

The Next Generation of Democratic Leaders

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This week, we read for EDU 380 (Culturally Relevant Teaching) Chapter 8, entitled “Taking Action in the Classroom and Beyond” from the 2011 book *Doing Multicultural Education for Achievement and Equity* by Carl A. Grant and Christine E. Sleeter. The main topic discussed in this chapter is democracy. When most people think of the word *democracy*, they tend to think of majority rules, or voting, or simply the United States Constitution. But in order for democracy to work in the way it was originally envisioned, it needs to go much deeper than that. Democracy needs to encompass the freedom to live without tyranny or government oppression, equal application of laws, harmony and equality among all people, ability to reason, having a say in how to live, active debates, and education that prepares them for this. We, as a nation, should not only think of democracy when it comes to governmental factors. It should be a state of mind, something that guides the decisions we make every day. This chapter discusses the importance of democracy in the classroom, as this is where students first develop an understanding and appreciation of the importance and implications of democracy.

A quote I found extremely powerful in this chapter has to do with how children are beginning to learn that achieving and maintaining democracy is a never-ending process. This quote states: “In addition, if they do not already know it, they will discover that when ordinary people question how power is used and claim a right to use it for the welfare of people like themselves, they are often seen as “too radical” or “un-American” (Grant and Sleeter, 2011: p. 232). I have seen this happen over and over again as people

from minority or socially low groups try and reclaim just a fragment of the power and are invalidated by the majority and are seen as extremists or fanatics. This is what happens when women try to stand up for their reproductive rights. It is what happened during the Black Lives Matter protests. It is also what happens with the LGBTQ+ community, or whenever there is an attempt at a power shift or at any sense of justice. How can we change this inequality? By starting in the classrooms. It is our job as future educators to prepare the new generations to realize the true potentials of democracy and to ensure that there is true equity.

This chapter also discusses the difference between the different forms of consciousness and their relationship to the way we can change the future for the better. The first is naive consciousness, which amounts to believing that those in power have everyone's best interest at heart. We know that this kind of thinking is wrong, as there are still those who are homeless, or who are discriminated against, or who work three jobs and are still unable to feed their families. The second form of consciousness is magical consciousness, where we are aware of injustices but believe we can do nothing about them. This kind of perspective is the reason that there are so many problems in our society today. We cannot be bystanders and watch as those around us are treated unfairly. We need to get involved and take positive action, we need to educate ourselves about social justice issues, and we need to attend protests and demonstrations and volunteer for organizations that will initiate change for the better. The third form of consciousness is critical consciousness. To develop a critical consciousness, we need to understand the relationship between everyday problems and larger abuses of power

and see ourselves as capable of working for change. This is the type of consciousness that we all need to work towards and that we need to teach in the classroom.

Media is one major reason as to why everyday people believe that change is not possible. The stereotypes and portrayals of certain minority groups allow a society to perpetuate injustices. This chapter mentions how different races are portrayed. For example, white middle class youths are called “boys” or “cliques”, but black or Latino, low income youths are often referred to as “men” and “gangs”, portraying them as more dangerous. When people see this and believe it to be a fact, it leads many to believe that “dangerous” people like this do not deserve to hold any power. Students in the classroom need to realize just how important they are as individuals and the importance of true democracy. We must teach our students that the best way for this to happen is by working together, and that taking action really can make a difference.

Citations

Grant, C.A., Sleeter, C.E.(2011). Doing Multicultural Education for Achievement and Equity:
Chapter Eight:Taking Action in the Classroom and Beyond. Routledge.