Article Review

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Straume begins her article by giving the background context of the conception of the relationship between politics, education, and democracy in more recent years, during the '70s and '80s. Central to understanding Straume's argument and the thrust of the article is the important distinction she makes between "the political" and "politics proper". 'The political' refers to the political arrangements in societies including the party system, state apparatus, and supra-national bodies, whereas 'politics proper' refers to the activity of

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questioning 'the political,' those mentioned and established political arrangements such as society's laws, norms, institutions, and power relations. She argues that in a true democracy, education for 'politics proper' is essential. Using this distinction between 'the political' and 'politics proper', she evaluates the work of three thinkers who have established positions on the relationship between democracy and education - John Dewey, Amy Gutmann, and Gert Biesta. She assesses whether they focus on 'the political' or 'politics proper' to evaluate the kind of democracies that these thinkers promote through their conceptions of education, and whether they promote education for social democracy or political democracy.

Straume justifies and critiques the work of the three thinkers, questioning the implications of their theories, under three sections. First, John Dewey's conception of democratic education as "a mode of associated learning" is examined. Straume argues that Dewey's description of democracy, focusing on openness, deliberation, and harmonious interactions between groups, overlooks the "agonal nature of politics" where "contestation, conflict, and disagreement" are central (p. 34). Next, she looks at Amy Gutmann's conception of democratic education as "a system of handling cultural differences". Straume argues that Gutmann's approach to democracy, stemming from the political liberalism tradition, limits questioning of society to only the fundamentals or the constitution that every citizen in a diverse society should endorse, the result of which is

social reproduction rather than political change. Finally, Gert Biesta's conception of democratic education as the act of "subjectification" is discussed. Straume is more complimentary of Biesta's conception of democratic education as "subjectification" or bringing an individual's subjectivity to the fore in public participation, however she claims that he "fails to demonstrate what is political about his concept of subjectification" (p. 41). All in all, she laments that the three authors' conceptions of the relationship between education and democracy are inadequate as they give little or no emphasis to the education for 'politics proper'.

Straume passingly address her potential critics by noting that education is inherently 'social' in nature as the dominant role assigned to schools is to reproduce, rather than to destabilize, societies (p. 43). However, she boldly challenges this reality and questions this instituted order, arguing that a society that is unable to question itself about its being, unable to create and recreate its institutions, or to ask important questions about its laws, norms, and customs such as "Are these the laws that we ought to have? Are they fair and just? If not, what would be a fair and just law? ... What is justice?" (p. 43) is not a free society. I agree with Straume, as beyond socializing students into the current order, education also ought to free the minds of our children in an act of counter-socialization to give them both the knowledge and autonomy to make decisions that can improve the societies that they live in.

Straume has clearly stated in her introduction that this is not a how-to article, instead it is a what-is article. Hence, as typical of many philosophical works, one will not find in this article approaches to teaching democracy of the political kind that she advocates for. For that, they can refer to books such as Walter Parker's Teaching Democracy or Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy's The Political Classroom. Instead, what they will find in Straume's work may be of even greater worth: a stimulating discussion of the work of three thinkers and a closer look at the relationship between education and democracy that helps us to ask important questions such as what kind of democracy are we promoting in our schools? Are we educating our students to only perpetuate the existing socio-political system and institutions or also to question, improve, and re-create better ones