

Preparation and challenging democratic learning in the 21st century classroom.

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Classrooms can become more effective and productive when procedures are democratic (Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde 2005)

There are three environments that teachers begin to discover where decisions will be made to whether or not they will connect to past democratic inequities or they will learn and prepare from their peer educators and professors that engagement within a democratic classroom model is the key to a more fulfilling education.

Preparedness is the key and determines whether or not a teacher will have a successful democratic manner in their given classrooms. Quality preparation in any forum is necessary to have ultimate success in any given career or venture.

Tomorrow's teachers have to feel safe enough to be democratic leaders in the 21st century. This is accomplished by superintendents and principals abandoning the scientific management of the past and creating an educational atmosphere where teachers believe they are a part of creating a highly functional educational organization within the school. This is done by teachers being allowed to create beautiful, exciting environments in their classrooms where discovery within the cores is a democratic association of learners creating a, exciting new world. *Democratic administration and the human relations movement*, (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, Sybouts 1996). This is a

place where superintendents and principals are curriculum and instruction support rather than a controlling oligarchy.

Superintendents and principals should be similar to the bus driver, maintenance worker or cafeteria worker. These individuals support the learning process in their own unique way allowing teachers to teach. When the only fear is test scores, (which radically affect democratic engagement) and not punitive penalties from the hierarchal heads of the school district, teachers feel safe and trust their cohorts and democratic learning has a better chance to be nurtured and grow. *In order to make a school a democratic environment, it is first necessary to establish a democratic management system.*(www.coe.int 2010)

Human relations are the key to carry out democratic pedagogies and philosophies that are created within schools. As administrators become transformed into leaders of curriculum and instruction and not managers of people, teachers will feel more at home in their learning and educational beliefs and feel that they are an integral part of the decision making framework and creators of a new democratic enterprise known as tomorrows leaders. These new leaders will be able to team up with their peers and their students to create an exciting classroom environment that is student led. When this is witnessed at its highest level, you have a staff that relishes co-teaching whether it is across curriculums or with their special education teammates. This application is nice in theory but with restraints levied on administrators and teachers by the state, democratic engagement can be

tenuous. Teachers and administrators spend more time looking over their back instead of looking ahead to their students.

We must remember that the classroom is really a community. Students are citizens of the school and need to be treated as such. Similarly, teachers are an integral part of this community. They are the most important tool in the teaching democracy and need to be treated as such. Teachers that are treasured and respected will gladly live within the structure created by administration and teacher leaders. If teachers have learned through dialogue and engagement with administration that trust is evident and their participation in the democratic application is primary, these cutting edge teachers of tomorrow facilitate great learning. This allows teachers to create an engaging environment for students.

There are three main areas that are explored by our authors below which are important to making a successful democratic teacher. It is shown that teachers play the main role in creating and fostering democratic ideals that students take with them to form their democratic ideals and produce new democratic developments through new educational opportunities. Truth, integrity and honesty are the backbone of true authentic leadership. This backbone is what breathes life into true, democratic institutions and the continuance of clear teacher preparedness, continuing and improving democratic convictions.

Many critics contend that new teachers are not educated in such a way that they can generate cutting edge takes on democratic principles. Instead

students are stuck in sterile non-transformations where teacher's hands are tied by wallowing in the safe perpetuations and regurgitations of testing amalgamations rather than bold, challenging democratic methodologies. It is safe to be sterile and status quo rather than activating democratic thought and change. These democratic motivations are developed and nurtured in three settings. This preparedness is realized in three main ways.

These initiatives have their basis in some basic components that are talked about in various different mediums by the authors below, which include fairness, diversity and social justice. Creating democratic advancements are tied directly to how teacher's candidate's minds have been molded during their educational process. As teacher candidates wrap up their initial formal educations, the university they attended, their practicum's and their initial involvement within the communities go a long way to how confident, prepared and safe a new teacher feels in creating and amplifying a democratic classroom.

The first initiative is the university classroom. This is the place where tomorrow's teachers are molded by a plethora of professors. Some of these professors silence the voices of their students by intimidation through their own views. Other times relationships built with peers could impact student beliefs. Negative interactions including group domination by one individual or dissenting naysayer in a group affect democratic growth pertaining to a given classroom objective. When all group members participate in a group activity

and positive interactions with peers is evident then this kind of setting allows for growth.

The second initiative is the practicum school. This is a place where the teacher gets their first hands on connection to staff and students. Here is where beliefs are created and changed. Fears are perpetuated and learned. Curriculum is discovered and deemed democratic or undemocratic. These opinions are garnered from a cooperating teachers and administrators. On the job training begins to either destroy or cultivate democratic or undemocratic awareness.

The last initiative is community involvement. This is an area where perspective teachers can be intimidated and molded the most. In the community there are a wide range of organizations that are directly or indirectly connected to the school. Involvement in these organizations can be scary. Some organizations such as sport, business and church groups hold a large amount of influence within the community and school. Affiliation with these organizations can affect the way a new teacher deploys democracy within their new classroom. Veteran teachers and organization members can wield a heavy influence on philosophies of young teachers similarly the way principals can. This may affect the way new teachers teach and perspective students learn. Students take these learned ideals out into the world and begin to facilitate their influence on others.

State standards have added to the democracy question. Is curriculum driven or directed by new standards. If instruction is being driven by

standards, a democratic classroom is possible. If instruction is being directed by the standards, democracy in the classroom is strangled by these standards.

Today in many schools we see, teacher leadership teams, building leadership teams and district leadership teams. They are made up of a wide range of individuals. These teams form democratic environments where administration, teachers, parents, classified staff and community leaders come together and create curriculum and behavioral frameworks together to educate children in a more democratic way.

Within these groups participants want to feel safe and have their voice heard. If this occurs, teacher leaders take this collaboration back to their classrooms and feel more confident in letting their students take more of the lead in instruction. Moreover, through regular data analysis, cutting edge interventions are created and used to elevate learning in the classroom. Formative and summative data is continually collected and taken back to the monthly meeting for review so new interventions can be put into place if former interventions were not useful or simply did not work. This leads to a more democratic classroom environment with teachers and students alike. Teachers that are accomplished communicators have conversations and give regular feedback to their students, sharing details of instructional, testing and environmental nuances that prove to elevate student learning and trust. When these connections are at their best, students have a better opportunity to

succeed and pass on learned democratic norms that will be used and elevated in their future learning.

Positivism and more answers to democratic questions and philosophies are necessary to enhance student cooperation and learning. Teachers have to grow and feel safe in a democratic classroom whether they are new or veteran teacher. This may prove difficult with the specter of state testing hanging over everyone's head minute to minute. This ever-changing testing enigma needs to be created by a team of educators who not only were on the front line of teaching but still physically comprehend what that front line looks like today. Apprehension may be the rule for the rookie teacher or the veteran teacher to collaborate or co-teach when their job is on the line daily and the rush to teach to the test is real. In any case, there is nothing more beautiful than a democratic classroom where students can lead instruction and teachers can revel in this shared learning and educational joy.

References

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