The Five Pillars of Democratic Education

1. **Democratic education emphasizes the open flow of ideas, choices, and perspectives, regardless of their popularity.**
   Students and staff must have the opportunities to express themselves without limiting the rights of others. Democratic learning environments must create safe and empowering spaces to enable all voices and perspectives to be heard. Disagreements cannot dehumanize.

2. **Democratic education holds all students, teachers, and staff to high expectations while respecting everyone's intersectional identities, backgrounds, and varied cultural values and beliefs.**
   Democratic education is a high-quality, equitable education and should be accessible to and inclusive of all people. Democratic learning environments are rigorous, identity affirming, and culturally sustaining. These environments hold all people to high expectations while respecting their intersectional identities and varied cultural values and beliefs.

3. **Democratic education supports and interrogates the "common good" through critical and compassionate dialogue, active listening, and reflection to arrive at consensus or compromise.**
   Students and adults will develop the ability to communicate, debate, and synthesize multiple points of view to arrive at a decision in ways that support the "common good" while upholding each other's humanity.

4. **Democratic education is built upon collective decision-making structures with students, staff, families, and community members in order to address society's most urgent challenges.**
   Democratic schools organize students, staff, families, social institutions, and community members together to pursue shared goals and address the most urgent challenges facing their communities and wider society. They sustain structures for collective decision-making while continually revisiting and refining them in response to changing needs. By valuing diverse voices and reflecting on both process and outcomes, democratic learning environments cultivate the capacity to respond thoughtfully to the complexities of the present and the uncertainties of the future.

5. **Democratic education is deliberately sustained through ongoing resistance, resilience, and renewal in the face of systemic inequities and pressures to revert to oppressive forms of schooling.**
   Democratic education emphasizes the deliberate refusal of schools and communities to accept inequitable, exclusionary, or authoritarian forms of schooling. This Pillar also requires school communities to develop the capacity to absorb shocks, reinvent structures, pushback, and keep democratic purposes alive over time, in the face of changing sociopolitical contexts, institutional pressures, and the persistent pull toward more traditional and hierarchical models of education.



An original lithograph representation of the Five Pillars of Democratic Education by student-author and artist Finuala Nevins