

Developing a Democratic Classroom

OSU Motivation in Classrooms Lab – Motivation Minute. December 2021.
How can I give students an active role in the decision-making process?

How to facilitate student autonomy and engagement!

Democratic Classrooms: “The democratic classroom should be understood as a place where a total development of the student’s personality is achieved, a place where the processes of humanization, personalization, and socialization are taking place” (Kocoska, 2009).

- **Specifically**, democracy within a classroom can vary considerably depending on the context. Students may get to choose what they do in class, or may simply get to vote or voice their opinions. Regardless, the intent is always to give students voice, choice, and social awareness.

**Democratic Classrooms require students to think critically, but also help them practice critical thinking skills. The process may start out rough, but with practice, democratic classrooms can become an effective and valuable learning tool.*

Within a Democratic Classroom...

Three Processes of Democratic Classrooms

Humanization

Humanization happens when **students feel...**

Confident and Brave

Appreciated

A Sense of Belonging

Teachers can foster Active Listening and Opinion Validation. These are essential! - “What can I do as a teacher?”

- Encourage students to participate, actively listen to others, and give positive feedback
- Let them know their ideas are valid
- Treat students equitably

Personalization

Personalization happens when **students learn...**

Decision-Making

Critical Thinking

Classroom Engagement

Teachers can promote decision-making and knowledge presenting. - “How can I help my students develop effectively?”

- Present students with opportunities to choose their work for the day, but provide structure to get students started
- Ask questions that encourage perspective-taking
- Encourage students to assist others in learning

Socialization

Socialization happens when **students can...**

Make responsible decisions supported by logic and empathy

Defend their decisions and take responsibility for the consequences

Feel comfortable rationally discussing disagreements with others

Teachers can nurture social interactions within a democratic classroom. – “How can I ensure my students are strengthening their social skills while also learning the curriculum?”

- Begin instruction with collaboration to set expectations for the day, unit, or activity
- Understand questions about boundaries and explain in a student-focused way (e.g., explaining limiting cellphone usage as a way to protect the privacy of students, not to control them)
- Genuinely ask for student input on policies and advocate with administration and policymakers

Reflection Questions

- Were all of my students able to voice their opinions?
- How can I help students feel safer to socialize and work together?
- Was the activity well received by students?
- Was the learning objective still met?
- Rose-Bud-Thorn – What went well, what is something to build upon, and what could be improved upon?

Resources

- von Duyke, K. (2018, April). *Why do urban schools discipline, why not democracy?* [Video]. TED Conferences. https://www.ted.com/talks/katherine_von_duyke_why_do_urban_schools_discipline_why_not_democracy
- Hamzah, L. M., & Hussien, S. B. (2020). The impacts of democratic classrooms on students' personal growth. *Social Science Learning Education Journal*, 5(05), 126-130. <https://doi.org/10.15520/sslej.v5i05.2670>
- Kocoska, J. (2009). The student's position in the democratic classroom. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 1(1), 2429-2431. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2009.01.427>