Teaching Democratic Culture by Democratizing Education

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Opening Reflection

Thinking about your own schooling experiences, what aspects of that experience were democratic in nature, and what aspects are decidedly more authoritarian?
Overview

1. Why does a democratic classroom matter?
2. What do we mean by “creating a democratic context”?
3. Democratizing the educational experience
   - Social factors
   - Institutional factors
   - Physical factors
4. Considerations for different levels of the education system
Culture in the Classroom

Why does a democratic classroom matter?
A Thought Experiment in Education
Enculturation in the Classroom

Society

Individual
Enculturation in the Classroom

School System

Student
Enculturation in the Classroom

School

Student
Enculturation in the Classroom
Enculturation in the Classroom
Enculturation in the Classroom
Back to Our Thought Experiment

Authoritarian
Sitting
Listening
Not asking ?s
Authority
Fear
Discipline
Rules
Punishments
Obedient
Passive
Complacent

Open
Participatory
Active
Engaged
Asking ?s
Debate
Initiative
Dialogue
Collaboration
Answering ?s
Solving problems
Immersion as Curriculum

What do we mean by “creating a democratic context”? 
Conventional Approach

Student
Conceptual Approach

Student
Conceptual Approach
Immersion as Curriculum

- Student
- pedagogical role modeling
- curriculum integration
- classroom management
- assessment & evaluation
- teacher talk
- textbook & curriculum content
- physical environment
- use of technology
- how texts are used
- school leadership
- school governance
- legal & policy environment
- institutional culture
- peer relations
- pedagogical approaches
- supervision & accountability
- social justice in the system
- community linkages
- parental involvement
- teachers' involvement
- teacher qualifications
- students' involvement in school
Immersion as Curriculum

Context
- tacit
- indirect

Content
- explicit
- direct

Pedagogical approaches
Supervision & accountability
Social justice in the system
Institutional culture
Parental involvement
Teacher involvement
Teacher qualifications
Students' involvement in school
Community linkages
Physical environment
Role modeling
Assessment & evaluation
Classroom management
Peer relations
Curriculum integration
Student
Teacher talk
Textbooks
Curriculum content
How texts are used
Use of technology
School governance
School leadership
Legal & policy environment
Immersion as Curriculum

Student
Immersion as Curriculum
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- role modeling
Immersion as Curriculum

Social Factors
• Relationships
• Interactions
• Language
Immersion as Curriculum

Institutional Factors
• Policies
• Procedures
• Frameworks
• Standards

Student

Institutional

Material

Social

Content

- classroom management
- supervision & accountability
- school governance
- legal & policy environment
- social justice in the system
- assessment & evaluation
- curriculum integration
- teacher qualifications
Immersion as Curriculum

Physical/ Material Factors

• Objects and visuals
• Use of space
Social Factors

How can we democratize the social experiences of students?
Context as Curriculum: Social Aspects of the Educational Experience

Social Factors
- Relationships
- Interactions
- Language
Social Factors in the School Experience

What is meant by “social factors”?  
• Factors to the social experiences of students  
• Relationships between social agents  
• Other social phenomena such as language, role modeling etc.
Democratizing the Social Experience

How can democratic values and principles be reinforced in the social experience?

• Encouraging equality/ dialogue in relations
• Encouraging linkages to home/ community
• Making participation/ engagement “normal”
• Cultivating understanding and respect
• Recognizing different assumptions/ perspectives
• Steady exposure to “democratic ideals”
Democratizing the Social Experience

What kinds of activities/processes support a democratic social experience?

- Student-centered approaches (inquiry etc.)
- Dialogue, discussion, and debate
- Participatory/experiential activities
- Authentic problem-solving
- Collaborative work
- Community-based activities
Reorienting Social Factors to Support a Culture of Democracy

Where can democratic values and principles be reflected in the following?

• Pedagogical approaches
• Role modeling
• Peer relations
• Language, terminology, vocabulary
• Relationships with parents, other teachers, school leaders
Institutional Factors

How can we make our educational institutions, policies, and processes more democratic?
Institutional Factors
- Policies
- Procedures
- Frameworks
- Standards
Institutional Factors in the School Experience

What is meant by “institutional factors”?

• The institutional arrangements of schooling
• Frameworks, policies, procedures, standards, mandates
• Governance mechanisms
• Established practices and norms
Democratizing the Institutional Experience

How can democratic values and principles be reinforced institutionally?

- Critical analysis of the values and principles on which institutional structures are currently based?
- Governance that reflects democratic values and principles (transparency, accountability, equality, rights, social justice)
Democratizing the Institutional Experience

What kinds of activities/processes support a democratic institutional experience?

• Demonstrating transparency and accountability and fairness
• Deliberative processes at all levels
• Encouraging participation and engagement
• Cultivating autonomy and personal responsibility
Reorienting Institutional Factors to Support a Culture of Democracy

Where can democratic values and principles be reflected in the following?

• Discipline systems
• School procedures
• Classroom routines
• Assessment and reporting practices
• Decision-making processes
Physical/ Material Factors

What role can the physical environment play in norming democratic values and principles?
Context as Curriculum:
Physical/ Material Aspects of the Educational Experience

Physical/ Material Factors
- Objects and visuals
- Use of space
Physical/ Material Factors in the School Experience

What is meant by “physical factors”?

• The physical environment in which schooling takes place, inside and outside the classroom
• The visual environment and “wall space”
• The objects, materials, and learning resources students interact with
Democratizing the Physical/Material Environment

How can democratic values and principles be reinforced by the physical environment?

• Making the physical environment conducive to democratic relations (sharing materials, discussion, collaboration etc.)

• Empowering students regarding their physical environment

• Making the use of some spaces “negotiable”

• Giving students a sense of ownership and responsibility
Democratizing the Physical/Material Environment

What kinds of activities/processes facilitate a democratic physical environment

• Transparent processes and functional approaches for seating arrangements
• Giving students ownership/control over certain spaces
• Involving students in decisions about how space is used
• Democracy-related visual messaging
Reorienting Physical/ Material Factors to Support a Culture of Democracy

Where can democratic values and principles be reflected in the following?
• Seating/ desk arrangements
• Visual environment, wall space
• Learning materials and technology
• “Teacher” materials
• Outdoor spaces, surrounding environment/ community
Implications for the System

What does this mean for education professionals at different levels?
Immersion in a Nested System
Immersion in a Nested System
Suggestions for Classroom Teachers

Key considerations for establishing democratic classrooms:

• Use democratic, student-centered teaching and learning strategies
• Give students practice with democratic activities, in a safe and caring context
• Help students establish democratic values and principles as “normal”
• Balance structure and freedom in the management of the classroom
Suggestions for School Leaders

Key considerations for making schools more democratically engaged:

• Be open and transparent in school governance

• Model democratic leadership, involve students and teachers, as appropriate

• Strive to bridge the school with the home and community context

• Encourage and support teachers in embracing democratic values
Suggestions for System Leaders

Key considerations for democratizing education systems:

• Collect and analyze student data, to identify inequities (access, quality etc.)

• Establish policies which mitigate against social injustices in the system

• Prioritize transparency, accountability, and participation

• Ensure formal curricula include attention to democracy and related issues
Closing Reflection

What are the most democratic aspects of the schooling experience for students today? What are the most authoritarian? Are there any which would be relatively easy to infuse with democratic values and principles?
Thank you

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