

The background of the slide features a large, faint watermark of the Rutgers University seal. The seal is circular with a sunburst design in the center and the words "RUTGERS UNIVERSITY" around the perimeter.

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School of Management
and Labor Relations

Deliberative Democracy and Workers' Education: Power "to" vs Power "over"

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“The history of workers’ education is a history of workers striving to remake their communities into democracies and themselves into democrats.”

(Merrill. M & Schurman, S. International Labor and Working-Class History No. 90, Fall 2016. p5)

Why is workers’ education so committed to democracy – as opposed to
Any other political system?

John Dewey's "Democracy and Education"

published in 1916

- Democracy is a political system that reconciles the full expression of individual potentialities with the common good.
- But this "reconciliation" does not eliminate the conflict between **individuals' power** to achieve full expression at the expense of others and the **community's power** to protect the common good.
- Democratic social systems create structures to resolve these conflicts peacefully and (in theory) fairly.
- But such structures and mechanisms can't work unless members of the community learn the values and behaviors required to use **both their individual and collective power** effectively.
- In other words, democracy is a learned pattern of behavior intended to channel **power** for the benefit of all.
- Education is the mechanism through which democracy can be learned.

Power is one of the most contested concepts in social and political theory

Seven major points of contestation

- Centered versus diffused
- Consensual versus conflictual
- Constraining versus enabling
- Quality versus quantity
- Power “over” (domination) versus power “to” (empowerment)

Power over... versus power to...

- Power as domination – power *over*
- Empowerment – power *to*

Both of these forms are essential to create just societies

- A just society needs to be able to exercise power over individuals in order to prevent some from exploiting others.
- But unless members have a strong sense of empowerment and embrace the values of equality, equity and justice – democratic systems can become oligarchic or authoritarian.
- How do we in workers' education create education experience that help to create this kind of empowerment?

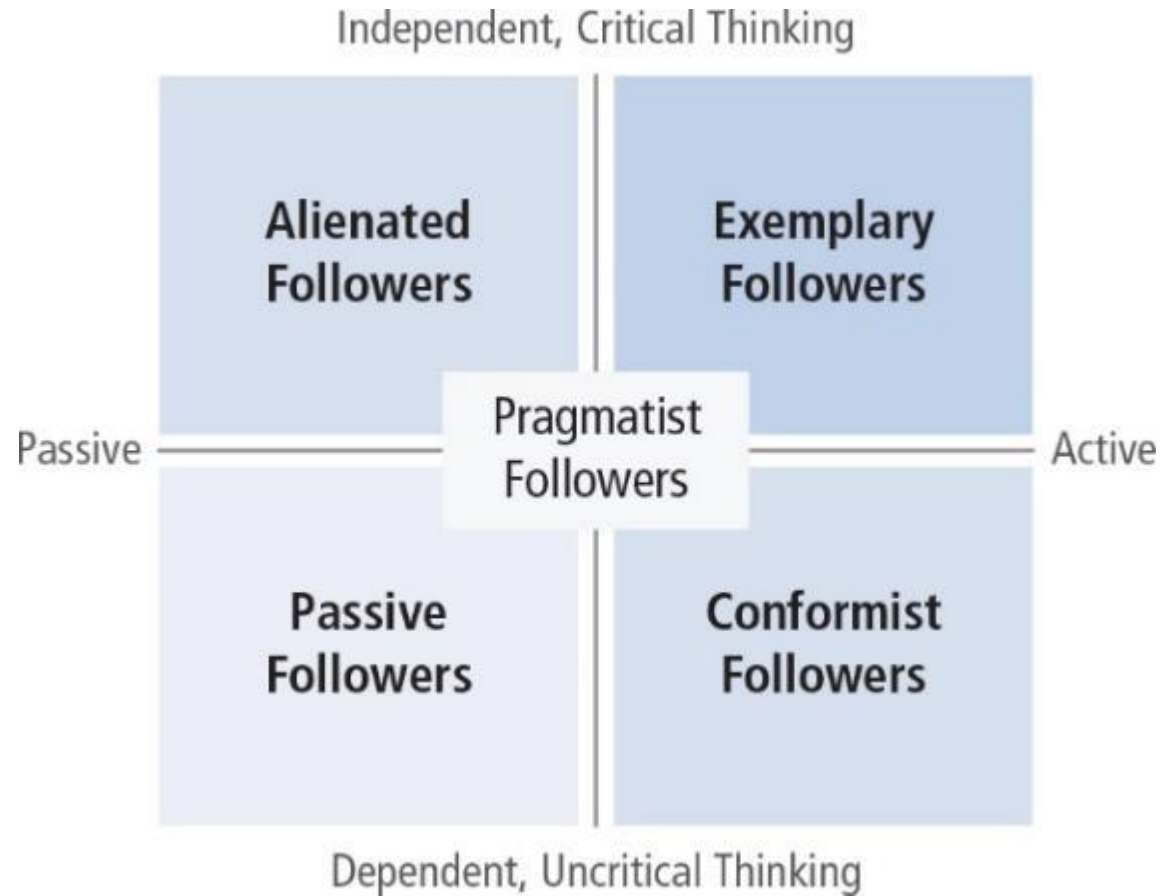
What kind of education leads to empowerment?

- Here we can look to Paulo Freire's concept of "deliberative/dialogic democracy."
- Like Dewey, Freire teaches that democracy is not an end in itself. It is a pathway – or we might say a process - that leads to a more just society.
- We should not confuse this process with specific forms of "democratic" structures.
- We learn to practice democracy through deliberation – speaking, listening and being listened to.
- But not just any form of speaking. Freire and many other great teachers in the workers' education tradition told us to learn the dialogic method

Principles of the Dialogic Method

- Respect for what people already know
- Co-learning - we are all teachers and we are all learners
- Problematizing – asking questions about why things are the way they are, letting go of old/false ideas; asking how things might be different, inventing new knowledge – new ways of living
- Combining practice and theory - praxis

We are all leaders and we are all followers



Our job in Workers Education...

- To create learning opportunities that assist people to feel personally empowered and committed to use their power toward achieving equity, equality and justice for others as well.