

# Democracy in a classroom



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Diamond (1997) brings a theoretical foundation in to view of why establishing democratic principles in a classroom environment equates to the promotion democracy in the country. Social and political undercurrents of a democratic society cannot be maintained indefinitely if such is not promoted in the nation's schools. And it should. After all, country's schools should be viewed as the milieu of educating the future citizenry that is forming our future society. The values that we teach our school children today will become the causative element to the kind of life we will experience tomorrow.

No one will deny that democratic principles are important and relevant to propone in the contemporary schools. The best milieus in which the teachers can promote democratic principles are the Social Science lessons. The teaching and learning of societal and political systems in the human history is not enough to understand the value behind democracy; the students must experience how democracy works in their own environment. The Social Science teachers, to the opinion of this writer, are the best suited for this purpose for their subject matter by its own nature suggests the experiential learning.

Diamond implied that some educators while not aggressively promoting the democracy in the classroom in fact carry the message of undervaluing it. Such a strong accusation does have a logic approach that simply states, " If you are not fighting the cause than you are against it. " With that, the author argues, children when developing must be exposed to the truth in the human history discourse with the special emphasis on the presence or absence of democracy as the cause for the absence or presence of human tragedy.

When and if the rationale of the necessity of the democracy is established, the civic teachers must devise the practical element of democracy to interject into their curricula. For example, while studying the Civil War, the class might be divided into two groups: slave owners and those who spoke against slavery. The teacher can interject democratic principles to deal with the dilemma at hand through and with voting and election. When the majority opinion is entered and heard, the teacher might elaborate why such an opinion does not always represent the true opinion of the majority entering with that the concept of “ fence-sitters.”

If the historical events are played out from the democratic lenses’ perspective, the civic teachers can direct the students’ attention at the current events. Here and now, the teachers must be cautioned that the main thorn on to the decision whether the opinion was entered from the democratic perspective could be a lack of knowledge. Thus, knowledge is imperative in the decision-making and opinion-offering process. In this way, the students can be given a strong rationale that studying the relevant knowledge is prerequisite for the democratic process.

Such can be easily exemplified in the class/school election process for the student council. In order for the participating student body enter the educated vote, each and single one of them must have enough knowledge (and precise one too) about each candidate they vote for. Voting on the pretense of the appearance and the words that the candidates speak at the final speeches can be detrimental to the democratic process. The most valuable and honest candidates can be obscured in favor of the most articulate ones.

With this practical example, especially if the civic teachers bring a parallel to the historic events, students can be gradually lead to the values and practical benefits of the democratic structure. Truly democratic education must be able to confront own un-democratic history and mistakes made while the society was developing. Some of the truly horrific mistakes were slavery, racism, unfair dealings with Native Americans, Japanese Americans (during the World War II), and other equally horrific acts of taking freedoms away from the people who happened to have a different appearance or cultural belonging.

Examining these mistakes with their students, the civic teachers can pose a practical question, “ How these situations could be resolved democratically and equally to all the parties involved? ” Careful guidance of students from this perspective can bring rewards in the face of their understanding and ability to choose the most democratic path of actions in the possible dealings with other life situations. The group of researchers followed this logic to do the study involving students and their perspectives on democracy.

They allowed students to break into arbitrary community groups decided by the type of card(s) they pick. Once the choices were made the students could not switch from one community group to another (Hewett, Holt, Kosmopoulou, Kymn, Long, Mousavi, and Sarangi, 2005). The students quickly realized that their choices were terminal and transition from “ one class” of citizens to another was either impossible or extremely difficult under totalitarian regimes but possible and less difficult in a democracy.

Paul (2002) wrote, " Civil Learning involves the students coming to understand the democratic processes of community, the problem it faces, the diversity, the need for individual commitment and the importance of working collaboratively. " He also stated that democratic teaching helps civic teachers become more efficient in developing pro-democracy citizens. Adams, Cantrell, and Powell (2001) warn their readers however, that democratic teaching does not have to be limited to the social science context. It should extend to literacy facets of education as well.

Democratic equity is as important in learning of any subjects and the teachers who conscientious about it will model it daily. The young students have a way to remind teachers about the significance of democracy within the classroom, especially when establishing the classroom climate. By their judging every situation fair or not fair they define their perspective on the democratic principles. To the opinion of this writer, the democratic principles should not become yet another lesson of instruction but must become a standard of teachers' behavior integrated into the curriculum delivery of every subject of the school instruction.