Democracy is the notion of a government where people make decisions. It is a system that, to Americans, implies an almost sense of freedom and power. But democracy in terms of education does not necessarily mean complete freedom. Freedom in the classroom, unchecked, can lead to disruption and chaos. But the system of democracy in the classroom leads to liberty. Utilizing notions from Dewey, Ravitch, and Hilliard, this paper will assess Conroy's experiences to exemplify and define true democracy in the classroom, true democracy that leads to multiculturalism.

Dewey may interpret Conroy's experiences by stating that they exemplify the principle of continuity of experience in that each situation modified “in some way the quality” (35) of further experiences. Conroy's chain of experiences built upon each other, each one teaching him a deeper understanding of education. This indicates growth, “one exemplification of the principle of continuity” (Dewey, 36). And just as continuity allowed growth for Conroy, growth in America led to a favoritism of democracy. Dewey contends that Americans favor democracy because we believe that, “democratic social arrangements promote a better quality of human experience” (34).

Ravitch would likely view Conroy's essay as an education in the common culture. She defines common culture in America by stating that it is multicultural (10), just as Conroy's experiences. In his ability to learn from each experience, Conroy was educated in many cultures. He learned the shoeshiner's way of escaping reality by creating another world with his imagination; he entered the culture of music; he was initiated into the culture of the legal system. He learned the value of integrating experience and education in presenting a philosophy of education. Hilliard stresses the importance of “truthful and meaningful conditions of the whole human experience” (15). Conroy not only learned each situation with his own eyes, but his reflections allowed him the opportunity to see through the eyes of others. The truth behind the experiences was not always apparent at the outset, but other experiences allowed him to recognize the depth of meaning behind the most seemingly insignificant encounter.

A summary of Conroy's view on democracy is that it is not static; rather, it is in a perpetual state of motion, of transition. The people also remake it. Each generation brings with it a new understanding of culture, a new tension between the past and the present. Conroy suggests this is a tension that will never be resolved (70). Rather, he suggests that by exploring the inextricable link between education and democracy (9), Democracy is not about pushing others down in order to elevate the few. Instead, it is to create a society where every individual is an aristocrat, where equality is attainable. This ties directly into multiculturalism, as public education is a means to create a society where every individual can succeed. Hilliard stresses the importance of “true democracy” (13). Conroy suggests this is a tension that will never be resolved (70). Barber furthers this notion by explaining the role of education in America’s democracy (9). Education should not become a platform for one group’s hegemony (14). Such domination is precisely what true democracy opposes.

The Constitution and Bill of Rights are treasured documents in America’s history. To say that they exemplify democracy is to assume that democracy is constant. Conroy’s educative experiences, as interpreted by Dewey, Ravitch, and Hilliard, suggest that both democracy and education are not constant, but constantly evolving. They change with each individual’s experiences. And consideration of education as an individual experience is precisely what true democracy opposes. True democracy within the classroom is to teach liberty to all so that excellence can be obtained by all. This is democracy within the classroom.