A Pedagogy of Empowerment: Fostering Character Development

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PRIME Character Education

- Prioritizing character education
- Relationships
- Intrinsic motivation
- Modeling
- Empowerment
Empowerment

- Character develops in part through a sense of one’s autonomy.
- Character education should focus on the empowerment of all stakeholders: teachers, administrators, support staff, students, parents, community members, etc.
- A philosophy of empowerment should be at the heart of the school.
Many schools that serve under-served youth "operate more like prisons than schools. They are more likely to rely on guards, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras to monitor and control students, restrict access to bathrooms, and attempt to regiment behavior by adopting an assortment of rules and restrictions"
“The first service that one owes to others in community consists in listening to them.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer Life Together
A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.

John Dewey
Democracy and Education
(1916)
Socrates and Plato, over 2000 years ago, recognized that the only path to a just and effective society is for citizens and rulers to be virtuous. They fully recognized that people will always be guided, at least partly, by self-serving motives.
The Great Experiment

Thomas Jefferson argued that democracy depends upon the cultivation of “public-spiritedness” which will not flourish spontaneously, but must be taught.

Benjamin Franklin: “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom”

Theodore Roosevelt: “To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society”
What is democratic character?

- An ethic of care and responsibility
- respect for the right to development
- appreciation of the importance of the public
- critical and analytical social perspective
- skills for democratic participation (e.g., listening, co-operation, verbal analysis)

David Sehr (1997)
Civic Character

"Responsible moral action that serves the common good."

Patricia White (1996)

*Civic Virtues and Public Schooling*

- Hope and confidence
- Courage
- Self-respect and self-esteem
- Friendship
- Trust
- Honesty
- Decency
David Sehr (1997)

Education for public democracy

• An ethic of care and responsibility
• Respect for equal right of everyone to the conditions necessary for their development
• Appreciation of the importance of the public
• Critical/analytical social perspective
• Capacities necessary for participation in public democracy (e.g., verbal analytical skills, habits of active listening, self-confidence, co-operation)
Michael Josephson
Josephson Institute of Ethics

- Recognition of and living up to social obligations
- Participation in the democratic process
- Law abidance
- Protection of the environment
- Community service
- Doing one's share
Why moral character?

• Democracy is not intrinsically moral; it requires individual virtue
• Democracy ideally requires an orientation to the general welfare
• Democracy ideally requires a willingness to challenge the majority and a willingness to bend to the majority, and the wisdom to know when to do each
"People in democratic societies have a right to expect their schools to be guided by moral principles such as justice, fairness of treatment, liberty, honesty, equity in the distribution of resources, and respect for differences."

A Pedagogy of Empowerment
Elements of Educating for Democracy

- Learning about democracy and citizenship
- Experiencing or practicing democracy
- Education for democratic skills
- Education for democratic character
The Social Need

No democratic society can long endure if its does not socialize each subsequent generation to develop the competencies, values and dispositions necessary for a self-governing society. Effective, ethical democracies are not automatically self-propagating.
Educating for Democracy

• Democratic knowledge: Learning about democracy and the role of citizens in a democratic society

• Democratic experience: Experiencing (practicing) democracy

• General knowledge: General education as a foundation for democratic participation

• Character education: Development of moral character
“The routines and rituals of a school teach, and teach especially about matters of character”
Theodore and Nancy Sizer (1999)
Methods of Citizenship Education

- Civic learning in the classroom
- Discussion of current issues
- Extracurricular activities (projects and community service)
- Service-learning
- Simulations
- Student voice in school governance
Why democratic experience?

• One does not develop democratic character solely from learning about democracy
• One’s democratic character is largely forged in the fires of democratic experience
• Mastery requires practice
• Democracy is counter-intuitive
  - About winning and losing
  - Complex and messy
  - Have to work with people you don’t like
Just, Caring, and Empowering Classrooms

• Give students “voice” in planning, problem-solving and decision-making
  - Class meetings

• Build a caring community as the context
  - Pro-social norms
  - Model caring
  - Nurture positive relationships

• Promote opportunities for service to others
  - Ideally student-driven
- Developmental discipline
  - Foster student input in decision-making
- Empowered conflict resolution
  - Peer conflict resolution
Class Meetings

• Norm setting
• Planning and decision-making
• Check-ins
• Problem-noticing and problem-solving
• Retrospective reflections
• Curriculum, current events, etc. discussions

• RESOURCES:
  - Ways we want our class to be (www.devstu.org)
  - The Morning Meeting Book by Kriete (www.responsiveclassroom.org)
Developmental Discipline

Asks educators to take a unique attitude toward students—a believing attitude. We believe students want to succeed, want to be in a caring relationship, and want to learn.

Our work is to try strategies that might overcome potential barriers.

---Marilyn Watson, Discipline for Moral Growth
3 Core Principles of Developmental Discipline

1st Principle: Build warm, caring, trusting student-teacher relationships

• Discipline must be built on a foundation of mutual trust
• Trust is difficult to build and easy to destroy
• Trust comes from collaborative, caring relationships
2nd Principle: Support/encourage friendly relationships among students

- Unity builders
- Collaborative pedagogy
- Teach social skills
3rd Principle: Use misbehaviors as opportunities for social, moral instruction

- Kids need to **develop** social and emotional skills for developmental discipline to work
- Also directly teach social-emotional competencies
Discipline Resources


Peer Mediation

- Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution are more powerfully effective when the school uses the same approach, language, and steps and ensures that all students are trained, have opportunities to practice and are empowered to use their skills.
Conflict Resolution

• “How to talk it out:
  - Stop. Cool off.
  - Talk and listen to each other
  - Find out what you both need
  - Brainstorm solutions
  - Choose the idea you both like
  - Make a plan. Go for it!”

RESOURCE:
Examples of Empowerment

- Democratic student government
- Class meetings
- Peer mediation
- Student guided curricula (e.g., project based learning)
- Student run honor system
- Student advisory committee
- Culture of staff collaborative decision-making