

# Democratic Values and Democratic Approach in Teaching: A Perspective

Dipty Subba \*

Assistant. Professor, Dept. of Education, Southfield College, Darjeeling, West Bengal, INDIA

\*Corresponding author: Diptysubba1@yahoo.com

Received September 11, 2014; Revised November 20, 2014; Accepted December 18, 2014

**Abstract** This paper introduces the importance of Democratic Values and place the role of teachers in the present democratic world. India is the solitary country in the world where greater importance is attached to the teacher. Schools are places where democratic ideals such as equality, freedom, justice are instilled in individuals. Teachers are the ultimate instruments of change. For democracy to continue to thrive, children must be taught to value it as a way of life. The necessary skills for building democracy do not develop automatically in children. Teaching democracy means preparing children to become citizens who will preserve and shape democracy in the future. Therefore democracy should be a key aspect in every form of education at the earliest age possible. Children should learn about taking responsibility for their action. These educational outcomes are only possible through action. While key concepts of democracy should be understood by children, living and acting in a democratic environment is the only and the best exercise. Schools, institutions, children's clubs and organizations and even families that respect democratic principles and have real democratic structures function as the best models to help children learn what democracy is about. The qualities like tolerance, acceptance, a wider view, global awareness, reflection and equal justice rests within the teachers to shape the child in all possible ways to face this competitive world of today. Teachers' beliefs, thoughts and decisions on educational matters occupy the major part of the psychological context of teaching process. Teacher educators should democratize their pedagogy so that their trainees learn understandings and skills of democratic practice throughout their training experience. The appropriate balance between critical components skills, knowledge and dispositions, on one hand, and an open, dynamic and critically engaged curriculum, and teaching and learning conceptual framework, on the other hand has not yet been attained.

**Keywords:** *Democracy, Democratic Values and Democratic teaching*

**Cite This Article:** Dipty Subba, "Democratic Values and Democratic Approach in Teaching: A Perspective." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 2, no. 12A (2014): 37-40. doi: 10.12691/education-2-12A-6.

## 1. Introduction

India's political and social life is passing through a phase which poses the danger of erosion to long accepted values. Increasingly, there is an explicit, as well as an implicit, need to stress democratic values and engagement in education in order to bolster democracy. The goals of secularism, socialism and professional ethics are coming under increasing strain. To make teachers aware of this menace, teacher education needs to devise new strategies for enabling teachers to address this task. India is the solitary country in the world where greater importance is attached to the teacher. The founding fathers of Indian Constitution solemnly resolved 'to constitute India into a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens: justice-social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, faith, belief and worship, equality of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the integrity of the nation'. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005), strongly advocates values like cooperation, respect for human

rights, tolerance, justice, responsible citizenship, diversity, reverence towards democracy and peaceful conflict resolution. It also delineates education for peace as a significant national and global issue if teachers are to make positive contribution to the realization of the constitutional goals, pre-service and in-service education of teachers needs to give up its neutral stance and commit itself to attaining these goals. The primary purpose of this study is to put into place the role of teachers in the past and in the present democratic world.

The success and the achievements of an educational system depend to a great extent on the ideals that animate the teacher and the student. The changes that took place in schools have changed the role of teachers, too. In the past teachers used to be the major source of knowledge, the leader and educator of their students' school life. Teachers would organize after-school activities. Nowadays teachers provide information and show their students how to tackle them. Teachers are the ultimate instruments of change. The qualities like tolerance, acceptance, a wider view, global awareness, reflection and equal justice rests within the teachers to shape the child in all possible ways to face this competitive world of today. Teaching is democratic and noblest of all the professions as the teacher's role is

highly significant in shaping and molding the future of a nation by tending the youth minds as the architects of the future generation. The National Policy of Education (1986) also highlighted the need of education for values in removing intolerance, violence, superstition and upholding social, cultural and scientific principles to make India a secular, democratic and progressive nation taking pride in its cultural heritage

The teacher is the pivot in Education. Besides knowledgeable information, a teacher imparts emotional and moral moorings, volatization of approach, deep sense of understanding, student psyche, communication skill and interaction with students and above all the sense of humor to make the classroom lively. An ideal teacher should be fair, should motivate the students and should have a passion for teaching. In a country like India, democratic values are reflected in all walks of life and in all aspects of society. How young people experience classroom practice is directly linked to the teaching-learning experiences they encounter. Teacher education programs are considered as gatekeepers to the teaching profession. Classroom practice in contemporary India is largely seen to be determined by "what is taught" and "how it is taught." A growing body of research shows that teachers' sense of efficacy is connected to their commitment to teaching [1], their attitudes towards using innovative instructional strategies [2,3], students' academic achievement [4], and motivation [5]. In addition, it has also been found to be related to teachers' behavior in the classroom, their attitudes to teaching, stress and burn-out and their willingness to implement innovation [6]. Similarly, the literature shows that teacher effectiveness is supported by democratic values and beliefs of teachers [7].

## 2. Concept of Democracy

Democracy is regarded as a 'way of life' interrelated with the perceptions and assumptions, common experiences of individuals and it is about living together [8]. So, it can be state that democracy is not a static concept but a dynamic, active and changing process.

Democracy is based on faith in the dignity and worth of every single individual as a human being. ... The object of a democratic education is, therefore, the full, all-round development of every individual's personality. ... i.e. an education to initiate the students into the many-sided art of living in a community. It is obvious, however, that an individual cannot live and develop alone. ... No education is worth the name which does not inculcate the qualities necessary for living graciously, harmoniously and efficiently with one's fellow men [9].

## 3. Concept of Democratic Values

Shechtman [7] stated the democratic values or beliefs that a teacher should have are freedom, equality, and justice. Winfield and Manning [10] enumerated democratic values or principles as autonomy, cooperation, shared decision-making, and a sense of community. Kincal and Isik [11] numerated the democratic values that take place in literature as equality, respect life, justice, freedom, honesty, the search for goodness, cooperation,

self-esteem, tolerance, sensibility, responsibility, acceptance of difference, safety, peace, development, perfection, and effectiveness. Establishing democracy mostly depends on the understanding, skills and attitudes of people which would be the primary responsibility of education. Education is not the only source for establishing a democratic culture; family, media and other institutions contribute to this process as well. However, schools have the essential role in this process as they maintain structured and formal educational programmes [12]. Howe and Covell claim that "democratic values must be reflected in both the formal curricula, through explicit teaching, and throughout the hidden curriculum codes of conduct, mission statements and classroom interactions that model democracy and respect for the rights of all." Democratic citizenship can emerge by reflecting education through democratic values in both curricula. In this direction, we are responsible for helping children develop an appreciation of core democratic values and we must help them develop a sense of commitment and attachment to those values.

Mere knowledge of democratic processes is not deemed sufficient for ensuring that the student will grow up to become an active participant in the democratic processes. What is important is that the students understand the meaning of democracy in terms of social justice and equality. It is also important that they understand the real world issues to meaningfully participate in discussions and decision making. But most importantly the students should learn to respect democratic values. Therefore NCF 2005 emphasizes not on merely learning democracy as a political system but adopting democracy as a way of life. Teacher has to play an important role in ensuring that the students understand not merely the form but spirit of democracy. Teaching democracy in the classroom means incorporating the values of democracy, using a democratic approach to teaching that enables students to practice democracy, and providing a safe environment where students can take risks and where they can actively participate in the learning process. Kesici also suggests that teachers who want to practice democracy should demonstrate their beliefs by giving importance to democratic values in their classrooms. He feels that a democratic teacher should hold democratic values in high esteem and adopt appropriate teaching methods in accordance with those values. Shechtman [7] sums up this line of thought by stating that, "If democracy is to become a way of life in western societies, we certainly need teachers with a strong commitment to democratic education."

Democratic education and citizenship understanding will not develop without strong democratic leadership (Knight). According to Gutmann, it takes effective teachers to convey the importance and substance of the skills and virtues of citizenship (McDonnell). The more a teacher understands democracy and incorporates it in the classroom the more it will be understood by students. Kesici states, "The teacher is the key factor in the process of building a democratic classroom". Citing Hepburn and Selvi [13], he suggests that teachers should use appropriate teaching methods so that students can easily express themselves and their thoughts and ideas. A democratic teacher also needs to be fair, applying rules

uniformly and listening to student explanations for misbehavior before making decisions.

With respect to rights, Kesici in stating that teachers should help students understand about their right to make a choice for themselves and teach them how to use this right. Kesici explains that one of the duties of the teacher in a democratic classroom is to develop a positive education process, which includes creating a cooperative learning environment, respecting students, and motivating them to develop their social relations sufficiently. Kesici states that students must feel free to think and be creative and be comfortable enough to conduct discussions openly. In other words, the environment must be safe enough for students to take risks. A democratic classroom provides a safe and active learning environment where student rights are guaranteed. Kınca and Işık [11] identify the democratic values as justice, equality, freedom, respect for life, collaboration, self efficacy, honesty, tolerance, sensitivity, searching for effectiveness, responsibility, respect for differences, security, improvement and perfection. Kepenekçi [14] discussed the relationship between democratic values and democratic education. They suggest that democratic values need to be a part of family and school for democratic education. Özpolat (2010) identifies human and student centered education, civil rights, skill teaching, self development, value education, and respecting social rules as the basic components of democratic education. He also argues that the focus needs to be on democratic education rather than democracy education and therefore teachers need to not only believe in these values and components but also practice them in their classrooms [15].

#### 4. Teacher and Democratic Teaching

The teacher's role should be transformed from a traditional didactic, authoritarian one to a facilitating, personal role. Schools can and should play a major role in preparing citizens to play their democratic roles in adult life. For democratic teaching to succeed in schools it must be conceptualized and practiced as a dialogue between students and the teacher. It is not sufficient that teaching is organized democratically, what is taught and how it is taught must be negotiated and subsequently evaluated. It is clear that teacher education and teacher development is central in any process of educational change. If teachers are, for example, to teach democratically, then they are better placed to do this if they have experienced a democratic teacher education for themselves.

Schools are places where democratic ideals such as equality, freedom, justice are instilled in individuals. In this challenging endeavor teachers have a key role to play no matter what their subject area is, for they determine what will be taught and how it will be taught regarding democracy education. Teachers' beliefs, thoughts and decisions on educational matters occupy the major part of the psychological context of teaching process. Educators should demonstrate respect for children by establishing children's decision making bodies and peer mediation, trusting children to organize their events and empowering children to explore issues, to discuss, to formulate opinion, to debate and to propose strategies to deal with conflict and achieve reasonable goals. Such experiences of

participation are especially empowering for children, helping them to understand that participation is a worthwhile effort. Teachers reflect on their behavior towards their pupils and on their teaching decisions and actions in general. Parker, writes "schools play such a pivotal role since citizens of a democracy are created, not born. Liston & Zeichner suggest that "teacher educators must enable prospective teachers not only to formulate good reasons for their educational plans but also to identify those social beliefs and conditions of schooling that are obstacles to a democratic education." Surely, the most important component of the formal educational programmes is the teacher. Therefore, teachers need to have not only an understanding of democratic society, values, behavior and attitudes but also need to practice this knowledge and understanding in the classroom otherwise pure information about democracy would not work out in the long term (Ravitch). Democratic management within Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) would seem essential because it cultivates within these institutions an environment which produces lecturers and students who are not just skilled and knowledgeable but also politically wise, dedicated to democratic ideals and 'who are prepared to acknowledge their future responsibility for the rights of others' (Davies).

Teacher educators should democratize their pedagogy so that their trainees learn understandings and skills of democratic practice throughout their training experience. This involves critical questioning as well as establishing the 'rules' of democratic interchange in classes and lectures. The role of teachers is to provide a safe space for children to express themselves, and simultaneously to build in certain forms of interactions. They need to step out of the role of 'moral authority' and learn to listen with empathy and without judgment, and to enable children to listen to each other. An atmosphere of trust would make the classroom a safe space, where children can share experiences, where conflict can be acknowledged and constructively questioned, and where resolutions, however tentative, can be mutually worked out. In particular, for girls and children from under-privileged social groups, schools and classrooms should be spaces for discussing processes of decision making, for questioning the basis of their decisions, and for making informed choices. While teaching in the class the posture, responses and the way of dealing with the students should be democratic and it can be ensured by exercising certain precautions like the teacher should give freedom to every student in the class to learn on their individual pace as far as possible. She should ensure while moving on that no child is left behind. It is important to create an environment in the class in which every student in the class is able to participate freely and this can be done by encouraging students when they respond in the class. Teacher should always encourage the students who seldom respond in the class. Encourage students to self evaluate their work or adopt the strategies of peer evaluation in the class. In this way they will feel responsible for their own studies. The teacher should keep in mind that there should not be any discrimination in the class between back benchers and front benchers. The teacher can eliminate the differences by continuously rotating the seating arrangement so that every student gets to sit in the front once in a week. Instead of standing at one place only, the teacher can

move around in the class while teaching so that every student gets the attention of the teacher. The teacher should be friendly enough so that the students are not afraid of making mistakes. If they are afraid of making mistakes, they might become wary of even trying. The teacher should not show priority to any student over others in any matter nor should she be discriminatory when dealing with students. Students from diverse backgrounds should be given ample opportunity to participate actively in class activities and discussions. Having students from diverse backgrounds enriches the learning experience of the class. Teacher should not be the sole authority of knowledge but mere facilitator who encourages the children to learn and facilitates such learning in diverse ways. Howe and Covell claim that "democratic values must be reflected in both the formal curricula, through explicit teaching, and throughout the hidden curriculum codes of conduct, mission statements and classroom interactions that model democracy and respect for the rights of all."

The lack of teacher and teacher educator voices in decision-making processes in India is an important factor in a striking gap between the expectations of and about teachers articulated in policy discourses (e.g. the National Policy on Education). Teaching democracy places different demands on teachers, particularly in relation to personal attitudes and engagement. Creating a democratic school culture also means that the relationship between students and teachers/leaders must be on a more equal basis, must be governed by mutual respect and must be committed to enhancing democratic processes. The need to craft new, more inclusive and inherently democratic approaches to teacher education in India is evident. To teach about democracy and social justice, educators need to have authentic experiences with/in the subject-area, and be able to cultivate arguments, positions and activities that will enhance the learning experience (Gandin & Apple; Schugarensky; Hess). Parker (2006) builds on Dewey's (1997) seminal work in arguing that teacher-education should involve three strategies humility, caution and reciprocity to effectively engage students in the workings of democracy. Galston feels is supportive of more enhanced democratic values, political participation, changing legislation, better integration of immigrants and others, and less mistrust of politicians it is critical to develop and sustain explicit linkages with communities and local institutions, increase focused professional development, emphasize clear and specific objectives and activities in the curriculum related to civic education, focus on "real-life" experiences, and significantly enhance the culture of the school, including extra-curricular activities (Glaston).

## 5. Conclusion

Teacher's role is highly significant in shaping and molding the future of a nation by tending the young minds as the architects of the future generation. Teachers should be successful in producing men and women of good moral

character, dedication, lifelong learning spirit and teaching as a mission for shaping the humanity for all times to come (Hamilton). John Dewey, Ivan Illich, bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and many others have all critiqued the authoritative, essentially anti-democratic mode of education that has become a pervasive mainstay of the modern educational system. These progressive educators have posited, in turn, alternative ways of understanding and practicing progressive pedagogy. Popular education, collaborative learning, problem-posing education, and many other alternative approaches to education draw upon the assumption that learners learn best when they take on a responsibility for their own learning. One such pedagogical approach that requires such a responsibility and seeks to link participatory forms of learning to life beyond the narrow confines of the classroom is "service-learning."

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