

Principles of democratic education



**ASSIGN
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What are the principles of democratic education? How are these principles and values in tension/contradiction with our social construction of children and youth? For example, what assumptions do we make about teaching, learning and youth that democratic schools challenge? How does “one size fits all” centralized curriculum contribute to what Apple called the “deskilling of teachers”? What is lost when this approach is adapted, especially when it is combined with the “intensification” of teaching? Explore the contradictions between what we say we want our students to be when they are finished their schooling (engaged, critical thinkers, active contributors and problem solvers) and how we are often educating young people. How does democratic education address this? What are some of the challenges educators who want to introduce democratic principles into their schools face? What are some of the potential rewards? How does democratic education address the notion that all education, even that which claims to be value-centered, is political? Explain the relationship that concepts like voice and agency have to democratic principles in Education.

Answer

Democratic Education

All beings are created as individuals and have different habits and intelligence. Ayers (2009) says that every human being is capable of infinite and incalculable value. All of us have an exclusive intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual, moral and creative force. Each person is born free and is equal in dignity and right. Each endows with reason and conscience. Every individual is deserves a community and sense of brotherhood and sisterhood, recognition and respect. This core value must express itself

explicitly and implicitly in education as in every other aspect of associative living.

Amy Gutmann (1999) defines democratic education as a worldwide movement towards greater decision-making power for students in the running of their own schools. There is no generally agreed definition of the term, but at the IDEC: International Democratic Education Conference (2010) in 2005 the participants agreed that, in any educational setting, young people have the right:

to decide individually how, when, what, where and with whom they learn

To have an equal share in the decision-making in the running of their school and determining the rules and sanctions, if any, are necessary.

IDEC (2010) supports schools which uphold respect and trust for children. They believe in shared responsibility and freedom of choice of activity. IDEC is open to schools which follow equality of status of children and adult and democratic governance by children and staff together. They do not believe in any superior guide and system.

Principles of Democratic Education

There are two pillars of democratic education:

1. Self-determined learning
2. A learning community based on equality and mutual respect

Apple (1995) discusses that democratic education means that children and teachers engage in collaborative planning, reaching decisions that are in the

interest of both their aspirations and desires. Those involved in democratic schools prize diversity. They consider themselves participants of communities of learning. Such communities include people representing a broad spectrum of age, culture, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic class and abilities. However, these differences do not create stereotype; instead they enrich the community.

Democracy means by definition means “ by the people, for the people”. Therefore, it gives the community a shared purpose and allows people to set aside their self-interests and work for the greater good. Common goal is the central idea of democracy. Beane & Apple (1995) explain that educators who are committed to democracy know that any inequality at schools will also be found in the community. Hence, they seek not only seek democracy in institutes but also want to extent to the community. If the community does not follow democratic conviction then concentrating on democratic education is pointless, because the young people will be affected by their surroundings and the concept will fail. Democratic education seeks to lessen the harshness of social inequities in school and change the conditions which create them.

Challenges by Democratic Schools

Democratic school challenge the approach of teaching that follows the belief that young people are to follow the lead of their teachers and not question their ability or knowledge. Democratic approach says that students and teachers should go hand-in-hand. They should participate in not only teaching practice but also the curriculum. Democratic education challenges the conventional way of assembling the curriculum and focus on broadening

the horizons. These schools need to be based on the broad definition of “we”, a commitment to build a community that is of the school and the community in which the school exists.

One Size Fit All

Today all the focus is on privatization, marketization and decentralization. So, for teachers, going beyond “approved” material risks administrative consents. Jungck (2000) explains in her article that there is an immense pressure in not only to redefine the methods of teaching but also the purpose of education. If the schools, their teachers and curriculum are closely knitted, more technology oriented, according to the needs of business and industry, then it is expected that the problems of achievement and unemployment will be disappear along with the international economic competitiveness.

In most of elementary and high schools, the curriculum is planned by the national or state department of education. It took teachers a lot of time and effort to minimize the total administrative control over the curriculum. Apple (1995) says, that after all, it is the teachers who teach in the class room and thus they should have a say in the matter. In most Western industrialized nations, the phenomenon of de-skilling of teachers is become common. It means that when individuals are unable to control a large portion of their job, they forget the essential skills required to perform the job.

Teachers have been alienated from the tasks of setting curricular goals, designing lessons and individualized attention to students according to ability and need. Now, instead of teachers who care about what and why

they teach, executioners of someone else's plan are created. The effect of this practice is very hostile for the profession of teaching itself.

Quality is sacrificed on quantity as a result of de-skilling of teachers. They now want to “cut corner” and rely on the experts for their job. Jungck (2000) tells the concept of “intensification”; she says that collective skills of teachers are lost as they concentrate on management skills. Ayers (2009) enforces the importance of education. He says that all children and youth in a democracy deserve full access to richly resourced classrooms led by caring, thoughtfully qualified, and generously compensated teachers. Whereas democratic education is affecting the professional teachers and turning them into managers. Intensification results in lack of enthusiasm and simplistic response to innovation.

Educating Young People

Every student brings their experiences and skills to school. They represent their community (Ayers, 1994). In another article Ayers (2009) states that, “students should be able to make up their own judgment based on evidence, ask fundamental questions and pursue answers wherever they take them.” Democratic education is about opening doors of opportunity and opening minds as students make their own pathways into the world.

Beane & Apple (1995) explain by research that young people are more interested to learn through experience. They do not like to study from tapes because they already know most of the stuff. Teachers also don't interact during this type of sessions and the outcome is not as desired. So, democratic education

Challenges, Rewards & Political Belief

Ayers (1992) tell that in order to introduce democratic education, people have taken very important steps. Young people have been given space and considered while making policies. A great challenge however was inadequately trained staff. Apple (1995) says that a very challenging task was to broaden the horizon of education from the conventional curriculum. Also, in order to achieve democratic education, the community and school needed to be connected. However, the outcomes of democratic education are vast. The students are grown to be with high thinking ability and contribute to their society. Although no matter what the core value, it is always of political benefit.

Ayers conclude that (2009) “ educators, students, and citizens should press for an education worthy of a democracy, including an end to sorting people into winners and losers through expensive standardized tests that act as pseudo-scientific forms of surveillance. There should be an end to starving schools of needed resources and then blaming teachers and their unions for dismal outcomes. Militarization of schools, zero tolerance policies, gender identity discrimination and end to limited resources due to communities historically isolated, underfunded, and underserved.”

Question No. 2

Outline the tenets of neoliberalism in relation to education. What are the organizing value sets and key assumptions to this ideology? How are they aligned with or in conflict with the goals of some of the other models we have looked at in education (for example, Dewey’s notion of child-centered education) where is power and authority located in a neoliberalist

model? List a few of the key ideas of neoconservatives in relation to education. Can a person be both a neoconservative and a neoliberal at the same time? How does the film “Waiting for Superman” frame particular neoliberalist ideas about education? What systemic structures are not being challenged by putting the blame for lagging education on teachers’ unions, according to Swalwell and Apple? Who benefits by this, and who loses? Discuss the ways in which charter schools and voucher systems can impact students, teachers and schools. Why do you think neoliberalism has become the dominant discourse of education, despite the fact that Finland seems to go against most of the tenets of neoliberalist education and yet scores so well on the PISA tests? Is it the inevitable way that the world is moving and education needs to adapt, or are there other models that should be considered for teaching and learning?

Answer

Neoliberalism

Wendy Brown (2003) states that neoliberalism equated with a “radically free market: maximized competition and free trade achieved through economic de-regulation, elimination of tariffs, and a range of monetary and social policies favourable to business and indifferent toward poverty, social deracination, cultural decimation, long term resource depletion and environmental destruction.”

So neoliberalism can be summed up in four major types of public policy:

1. Free trade,
2. Deregulation

3. Fiscal austerity

4. Privatization

John Dewey's Theory of Education

Warde (1960) explains this theory; unifying principles of democracy and education will create an American society depicting creative and well-adjusted youth. The three steps are:

1. Free availability of kindergarten to college
2. Children would carry on the educational process, aided and guided by the teacher
3. They would be trained to behave cooperatively, sharing with and caring for one another image.

Warde (1960) stated that by following this theory the opposition between the old education and the new conditions of life would be overcome. The progressive influences radiating from the schools would stimulate and fortify the building of a democratic order of free and equal citizens.

Since the 1980s the impact of neoliberal and neoconservative ideas on education in the UK and USA has been dramatic. In the UK, protagonists argued that education had been going in the wrong direction and attacked ideological attack resulting in quality of primary education in England. From the 1950s to the early 1980s those teachers were respected due to their professionalism and because they engaged in a variety of national curriculum projects. During this period schools had both greater autonomy and greater local support than thereafter (Hicks, 2004).

Hicks (2004) state that money spent on education is seen as a waste of time unless it helps the country compete efficiently and effectively in the international market. The metaphors applied to education became those of the market place: parents as consumers, business as the model for education, internal and external competition in schools to bring out what is the best in both pupils and schools.

Neoconservative

Neoconservative is a “ conservative who advocates the assertive promotion of democracy and United States national interest in international affairs including through military means.” Neoconservatives are not really conservative and neoliberals are not really liberal. So a person can be both at the same time. Neoconservative policies with respect to education will include; common curriculum, accountability of teachers, responsibility of teachers for education and central control over education (Apple & Swalwell, 2011).

Waiting for Superman

According to Apple & Swalwell (2011), “ Waiting for Superman” explores the tragic way of failure of American education system. It is incorporated by neoliberal idea, shows that America had the best public education system dominating internationally. Regardless of systemic and structural social inequities that powerfully shape the lives of the children and their caregivers, the film portrays them all as equally tragic. These are children who want desperately to succeed but who are likely to be crushed by bureaucracies, bad teachers, and unions unless charters with dynamic leaders can save them.

Apple & Swalwell (2011) blame the teacher's Union for lagging education because they themselves are unionized and bad teachers are protected by them at the expense of students. By blaming these unions, oppression of children, racial and social issues are not addressed. It also fails to address the impact of No Child Left Behind and other policies that cut off school funding. This also does not discuss curriculum change towards test preparation, mechanized teaching, and further marginalized children who are predicted to drag down test scores

As the documentary points out only one in five charter schools perform better than regular school, the ultimate solution for the students, teachers and parents. Rather, the solution is not to put all children in charter schools, but rather to make all schools more like the charters. That would entail discipline, high expectations for all students, longer school days, and more flexibility to hire (and reward) good teachers and get rid of bad ones.

Conclusion

Finland's teachers are also fully unionized, teaching there is in a homogeneous and wealthy nation. Their educational system has access to social support system. There are many factors that are to be considered in adapting educational models. The web woven between charter schools, neoliberal venture capitalists, and neoconservative think tanks forms powerful, interconnected force intending to influence votes on policies supporting charter schools and even running candidates.

These promoters include most prominent educational leaders and policy makers. Research needs to be done in order to expose this political effect and attempt to protect public institutions.

Our schools, teachers and students deserve better. Therefore they need to work together along with the help of state to run a progressing educational system. Competition is the basis of improvement. Therefore, the educational methods have to be competitive with global market. Finland succeeds due to the huge safety net for citizens, whereas everywhere else cutting edges are common. Segregation, property-tax based funding formulas, centralized textbook production, lack of local autonomy and shared governance, de-professionalization, inadequate special education supports, differential discipline patterns, and other such matters need to be addressed in order to improve educational system. However, the need to adapt according to the changing technology and laws is necessary.