

et: "Because we need to them understand all the an be the way for them es, demands, and power choices in it. This is why enge to democratic edu- v the rules? What about please the teacher that ching principles address individual and raise ques-

ged in the cooperative, id evaluating rules and classroom routines and issues within situations authority figure or struc- eveloping a critical atti- opportunity to experience ir voicelessness. Demo- edagogical power. What ent on activities, how g are all areas that can

and objectives for each are based on the text- often, though, I put the ow to go about achiev- udies when we needed ociated with the Ameri- d them things I'd done discussed suggestions Revolution. Eventually ch included narrations nd Indian War through y job as teacher was to eas on how to best "act as cause and effect and imposed a classroom etween George III and g to their reasonable The students were see-

This of course takes a little more work and a lot of faith that students will be responsible for their own learning. I could test them to "make sure" they learn the concepts. Security. This reflects my need for them to be accountable so I can give the grade, "validating" the experience and "proving" that it was "effective." But it's their experience. It can stand on its own without my stamp. The real validation is in their sense of personal accomplishment. In the course of the whole human event that constituted the social studies activities, students did much more than engage with the curricular material at hand. They had a share in planning, implementing, and evaluating an entire project. They worked together, listened to each other, generated ideas, produced an exciting play, evaluated what does and doesn't get an idea across to an audience, shared power and decision making, and enjoyed maximum participation from each individual. Allowing students the opportunity to choose how something is learned is very dynamic. Even when they cannot choose the content, they can have an influence on the form, and thus reshape that content. This choosing is one principle of democratic teaching.

There are two other important democratic teaching principles that deserve elaboration. One is that every student must have equitable access to educational rewards and benefits, including resources, information, and materials necessary for learning. The second is that students must have the opportunity to process and evaluate their own personal goals and decisions and how they as individuals have contributed to the group or community.

Equitable access is a tough issue. The idea of the "haves" and the "have nots" becomes very clear in regard to classroom life when there are high and low reading and math groups, enrichment opportunities, pull-out programs, and remedial classes. We as educators are constantly trying, for the most part with good intentions, to adjust to the learning styles and levels of achievement of the individual students in our rooms. A hidden agenda becomes clear, however, when those who get the "goodies" are those who follow the rules and excel at adapting to the standards of the system. Failure to meet the standard is seen as defiance, laziness, or defectiveness in the individual, not as bias in the standards or inequities in the system that imposes them. "Fair" adjustments are made: lower reading groups, behavior-disordered and/or learning-disabled classrooms. It is not easy to determine what fair democratic practices would entail in this regard. The one thing I know I can do and have done is to be a reflective, challenging voice with my students, and as a member of the faculty. What are we really about? What is most fair? Why don't these students "fit in?" From where do our standards come?

Providing students the opportunity to reflect and share who they are,

*"Creating Democratic Classrooms" 1995 (Beyer et al)
An excerpt from MaryBeth Cunat's chapter (1993)*