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THE DISCUSSION AS PART OF THE DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM

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FOREWORD

The International Journal TEACHER at the Faculty of Education in Bitola, with its international dimensions presents a fresh wave at the pedagogical setting in the Republic of Macedonia. It delivers, analyses, affirms and elaborates serious interdisciplinary themes, occurrences and areas that with its existence mark the present educational field. The papers in the journal present significant pedagogical phenomena and occurrences that are in context with the Balkan and South-East European geographical area. A dominant characteristic, beside the internationality of the papers, is its interdisciplinary belonging which gives them special attention to the reader from all kinds of fields to enjoy in the implementation of the theoretical and empirical experiences of the authors.

In this instance, as always, we would like to express our gratitude to our editors and reviewers, who, with their dedication give maximal input in the improving of the quality of the journal as for forming a stand-point in the international library fond.

As always, a very personal gratitude to the authors who with their theoretical and empirical experiences contributed to the enrichment of the professional and scientific knowledge of the readers, i.e. the users of this renowned international journal.

To those who will come in contact with the pedagogical traces of the journal, we wish them enjoyment and uncovering of the secrets of their profession, as for a critical overview of the separate professional and scientific work, elaborations and attitudes.

A very sincere thank you note to all those who will project good-intended remarks and suggestions that will be in the sense of improving the quality of the pedagogical and other standards of the journal. In fact, that is what the crucial point of the Editor-in-Chief and the Editorial Board is in the upcoming 2015.

Let the new 2015 serve as a challenge in the search of new pedagogical creations.

With respect,

The Editorial Board

THE DISCUSSION AS PART OF THE DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM¹⁰

Jasminka Kocoska, Biljana Gramatkovski

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Abstract

The basic premise of democracy refers to development of the ability to deliberately and responsible participation in the political, economic, social and cultural life, based on knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies, personal qualities and preferences expressed by creative and challenging approaches to the issues and problems. In this paper we will focus on the discussion as one of the many strategies for the realization of the educational process, as an integral part of the democratic classroom. The discussion is an inseparable part of democracy because both have the same goal of fostering human development. They are based on the idea that only through cooperation with others we may be exposed to new perspectives indicating understanding and motivation in learning. The discussion strategy is one of the learning ways in which learning can explore specific issues already determined where the human experience and knowledge come to expression. It actually is an inspiring mean for detecting various opinions regarding a specific subject. All the conflicting perspectives of the participants, the unexpected multitude of opinions and views are a very good example of the democratic process in the classroom.

Keywords: discussion, democracy, classroom, education, students

THE DISCUSSION AS PART OF THE DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM

By following the world's movements and the need for challenges' identification set in front of the Republic of Macedonia, the existence and the practice of the democracy in the educational process appears as a result of the citizenship's needs.

Our educational programs should encourage the young Europeans to see themselves not only as citizens of their own country but as citizens of Europe and citizens of a modern world. We should help them gain responsibility and ability to keep and promote the democracy, the human rights and freedom.

The basic premise of democracy refers to development of the ability to deliberately and responsible participation in the political, economic, social and cultural life, based on knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies, personal qualities and preferences expressed by creative and challenging approaches to the issues and problems. Through careful and purposeful training of students in the knowledge and skills they need to function in a democracy as adults, teachers and parents, shape the future of a democratic society. That means supporting the relationship that contributes to the art., common opinion "which is the heart of the democratic ethos and that is quite the opposite of discrimination and injustice ... The whole school system should strive to educate the democratic initiative living - acceptance of responsibility, the challenge for active participation, the connection between rights and duties, knowledge and interest.

¹⁰ Specialized paper

In order to preserve the democratic principles in the realization of the educational process, it is necessary to use different strategies to master the content. They are used to intensify the interaction between entities and their cooperation in the educational process as a basis for developing the skills of civic activity and responsibility.

In this paper we will focus on the discussion as one of the many strategies for the realization of the educational process, as an integral part of the democratic classroom.

The discussion is an inseparable part of democracy because both have the same goal of fostering human development. They are based on the idea that only through cooperation with others we may be exposed to new perspectives indicating understanding and motivation in learning. This process only confirms the democratic principles where everyone has the right to speak his word, to expand their horizons and to nourish their development through giving and taking speaking and listening and describing and testimony.

The discussion strategy is one of the learning ways in which learning can explore specific issues already determined where the human experience and knowledge come to expression. It actually is an inspiring mean for detecting various opinions regarding a specific subject. All the conflicting perspectives of the participants, the unexpected multitude of opinions and views are a very good example of the democratic process in the classroom.

The discussion is more serious than a conversation and differs from it in the approach and the ultimate goal. The discussion is concerned about the development of knowledge and understanding among the participants who should provide answers to different views expressed open to influence of the opinions of others.

The strategy for group discussion strives to encourage and strengthen communication skills among students in the class. It promotes thinking skills and decision-making, as well as stimulation of different views and opinions of the students. When students have an opportunity to brainstorm without criticizing, discussing various considerations, debating controversial topics and answering questions, we can prove thinking of students to a higher level. This strategy can be used in all areas of learning, but its realization depends on the climate in the classroom. It may be limited and inadequate for students in lower grades, because the extent of their thinking is lower. The main purpose of the group discussion consists of the following:

- stimulating students to think, explanation, reflection and repetition
- The ability of students to clear and to develop their own and others' ideas
- Promote positive group discussion and conversation
- Demonstrate different techniques of setting questions and leading a discussion on a specific topic in class are very useful tool for learning. However, it should be properly implemented, and for that purpose to be achieved the following principles should be esteemed:

1. The teacher first has to have a plan to lead the discussion so he can encourage higher level of thinking among the students. He should make changes spontaneously in accordance with the discussion, rather than stick rigidly to previously completed plan for the intended discussion with students. It is recommended to ask open questions, questions that do not have the correct answer (for example: How do you think the further action in the story will go?, What do you feel when talking about this character ?, What is your position on ...?) etc.

2. The teacher should also encourage interaction among students. The common practice for the teacher, as a central figure is to ask questions, and direct students to turn to him and then expect that teacher feedback confirms their answer or not. However, as long as they support this model to work, students will not learn to discuss with each other. Instead, the teacher can ask a question, then to talk about that with a student, and then with another, and with the third and so on, ofcourse, with occasional involvement of the teacher when he deems it necessary, in order to improve the quality of group discussion .

3. When it comes to the accuracy of the answer to the previously asked question, the teacher should not be instantaneous assessors, or to confirm or deny the accuracy of the response of the student, but it would be desirable to encourage discussion about the question where he will leave students to comment on it. In this way of work the students gain more confidence, discuss freely, without fear that they'll be laughed at for their mistakes.

4. When the teacher ask question, he should be aware that students need time to think before they give a thorough answer, because by increasing the time for thinking, that significantly increases the level of opinion among students, which includes reporting on as number of students for group discussion.

5. When the teacher opens the group discussion, he should make an effort to include all students in it. In certain cases he should ignore dominant students who think they need to answer the question, and invite withdrawn students to discuss. Open discussion represent a great asset to encourage critical thinking in students who are less open, because in the discussion there are no right or wrong answers, all ideas are respected and considered important.

The way we implement this strategy includes the following steps:

- Group organization
- Set up task (The students ask questions that have multiple possible answers.)
- Discussion
- Presentation of the results (also made on earlier observation of group discussions, noting whether students of the groups ask questions, noting the position, themes, concepts or objects that stimulate group discussion among students).

The reflective discussion encourages students to think and talk about what they observed, heard or read it. The teacher is the one who initiates the discussion by asking questions, requiring from the students to reflect their thoughts and feelings after an interpreted movie, read or recorded stories, illustrations, and their connection with various experiences of students' life and other stories.

The reflective discussion can start with:

- Setting a quoesion to encourage a discussion;
- The question should contain more than one answer;
- The question should encourage the students to interpret what they have seen, heard or read and
- The first question should reveal the theme, the message or the goal of the discussion.

The main goal of the reffective discussion is:

- Using questions to stimulate reflection;
- To make students think through interpreting, summarizing, concluding and evaluatting and
- sharing personal thoughts, feelings and images caused by reading a book, film, illustration or experience

According to the fact that the learning is a continuous process, students should be asked questions that will make easier to set relations between the new information and what they already know. They should also be encouraged to connect content they learn with their own life experiences and to consider whether previous experiences determine their current mindset.

It is very important to work on developing students' ability to reflect and use higher order thinking skills as much as possible. Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive domains is a classic and useful categorization of ways of knowing and learning:

1. Remembering Information-- student memorizes information, repeats back on tests.
2. Comprehension-- student is able to demonstrate concepts, compare and contrast.

3. Application-- student can use knowledge to solve problems; student puts various sources of information together and applies this to understand situations and address problems.
4. Analysis-- student can use concepts and information to critique statements, understand complex situations.
5. Synthesis-- student can integrate various sorts of information together to formulate original explanations for situations.

These are the benefits of getting students to participate in classroom discussions:

1. It helps students explore a diversity of perspectives.
2. It increases students' awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity and complexity.
3. It helps students recognize and investigate their assumptions.
4. It encourages attentive, respectful listening.
5. It develops new appreciation for continuing differences.
6. It increases intellectual agility.
7. It helps students become connected to a topic.
8. It shows respect for students' voices and experiences.
9. It helps students learn the processes and habits of democratic discourse.
10. It affirms students as co-creators of knowledge.
11. It develops the capacity for the clear communication of ideas and meaning.
12. It develops habits of collaborative learning.
13. It increases breadth and makes students more empathetic.
14. It helps students develop skills of synthesis and integration.
15. It leads to transformation

Discussions in the classroom can lead to greater student understanding-but this does not automatically happen. Discussions can be fruitful when the teacher is clear on the reasons for conducting discussions, adopts approaches for making the discussions productive, and is comfortable with the various roles the teacher must play in discussions.

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