeLeon, A. (2008). Oh, no, not the "A" word! Proposing an "anarchism" for education. *Educational Studies*, 44 (2) 122-41.

Dewey, J. (1937). Democracy and educational administration. *School and Society*, 45 (1), 457-67.

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. NYC, NY: Kappa Delta Pi.

Edwards, C. (2011). *Democratic discipline in learning communities: Theory and practice*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Engel, S. (2015). 7 things every kid should master. *Boston Globe Magazine*.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2015/02/26/things-every-kid-should-master/uM72LGr63zeaStOp9zGyrJ/story.html>

Frede, E., Gilliam, W.S., and Schweinhart, L.J. (2011) Assessing accountability and ensuring continuous program improvement. In *The pre-k debates: Current controversies and issues*. Zigler E., Gilliam, W.S., and Barnett, W.S. (Eds.), Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass.

Project Zero & Reggio Children. (2001). *Making learning visible: Children as individual and group learners*. Cambridge, MA: Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Goldring, E. & Berends, M. (2009). *Leading with data: Pathways to improve your school*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Krechevsky, M., Mardell, B., Filippini, T. & and Gardner, H. (2012). Creating powerful learning experiences in early childhood: Lessons from good teaching. In *Defending childhood: Keeping the promise of early education*, B. Falk (ed.) New York: Teachers College Press.

Moss, P. (2011, February 1). Democracy as First Practice in Early Childhood Education and Care. Retrieved August 9, 2015.

Paley, V. (1997). *The girl with the brown crayon*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard College.

Roosevelt, E. (1958, December 10). In Our Hands. *10th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Lecture conducted from United Nations, New York City.

Seidel, S. (2001). *Making learning visible*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Slattery, J. (2006). *Curriculum development in the postmodern era*. New York, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Soder, R. (ed.) (1996). *Democracy, education, and the schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Soder, R., Goodland, J., McMannon, T. (ed.) (2001). *Developing democratic character in the young*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Spring, J. (2000). *American education, 9th ed.* NYC: NY: McGraw-Hill.

Tyack, D. (1974). *The one best system: A history of the American urban education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Weinbaum et al. (2004). *Teaching as inquiry: Asking hard questions to improve practice and student achievement*. NYC, NY: Teachers College Press.

Wiener, R. (2014, March 5). *The Common Core's Unsung Benefit: It Teaches Kids to Be Good Citizens*. Retrieved August 9, 2015.

Acknowledgements

This work was made possible by a Lesley University Senior Faculty Grant and a graduate assistantship grant from Lesley's Graduate School of Education.

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Appendix A

The Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Section One: Who is doing the talking

1a. What is the distribution of talk between teachers and children? <i>During the conversation...</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Evidence:</i>	<i>...almost all the talk is from the teacher.</i>	<i>...the teacher talks the most, though children talk about 25% of the time.</i>	<i>...the balance between teacher and child talk is about 50/50.</i>	<i>...many members of the classroom community are involved in the conversation with children talking more than adults.</i>

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

1b. What is the distribution of talk among the children? <i>During the conversation...</i>	1 <i>...one or two children do most of the child talk.</i>	2 <i>...a few children do most of the child talk.</i>	3 <i>...many children contribute to the conversation.</i>	4 <i>...almost all of the children contribute (verbally and non-verbally) to the conversation.</i>
<i>Evidence:</i>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Section Two: Who is in charge

2. Who decides who talks and what is talked about (the agenda)?	1	2	3	4
	<p><i>...the teacher controls all aspects of the meeting, calling on children and deciding the agenda.</i></p>	<p><i>...children have a minor role in calling on each other and deciding the meeting's agenda.</i></p>	<p><i>...children share with the teacher calling on other children, and deciding the agenda.</i></p>	<p><i>...children lead in the process of calling on one another, and deciding the agenda.</i></p>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Section Three: The nature of the talk

3a. How connected is the conversation? <i>The statements made and stories told in the conversation....</i>	1 <i>...are disconnected from previous comments.</i>	2 <i>...are related only because they respond to a common teacher question.</i>	3 <i>...are sometimes linked by children to other statements and stories made by other children earlier.</i>	4 <i>...are frequently linked to previous ones, statements and stories building off one another.</i>
<i>Evidence:</i>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

<p>3b. Is there a language of thinking, noticing and evaluating? <i>Children and teachers...</i></p>	<p>1 <i>...do not use a language of thinking.</i></p>	<p>2 <i>...infrequently use a language of thinking.</i></p>	<p>3 <i>...sometimes use a language of thinking.</i></p>	<p>4 <i>...frequently use a language of thinking, employing words like ideas, wonder, inspire, see, opinion, agree and disagree.</i></p>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

3c. Is there collective meaning making? Children's questions, proposed ideas, theories, solutions and stories...	1 <i>...are not part of the conversation. Instead, children are asked to answer closed questions, and recall specific information.</i>	2 <i>...are a limited part of the conversation.</i>	3 <i>...are a frequent part of the conversation.</i>	4 <i>...are central to the conversation. Children are solving problems, creating products and/or making meaning together.</i>
<i>Evidence:</i>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

3d. Does the conversation yield generative ideas? <i>The meeting....</i>	1 <i>...does not yield generative ideas as the teacher shuts down opportunities for the group to create generative ideas.</i>	2 <i>...yields a few or no generative ideas, since the structure of the conversation does not encourage collective meaning making.</i>	3 <i>...there is effort made by the teacher, and some opportunities and successes, but not a dense culture of collaborative learning.</i>	4 <i>...is forward moving, producing a collective body of knowledge and/or story that are embraced by the group.</i>
<i>Evidence:</i>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Section Four: The tenor of the talk

4a. Do children support each others' learning and understanding? <i>In the meeting, children...</i>	1 <i>...provide no assistance to one another.</i>	2 <i>...provide minimal/infrequent assistance to one another. Little awareness in inequities in contributions.</i>	3 <i>...sometimes provide assistance to one another. Some awareness of the need to include all participants.</i>	4 <i>...frequently provide help to one another through suggestions, critique, explaining ideas, and efforts to bring peers into the conversations.</i>
<i>Evidence:</i>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

<p>4b. How are uncertainty, difficult issues and different opinions handled?</p> <p><i>In the meeting, these challenging elements....</i></p>	<p>1</p> <p><i>...provoke inappropriate comments, e.g. "he's stupid."</i></p>	<p>2</p> <p><i>...are glossed over, or greeted with indifference.</i></p>	<p>3</p> <p><i>...are generally, but not entirely addressed.</i></p>	<p>4</p> <p><i>...are welcomed and handled with respect as ideas are negotiated by the group.</i></p>
<p>Evidence:</p>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

4c. What is the atmosphere of the conversation? <i>The atmosphere is...</i>	1 <i>...negative or adversarial, e.g. few smiles, sarcastic tones and body language that suggests disengagement</i>	2 <i>...neutral.</i>	3 <i>...sometimes positive. Some smiles and pleasure is evident.</i>	4 <i>...frequently positive, with children and adults appropriately expressing interest and joy verbally and nonverbally.</i>
<i>Evidence:</i>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Appendix B

Sample Coding of a Conversation

To assist in calibrating expectations for kindergarten conversations, the authors have coded a conversation with the DER that took place in an urban, public school classroom. The conversation occurred after center time where a group of children had enacted *The Three Little Pigs*. Preceding the conversation, the class had watched a short video from the enactment. A video of the conversation can be found at: <insert here>

Transcript

Teacher: The wondering part of the protocol is, “How did you?” “I wonder why?” These are all questions we can ask. Here is a chance to ask our questions.

Children: Ms. Yee.

Teacher: I’m wondering what happened when the wolf asked you to go to get the turnips and go to the fair. What did you say to the wolf?

Iyana: I said when I was going to get the turnips he said, “are you done now? And I said, “No no.” And then the next day he told me that I had to go get apples and then I got them and he said are you ready? And then I said, “No.” And he wanted me to go to the fair.

And then I was in the _____ and throwing down. And I wasn’t even on the bin. I was turning around on the floor cause I just wanted to walk. And then he went inside the chimney. And then I put a big thing and I ate him up.

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Tajarie: He ran way

Iyana: Then I see him.

[lots of talk]

Teacher: How does this work when we have four people and we have so many people [to call on]

Iyana: Maybe Iyana goes first. Makayla go next. Tajarie goes third. And Nathan goes fourth.

Teacher: Do you agree?

Children: Yes

Teacher: So did you already get a chance to call on somebody?

Iyana: No

Others: Yes

Iyana: No, I went like this and then they said Ms. Yee. All of us.

Tajarie: No, I didn't call

Teacher: Makayla, you can call now.

Iyana: No, all of us.

Teacher: Maykala's turn

Maykala: I pick Mae Lin

Teacher: What are you wondering about Mae Lin?

Mae Lin: I 'm wondering why...

Teacher: I can't hear you. Can you say that again?

Mae Lin: I'm wondering why you guys were wearing pig out of paper

Teacher: Did you hear that question Nathan? Makayla?

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Maykala: No

Teacher: Do you want to hear this question again?

Mae Lin: I wonder why you guys are wearing a flat pig nose?

Maykala: Cause we are the 3 little pigs

Iyana: I'm going to pick

T points to Tajarie

Tajarie: Jared

Jared: I wonder why Tajarie is still not eaten?

Iyana: Because at the end he's eaten. Then I eat him up. But the computer was off so I can't show you that.

Tajarie: Oh and I ran away too.

Iyana: Nathan's turn.

Iyana: I'm going to pick

T points to Tajarie

Tajarie: Jared

Jared: I wonder why Tajarie is still not eaten?

Iyana: Because at the end he's eaten. Then I eat him up. But the computer was off so I can't show you that.

Tajarie: Oh and I ran away too.

Iyana: Nathan's turn.

Teacher: Since he called on him, I'm going to have him answer. Nathan, do you have a response to what he said?

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Nathan: Yeah. But I didn't see that part because I was in back when Maykala said she needed some sun and I turned around. I was just at her.

Maykala I was making some sun.

Teacher: I'm sorry. Iyana.

Iyana: OK. Let's see. Angie.

Angie: I wonder why...

Teacher: Inspire

Angie: I am inspired that it never you make a better video with no one in the way. Make a new video about. It could be 2 little pigs. It doesn't have to be three.

Iyana: It could be one little pig.

Teacher: How do you want to answer her question? Her comment.

Iyana: I don't know if we could make that. I think we should make a story that has pigs going in the second house. A pig doesn't get eaten and then he goes to the next house and the next house and then don't get eaten.

Teacher: That means you are agreeing with Angie in the idea that you can make a story but you can make a different story or a different version. So her version has 2 pigs. Your version is the pigs don't get eaten. They run to each others' houses.

Iyana: I think there is 3 little pigs.

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Section One: Who is doing the talking

1a. What is the distribution of talk between teachers and children? <i>During the conversation...</i>	1 <i>...almost all the talk is from the teacher.</i>	2 <i>...the teacher talks the most, though children talk about 25% of the time.</i>	3 <i>...the balance between teacher and child talk is about 50/50.</i>	4 <i>...many members of the classroom community are involved in the conversation with children talking more than adults.</i>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><u>3.5</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The teacher persistently attempts to reinforce her role as a facilitator of student-student contributions, with only 2 examples of ‘rephrasing’ or ‘reframing’ student contributions to the rest of the group. - Helped to create a protocol to ensure high number of student contributions - Speaking only when necessary to remind students of routine & protocol - Might allow for a student to be the first one called on. 				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

1b. What is the distribution of talk among the children? <i>During the conversation...</i>	1	2	3	4
	<i>...one or two children do most of the child talk.</i>	<i>...a few children do most of the child talk.</i>	<i>...many children contribute to the conversation.</i>	<i>...almost all of the children contribute (verbally and non-verbally) to the conversation.</i>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><u>3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is one powerful personality in the cast who is excited, and may have to work on her ability to 'share the air' - Generally, though, protocol are created and reinforced that ensure shared contributions. 				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Section Two: Who is in charge

2. Who decides who talks and what is talked about (the agenda)?	1 <i>...the teacher controls all aspects of the meeting, calling on children and deciding the agenda.</i>	2 <i>...children have a minor role in calling on each other and deciding the meeting's agenda.</i>	3 <i>...children share with the teacher calling on other children, and deciding the agenda.</i>	4 <i>...children lead in the process of calling on one another, and deciding the agenda.</i>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><u>3.5</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher gave some general directions regarding seating placement, but allowed children to negotiate precisely where they sit. - Teacher decided that this was a time for probing questions regarding the performance - Teacher reminds students before they begin of preferred sentence starters/stems, such as 'I wonder...' - First speaker recommends strongly the sequence of speakers, and the teacher makes sure this is ok with everyone, this sequence is co-constructed. 				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Section Three: The nature of the talk

<p>3a. How connected is the conversation? <i>The statements made and stories told in the conversation....</i></p>	<p>1 <i>...are disconnected from previous comments.</i></p>	<p>2 <i>...are related only because they respond to a common teacher question.</i></p>	<p>3 <i>...are sometimes linked by children to other statements and stories made by other children earlier.</i></p>	<p>4 <i>...are frequently linked to previous ones, statements and stories building off one another.</i></p>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><u>3</u></p> <p>The center of all comments concern the ‘3 Little Pigs’ performance, but the protocol at this point does not compel students to have their contributions linked to the prior ones; contributions are in isolation from one another until the final suggestion to have fewer pigs in the story.</p>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

<p>3b. Is there a language of thinking, noticing and evaluating?</p> <p><i>Children and teachers...</i></p>	<p>1</p> <p><i>...do not use a language of thinking.</i></p>	<p>2</p> <p><i>...infrequently use a language of thinking.</i></p>	<p>3</p> <p><i>...sometimes use a language of thinking.</i></p>	<p>4</p> <p><i>...frequently use a language of thinking, employing words like ideas, wonder, inspire, see, opinion, agree and disagree.</i></p>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><u>4</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protocol focuses students towards using phrases like “I wonder...” and “I am inspired by...”, and teacher reinforces these phrases frequently. - 2nd small video segment allowed teacher to reiterate the centrality and importance of listening carefully and thinking about others’ contributions. 				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

3c. Is there collective meaning making? Children's questions, proposed ideas, theories, solutions and stories...	1 <i>...are not part of the conversation. Instead, children are asked to answer closed questions, and recall specific information.</i>	2 <i>...are a limited part of the conversation.</i>	3 <i>...are a frequent part of the conversation.</i>	4 <i>...are central to the conversation. Children are solving problems, creating products and/or making meaning together.</i>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p>3.5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When the 1st question is entertained by the group, the child in the cast couldn't hear it, so the teacher guided the child to ask his peer the question again. - The teacher allows for negotiation around how students will call on their peers, and how they will sit. 				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

<p>3d. Does the conversation yield generative ideas? <i>The meeting....</i></p>	<p>1</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>4</p>
	<p><i>...does not yield generative ideas as the teacher shuts down opportunities for the group to create generative ideas.</i></p>	<p><i>...yields a few or no generative ideas, since the structure of the conversation does not encourage collective meaning making.</i></p>	<p><i>...there is effort made by the teacher, and some opportunities and successes, but not a dense culture of collaborative learning.</i></p>	<p><i>...is forward moving, producing a collective body of knowledge and/or story that are embraced by the group.</i></p>

Evidence:

3.5.

- Nature of the language, e.g. when a student starts a contribution with ‘I am inspired by...’, gets peers listening attentively to hear what he was inspired by.
- Angie’s comment at the end leads to a whole new story idea, which the children are ready to entertain given the culture of inquiry fostered in the community.
- As with most or all conversation, not all comments were leading to a collective body of knowledge. Could there be other moments when this kind of contagious contribution is drawn attention to and built upon.

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

Section Four: The tenor of the talk

4a. Do children support each others' learning and understanding? <i>In the meeting, children...</i>	1 <i>...provide no assistance to one another.</i>	2 <i>...provide minimal/infrequent assistance to one another. Little awareness in inequities in contributions.</i>	3 <i>...sometimes provide assistance to one another. Some awareness of the need to include all participants.</i>	4 <i>...frequently provide help to one another through suggestions, critique, explaining ideas, and efforts to bring peers into the conversations.</i>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><u>3.5</u></p> <p>- The questions from the children are probing in nature, so each contribution in some way challenges the performers' actions and decisions.</p>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

<p>4b. How are uncertainty, difficult issues and different opinions handled?</p> <p><i>In the meeting, these challenging elements....</i></p>	<p>1</p> <p><i>...provoke inappropriate comments, e.g. "he's stupid."</i></p>	<p>2</p> <p><i>...are glossed over, or greeted with indifference.</i></p>	<p>3</p> <p><i>...are generally, but not entirely addressed.</i></p>	<p>4</p> <p><i>...are welcomed and handled with respect as ideas are negotiated by the group.</i></p>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><u>3.5.</u></p> <p>When one child proposes a sequence for calling on peers, the teacher ensures that everyone is in agreement.</p> <p>Appears that there was not a significant amount of conflict in the meeting to determine how it is typically handled by both the teacher and children.</p>				

Democracy Empowerment Rubric

4c. What is the atmosphere of the conversation? <i>The atmosphere is...</i>	1 <i>...negative or adversarial, e.g. few smiles, sarcastic tones and body language that suggests disengagement</i>	2 <i>...neutral.</i>	3 <i>...sometimes positive. Some smiles and pleasure is evident.</i>	4 <i>...frequently positive, with children and adults appropriately expressing interest and joy verbally and nonverbally.</i>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><u>4.</u></p> <p>No apparent negative feelings expressed by either students or teachers throughout the meeting.</p> <p>Teacher non-verbally expresses persistent interest and engagement, smiling throughout, even when necessary to redirect students.</p>				