Democratic Education...

...is learning that matters.
It matters to young people, because it is driven by their own curiosity and goals. It matters to the community, and the world as a whole, because young people gain the motivation and tools to meet pressing societal needs, including prejudice and violence, ecological devastation, and socioeconomic inequities.

...is not new.
It’s mandatory schooling that’s new, adopted in the late 1800s and early 1900s during the Industrial Revolution. Its purpose was to train an obedient workforce to run our country’s factories. Prior to this, children learned from their parents; in small, multi-age schoolhouses; and in hands-on apprenticeships. The current education system is obsolete. It must adapt to the Information Age and teach children to think for themselves and adapt to changing circumstances.

...comes in many forms.
Many schools, youth programs, organizations, and individuals practice forms of democratic education without using that term. Whole cities may orient themselves around equipping citizens to transform the community into a learning space and to increase the standard of living.

...teaches young people what they need to thrive.
Studies show that educational environments engaging young people as active participants in their own learning are linked with higher student attendance and student achievement, greater creativity and conceptual learning, and increased intrinsic motivation and determination in learning. Moreover, recent brain and cognitive research points to the value of the democratic education learning environment, including key elements such as collaborative projects, age mixing, learning through active experiences, and the importance of a caring community.

...contributes to positive social change.
Democratic learning environments develop self-determined and socially responsible individuals. These will be the leaders who build a more democratic, vibrant, and just society for all of us.

What is Democratic Education?
IDEA defines democratic education as learning that equips every human being to participate fully in a healthy democracy. Democratic education is rooted in human rights. Its goal is to empower young people to be autonomous, responsible members of their community and the larger world.

The United States of America is founded on democracy and the democratic values of meaningful participation, personal initiative, and equality and justice for all. Democratic education infuses the learning process with these fundamental values of our society.

Democratic education sees young people not as passive recipients of knowledge, but rather as active co-creators of their own learning. They are not the products of an education system, but rather valued participants in a vibrant learning community.

To learn more about democratic education, please visit IDEA’s website at www.democraticeducation.org