

## РОЗДІЛ III. ОПТИМІЗАЦІЯ НАВЧАЛЬНО-ВИХОВНОГО ПРОЦЕСУ В ЗАГАЛЬНООСВІТНІХ НАВЧАЛЬНИХ ЗАКЛАДАХ

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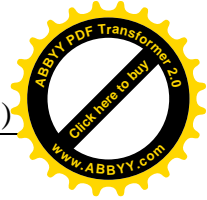
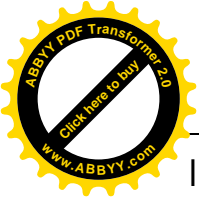
### PROMOTING STUDENT THINKING THROUGH ACTIVE, STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING

*This article begins by analyzing the foundational elements of democratic life and argues that promoting student thinking through active, student-centered teaching is a critical component for providing students with guided practice with these foundational elements. The article provides an example of an active, student-centered lesson and concludes by arguing that a democratic curriculum within a democratic school also contributes to the development of student thinking.*

*Key words: promoting student thinking, foundational elements of democratic life, active, student-centered teaching, skills of critical thinking.*

There is a popular misconception that anarchy equates with chaos. While that may sometimes be the case, most probably it reflects the fear held by those in power of what might ensue under such a situation. Chaos is neither a necessary result of nor precursor to anarchy. In fact holding such a notion reflects a view that power must be centralized and imposed from some central location. Etymologically, and literally, anarchy refers to being without a ruler (from an-»without» + arkhos »leader» according to the *Online Etymological Dictionary*), suggesting both that power and decision-making abilities are decentralized and also localized. Such a situation could be said to describe and coincide with a democratic situation. But what are the conditions or foundations of a democratic life? And, what might the promotion of student-thinking have to do with such a way of living?

James Beane and William Apple (2007), building on the earlier work of Beane argue that there are 7 foundational elements for a democratic life. These are: 1) open flow of ideas; 2) faith in our ability to create possibilities to resolve problems; 3) the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, & policies; 4) concern for common good/welfare of others; 5) concern for dignity/rights of minorities and individuals; 6) an understanding that democracy is an idealized set of values to live and guide our life; and, 7) organization of social institutions to promote/extend a democratic way of

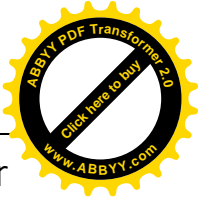
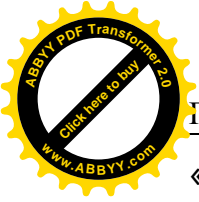


life (slightly paraphrased from Beane and Apple, 2007: 7).

The thesis here, of course, is that by promoting student thinking in the classroom, students will have the opportunity to practice and develop their skills with these foundational elements of democratic living. When schools are organized in ways that promote these activities and when lessons are constructed in ways that develop these skills among students (and teachers for that matter), then portions of element 7, above, are being implemented. Returning to the first component above, the open flow of ideas, even a brief consideration of this element demonstrates how the elements are integral to each other.

For instance, when students participate in discussions that permit the open flow of ideas (element 1), even, and especially, of ideas that might be unpopular, they are able to practice their speaking and listening skills and develop a belief that by working together we might be able to solve our problems (element 2). In such discussions, they must develop a concern both for individuals and minorities (element 5) as well as a concern for and consideration of the common good (element 4). When teachers construct lessons in ways that require students to evaluate the ideas of their student peers and historical, contemporary, and other cultural data from their own or other societies, they create the opportunity to guide students to develop and hone their critical thinking skills (element 3). By participating in such activities, students and teachers alike learn that democracy is not just a set of idealized values (such as rights of free speech), or a formal means of conducting affairs (such as by voting regularly in free elections), but also, and primarily, a way of living with each other (element 6). The last two points (elements 6 and 7) derive from Dewey (1916) who writes eloquently about the intimate relationship between ways of schooling and ways of living together (here, and for Dewey, democratically). Thus, for any people desiring to live democratically, these are necessary conditions for the continuance of such a way of living together.

It should be rather easy for most people to construct an image of the traditional classroom. The teacher or professor, cast as a «sage on a stage» offers wisdom and knowledge to the students, as one might bring money to a bank, to be deposited in their minds and withdrawn when necessary (for exams, for use, etc.), adding to the deposit as new knowledge is acquired, and so on. This regurgitative cycle in which the student repeats and reproduces the discourse of the instructor is what Paulo Freire (1970) referred to as the

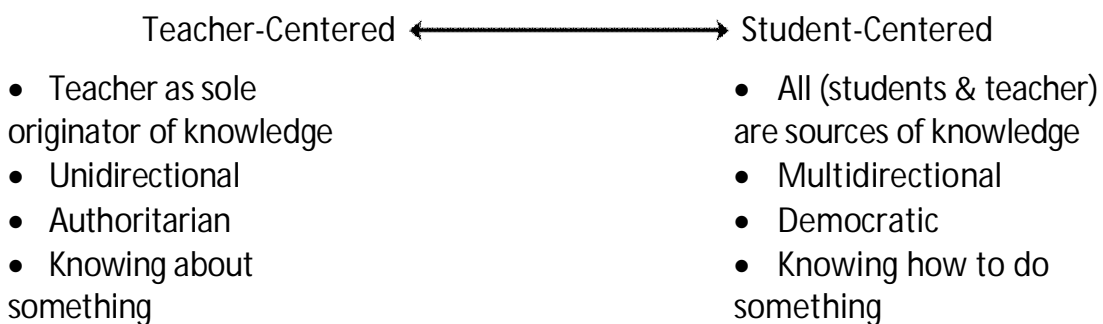


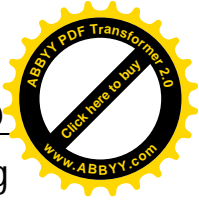
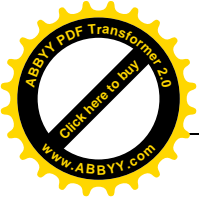
«Banking Concept of Education». It is teacher-centered, casting the teacher, or sometimes a textbook, as authority and originator of ideas; in other words, the teacher or some one other than the student has agency and the student is conceptualized as a rather passive recipient of knowledge.

A comic I once saw illustrates a portion of this banking conception. In the image, a teacher has tilted the top of a student's head open and is filling the student's mind by pouring knowledge from a pitcher into the student's head. In the picture, it is made clear that as the teacher pours, the student's level of knowledge rises as can be seen with the rising level of knowledge indicated inside the student. The viewer also clearly gets the message that the student will at some point pour this knowledge out, perhaps to another person, but certainly on some upcoming examination. Obviously, this is a situation of «knowing about» some topic, rather than one of «knowing how to do something».

Contrast this with a student-centered approach, a position on the other end of a continuum from the teacher-centered approach. This pedagogical approach seeks to situate the student as agent, as producer of knowledge, as precisely the sort of citizen required for a democracy to flourish. In fact, this can be seen as a liberatory approach (Freire, 1970), because students are cast as originators and generators of knowledge. It begins with the student, wherever he or she might be cognitively located, and encourages the student to speak, to write, to offer his or her views on the content at hand. Here, the teacher is not cast as omnipotent «sage on the stage», but rather, is cast as just one more participant in the conversation. In other words, the teacher and the students co-construct a conversational community. In the process, the student learns how to accomplish something (thinking, writing, speaking, problem-solving, etc.). Figure 1, below, diagrams this continuum.

Figure 1 Continuum of Educational-Centered-Approaches



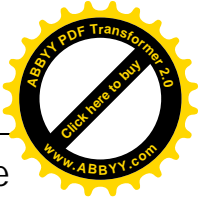


Clearly, in such a situation as that depicted above, the relationship among students and between students and teacher are qualitatively (and quantitatively) different. In the teacher-centered approach, students receive lessons in obedience, in following the commands of those appointed above them. In the student-centered approach, save for administrative duties and differences of knowledge, all co-create the community of which they are a part. It is in this latter approach, and only here, that students can practice, in a somewhat controlled and contrived situation, the skills and interactional possibilities that are requisite conditions of democratic life (following Beane and Apple, 2007).

One might ask, then, is there some sort of basic lesson plan structure that might be utilized to create a variety of student-centered lessons that would promote the development of the skills needed by citizens to further the foundations of a democratic way of life? The answer, as might be suspected, is a resounding yes could be called «Active Teaching with Original Materials». These materials could be historical or contemporary documents or photographs, or other cultural materials such as political advertisements or song lyrics from various time periods and or various genres of music. In general, all that is needed is some range of «data» from the content being studied that will subsequently be provided to students to work with. Of course, this should not occur as an isolated instance of a lesson, but rather should be a regular occurrence throughout the course the student is taking (such as an historical study of American Slavery or of Ukrainian famines).

The basic steps for lessons of the sort elaborated above are:

1. Provide students with a question that could have multiple answers (e.g., What would life as a slave have been like? for a lesson in which students are provided various visual and textual primary source materials from the time period of American Slavery).
2. Ask students to create an individual list of ideas they have in response to the question.
3. Place students in groups of about 5 students and ask them to share their list with other students.
4. Depending on time you wish to use with this activity, solicit at least one idea from each group of students and record it on the board so everyone in class has the opportunity to have access to a list larger than that which they might individually have generated.
5. Provide students with materials they might examine to construct an



answer to the question (documents, photos, sketches, etc; these may include both primary-source items from the actual time period under study – and secondary sources – items not from that time period, if you wish to address this issue with students).

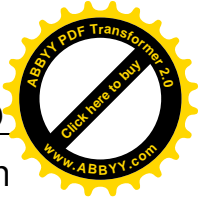
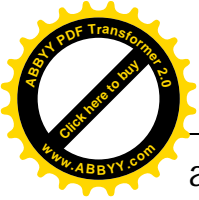
6. Repeat #2–#4 so students can share any new ideas they wish with other students, and record them on the board – the goal here is to make the information accessible to students who might have struggled with the material.

7. Ask students to write an essay in response to the original question.

As necessary, the basic procedures of this lesson can be modified to meet the needs/time, etc. (e.g., the essay could be assigned as homework, or done during the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of class, etc.). This lesson could easily be adapted for use with contemporary materials (such as art, political argument, etc.); the materials might also be comparative (e.g., letters about the creation of the local constitution from 2 or more countries. As an alternative to writing an essay, students could write a letter to a newspaper editor, or create some other product (such as a drawing) – the CRITICAL ELEMENT is that the students do the interpreting AND they produce something new to demonstrate what they have learned.

Such an approach may have the added benefit of helping develop general cognitive abilities among students. In one study involving lessons on American slavery such as that described above and a number of Piagetian tasks, it was determined that specific-cognitive structures underpinned elements of historical understanding (Bishop, 2006). Thus, it is possible that lessons purporting to develop historical understanding will help students to gain the experience needed, following Piaget, to construct the cognitive structures that underpin that historical understanding.

Beane and Apple (2007) also note some characteristics of a democratic curriculum and of democratic schools that I suggest can significantly contribute to the development of student thinking. Some of those components of a democratic curriculum includes: 1) understanding that knowledge is socially constructed, produced, & disseminated by people with specific values, interests, & biases; 2) discussions of current events; 3) subjects of study integrated into students daily lives; 4) explicitly seeks to change antidemocratic conditions in school and society; 5) does not ignore dominant knowledge (it opens doors), but neither does it endorse «drill and skill»; and, 6) teachers and students are involved in curriculum decisions (Beane and Apple, 2007: 14–20). Similarly, characteristics of democratic schools include, but are not limited to 1) widespread participation in governance

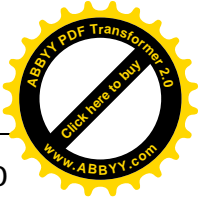


and policymaking and 2) an emphasis on cooperation/collaboration rather than competition (Beane and Apple, 2007: 9–14).

First and foremost, when students are educated in democratic situations and with a democratic curriculum, they still are being educated, though less so in the formal sense and more so in the sense of receiving an informal education. For instance, by understanding that values, interests, and biases permeate knowledge, including dominant knowledge, students gain awareness that theirs is not the only perspective out there. By discussing current events and integrating subjects into student's lives, they realize that schooling is part of the real world. By seeking to change anti-democratic situations and by involving students in curricular decisions and school governance and policymaking in a cooperative way, students learn that they can make a difference. And thus, they have taken one step closer to an active, participatory adulthood each time they experience something discussed above.

One example of the potential for such a confluence of informal and formal education is described by Griffin (1994). In a short, one-page newsletter report, she briefly describes how over her years of teaching she came to the point in her pedagogical practice where rather than preparing her classroom before the class arrived, she placed everything moveable in the center of the room. On the first day of class, students and teacher alike designed the physical layout of the room. In a situation like this, everyone has ownership and takes pride in their space. Later during that year, a student teacher arrived to complete her practice teaching. One day, she rearranged the room and when the students arrived, somewhat in shock, they asked Griffin why she had rearranged the room. Griffin replied that she had not done so, that the student teacher had done so and that the students should consult with her. So the students made the same query to the student teacher who replied that she had made the changes for pedagogical reasons related to the lesson she had planned for the day. After thinking a moment, one of the students informed her that she needed to ask first since it was their room.

Clearly, the example above demonstrates that such a convergence of curricular design, school operation, and active, student-centered teaching will certainly promote student thinking. And, given the foundations of democratic life, it will also contribute to the development of the active citizens required for a democratic way of living to continue. In other words, such could move students into a public adulthood. This means, as Parker (2005) notes, moving



students from idiocy (etymologically rooted in the notion of a private world) to that of puberty (and hence, of public life). If we do not want democracy to flourish, we should ensure that we do not teach in the manner suggested in this paper. And if we teach from a banking perspective, it ought to be clear to all observers that we value neither student thinking nor democracy. And that, I think, would be a grand mistake, one of the larger ones to be committed in the history of education and of democracy.

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#### РЕЗЮМЕ

**Дж. Бішоп.** Розвиток мислення учнів в умовах активного особистісно орієнтованого навчання.

*У статті здійснено аналіз основних ознак демократичного способу життя. Автор стверджує, що розвиток мислення учнів в умовах активного особистісно орієнтованого навчання сприяє практичному набуттю учнями основних елементів демократії. У статті наведено приклад особистісно орієнтованого уроку, а також зроблено висновок про те, що саме демократична навчальна програма у демократичній школі робить вагомий внесок у розвиток мислення студентів.*

**Ключові слова:** розвиток мислення учнів, активне особистісно орієнтоване навчання, основні елементи демократичного способу життя, навички критичного мислення.

#### РЕЗЮМЕ

**Дж. Бишоп.** Развитие мышления учащихся в условиях активного личностно ориентированного обучения.

*В статье осуществлен анализ основных особенностей демократического способа жизни. Автор утверждает, что развитие мышления учащихся в условиях активного личностно ориентированного обучения способствует практическому приобретению учащимися основных элементов демократии. В статье дан пример личностно ориентированного урока, а также сделан вывод о том, что именно демократическая учебная программа в демократической школе делает огромный вклад в развитие мышления учащихся.*

**Ключевые слова:** развитие мышления учащихся, активное личностно ориентированное обучение, основные элементы демократического способа жизни, навыки критического мышления.