

DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

Democratic education inspires the learning process with democratic values of the society, like meaningful participation, personal initiative, and equality and justice for all. It sees young people as active recipients of knowledge and 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. Democratic education begins with the premise that everyone is unique, so each of us learns in a different way. By supporting the individual development of each young person within a caring community, democratic education helps young people learn about themselves, engage with the world around them, and become positive and contributing members of society. Guided by this vision, democratic education can take various forms, each shaped by the by teachers, young people, school programs and communities. Schools implementing democratic education by involving practices like self-directed learning, shared decision-making, individualized project-based work, and student-chosen internships in the community. This includes schools that use the label “democratic schools“and others that practice these values and use other terms. Teachers creatively involve students working within the conventional structure of the school, but still need to provide students’ opportunity to have a choice in their learning. These teachers go beyond conventional building program to build more relevant and engaging experience that is associated with the lives of young people. (Bennis)

Key words: *democracy, education, classroom, environment, changes*

Introduction

Every society in its development and vision poses challenges to schools who specifically perceive the demands for greater efficiency and greater inclusion of stakeholders concerned. In education there is an always ongoing and prevailing tendency for modernization and acceptance of young generations of all social, social, national and ethnic groups depending on the level of development of society and the needs of the young generations of continuous permanent changes.

Education is a friendly bridge between all institutions in society with one goal, to help young people to be productive, responsible citizens, to realize their intellectual potential, while at the same time to develop and its other capabilities, because our future depends on young people. In order to accomplish its mission, the school should reflect changes in society, and thus to create the necessary changes. Changes in the environment affect the shifting interests, needs, the behavior of the students, their readiness for acceptance or rejection of certain ways of learning or models of communication. (Kочоска, 2007)

In recent years it has more to do about work organization in the classroom in which it is represented cooperation between all subjects. Students need to provide a friendly, working atmosphere and all of that they can accomplish when they are in a democratic environment in which jointly make the rules in the classroom, act responsibly and mutual respect. (Learning)

Democratic education

The Institute for Democratic Education in America (IDEA) defines democratic education as “learning that equips every human being to participate fully in a healthy democracy. “ (Graves, 2011) It's important to note that while democracy is taught in public schools, students are not given an opportunity to authentically practice democracy. Therefore the question arises: “If we don't experience democracy in our schools, how could we ever expect to end up with democracy in the ‘real’ world? “(Graves, 2011)

Actually democratic education is a learning that is meaningful, relevant, joyous, engaging, and empowering. It is more than just any learning environment, such as a school, and more than one feature, but an approach to life and learning and an approach to interacting with all members of your community in a way that respects, honors, and listens authentically to each voice within it. It is the practice of real democracy, which can manifest in many different ways based on you, your community, and your learning environment (Graves, 2011)

A number of studies show that in educational environments engaging young people as active participants in their own learning is associated with greater commitment to students and pupils, increased creativity and conceptual learning, and increased intrinsic motivation and determination in learning. In addition, recent cognitive research suggests the value of democratic education learning environment, including key elements such as cooperation projects through active learning experiences, and the importance of community concern. (Bennis)

Definitions of various authors for democratic education

Schools, families and the wider community shape the lives of citizens creating modalities that promote or reduce their ability to act in a democracy and to live their lives in accordance with democratic ideals. All this happens consciously and unconsciously. However, with careful and purposeful training of students in the knowledge and skills they need to function in a democracy as adults, teachers and parents, shape the future of a democratic society. By itself, this task is very difficult to implement, and those who will agree to do that must cope with the noise caused by the change. In school, students need to experience democracy and to begin to develop the skills and attitudes that are necessary to operate effectively as citizens of a democratic society. This theme studies a number of authors who realize the democratic education in their own unique way. (Кочоска, 2007)

According to Bill Ayers, a democratic education is something based in the culture of democracy and based on some radical propositions. A democratic education begins with the foundational belief that every human being is of incalculable value. Democratic education is less about facts and dates ... It's much more about opening windows and opening doors ... learning from the world, not about the world; learning from nature, not about nature; learning from the questions we can generate; and learning from democracy, not about democracy.

Maria Luz Torre believes that one education to be a democratic it must be a holistic education, not proscriptive, and not limited to the four walls of the classroom. It must be developmentally and culturally appropriate and it must be participatory. It helps a child develop a love for learning and critical thinking. It must also be equitable so that all have access to it.

Melia Dicker considered that the democratic education must be accessible for everyone. It means every human being has access to quality education and has their basic needs met. This means addressing social issues such as poverty and others that affect people's ability to learn. For education to be democratic, every person must be valued, listened to, and participate actively in their learning and in the decision making processes.

According to Sonia Nieto, in terms of students, it means having more of a voice in what happens in classrooms and schools and being able to practice democracy and not just read about it. And not only through student councils, but through taking action and being able to learn the tools of democracy like writing a letter, starting a petition and learning how to start a boycott. (Graves, 2011)

Democratic education aims to develop real democracy through active participation by all those involved in classrooms and educational institutions. In democratic education students have the power to make decisions about their learning, because power is shared rather than appropriated in advance by a minority of people. Education, in its various forms, is basically authoritarian, since one person, or small groups of people make decisions about "what to learn, when to learn, how to learn, how to assess learning, and the nature of the learning environment". (Union). For this reason we need to address with many issues about democratic education within our learning environments by creating authentic opportunities for young people to experience the power and possibilities democracy provides in loving and supportive community. We can transform our educational system to one based on respect for human rights and one that values freedom and responsibility, participation and collaboration, and equity and justice. To create a more just, sustainable and democratic world, we need democratic education. (Graves, 2011)

Key ideas for making a democratic environment for learning

Democratic education in the primary school encourages a realization in pupils that they are valued as people, and that they have a positive role to play in creating a caring community within the school. Relationships between pupils and teachers gradually improve as they work democratically together to create a positive environment. Creating a democratic classroom environment means involving students, on a regular basis and in developmentally appropriate ways, in shared decision making that increases their responsibility for helping to make the classroom a good place to be and learn. A democratic classroom contributes to the character because it: provides an ongoing forum where students' thoughts are valued and where any need of the group can be addressed; creates a support structure that calls forth students' best moral selves by strengthening community and holding them accountable to practice respect and responsibility; mobilizes the peer culture on the side of virtue, because students are working with the teacher in a continuing partnership to create the moral culture of the classroom; the chief means of creating a democratic classroom environment is the class meeting, a face-to-face circle meeting emphasizing interactive discussion and problem solving. (Cortland)

The comments above suggest that some of the consequences of democratic practices closely relate to the aims and objectives of co-operation, conflict resolution and other areas of peace education. Democratic education is likely to develop a sense of community amongst a group of students and a partnership between teachers and learners based on mutual trust in the capability and creative ability of all those involved in a particular learning process. The movement to promote real participatory democracy through the medium of education involves important procedural values. These include tolerance of diversity, mutual respect between individuals and groups, a respect for evidence in forming opinions, a willingness to be open to the possibility of changing one's mind in the light of such evidence, the possession

of a critical stance towards some information and finally, seeing that all people have equal social and political rights as human beings. This relates very closely to some of the aims for building upon the shared aspects of being human and relating toward one another with tolerance and kindness are, arguably, shared objectives. There cannot be a realistic agenda for democratic education unless there is an emphasis on reason, open-mindedness and a fairness which the practice of 'real' democracy will ensure. (Union)

Democratic education includes the peace education which is focused on fostering an ability to strive for peace in relationships between individuals and groups; establishing a sense of responsibility for one's decisions and actions; developing an understanding of the interdependence of people. These aims predicate particular skills and attitudes like fostering of acquired skills such as analysis, evaluation and critical thinking, co-operative skills, empathy, clear communication and conflict resolution. (Union)

Democratic education increases the opportunities for students to act and accomplished their rights to knowledge, success and responsibility, helps students to increase capacity for independent decision making reasonable- to learn how to think rather than what to think. Of great benefit is the realization of educational content that is embedded basic concepts of democracy through which students need to develop skills for active participation in the democratic educational process. They should be able to identify potential problems, asking questions about them and taking action to resolve them. The role of teachers in this process is also great because they are the ones who need to support the students in creating a personal commitment to accept the responsibilities associated with their rights. (Кочоска, 2007)

Active student participation in a democratic environment

Learning about democracy in school is very important for the survival of our constitutional democracy. Educators are challenged to seek and implement means to improve democracy in elementary school. (Hoge, 1996)

In order to be able to actively participate in the environment in which they live and learn, it is necessary to introduce the students with the basic concepts of democracy: Responsibility Authority, Privacy and Justice.

The curriculum content about *Responsibility* is an introduction to the concept that helps students to understand the importance of responsibility in everyday life. They learn to define the responsibility, to identify examples of it, to know the common sources of responsibility and to know what they get to fulfill, and the failures of responsibilities (rewards and punishments). Students are trained to recognize the consequences (benefits and cost) of the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of responsibilities in certain situations, to analyze situations to take responsibility, to evaluate, take and defend its position when it comes to taking some responsibility.

The curriculum content from the concept *Authority* teaches the students the notion of authority and power. They learn to distinguish situations in which people behave in some way on its own initiative and situations in which people behave in some way because someone told them to behave and thus control or guide their actions. Because students are facing daily with multiple rules in the home, in school, in the game etc. they need to learn who creates them, whether they are good rules and if there is a need to create new ones. This content teaches students what is useful to know when it comes to assessing the rules and decide whether they are good rules. Students need to know how to identify deficiencies of rules, to explain the characteristics of a good rule and create a good rule.

The content of the concept *Privacy* help students to define and identify privacy, to understand the elements of which require differences in the behavior of individuals when it comes to privacy and understand that any privacy has its limit and volume (which, how and

when). Students are introduced to the three important ways when using the term privacy: privacy from monitoring, privacy of information and privacy of behavior. They need to learn to identify present privacy situations and situations in which privacy is absent. Students should be able to include some of the common examples of privacy and be able to describe how people feel when they want to preserve their privacy.

The curriculum content of the concept *Justice* should allow students to introduce to the three types of justice: distributive, procedural and corrective. They should know how to identify and classify the various situations in the three types of justice.

Students are introduced to the detailed distributive justice and learn to identify the things that they divide at home, school or community; learn how to use the concepts of needs, abilities and merits in deciding to solve a problem related to righteous distribution of work in the group. Then they enter into the corrective justice and introduce to the terms "offense" and "injury". They learn a five-step procedure for the study of issues related to the upright answering the offense or injury and their use in such situations. The development of procedural justice allows students to learn about the importance of the use of righteous procedures for gathering information and making decisions. They meet with the four steps of the procedure which are used to find out something and making decisions. The main goal is through certain exercises, students to be able to evaluate, take and defend a position connected with the problem of righteous ways of finding out something and making decisions. (Кочоска, 2007)

The study of these concepts contributes to expanding the experiences of students from their family and preschool education. Great importance and opportunity for active participation of students in the adoption of new and changing old rules in their environment, in decision-making, planning and implementation of activities that help to understand and take responsibility in the class or family, responsibility to learning, respect for the opinions of others, the right to personal choice, forming their own position etc. (Горѓиоска, 2004) In this way, students will learn different approaches and ideas "intellectual tools" to evaluate these kind of situations. Intellectual tools help students to think clearly about issues of these four concepts, developing their own position and supporting them with reasons. The knowledge skills they gain are not only in addressing issues of public policy, but also in everyday situations they face in their private life. By thinking for themselves, reaching their own conclusions and defending their position, they can be more effective and active citizen in a free society. (Braverman, Croddy, Hirsch, & Rosen, 1995)

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