Democracy in education

Reading task 4

Under the new paradigm (as mentioned in 3.2) and within an educational ecosystem (as mentioned in 3.4) democratic values are the prerequisites and their fostering is of paramount importance for the system to flourish. Thus, for a democratic institution to pursue its values, aspects of democracy such as a complex interplay of all parties, practices of participatory decision-making, rules and organizational arrangements based on democratic principles, respectful and equal interpersonal relations in and outside the school, and interactive teaching and learning methods should be aspired to (Tools for Democratic School Development). Huddleston and Garabagiu (2005) state that schools apply democratic education if they function on democratic principles, teach democracy and work for democracy. In this context, the theme of democracy in education can be understood as relatively new in the Czech Republic wherein in 1989 a communist non-free regime was substituted by a young democratic system. Therefore most of the Czech sources and inspirations the school builds on come from the recent years, although some attempts to reform pedagogy using democratic principles (with the influence of Dewey's pedagogy) can be traced back to the interwar period and can be represented by the work of Příhoda (Cach and Váňová, 2000). This attempt to reform schooling based on the concept of laboratory school was interrupted by the communist regime in 1948 and could not be readdressed sooner than 1989.

1. On democracy in education

The question of democracy is broad and throughout history it has also been answered as such. For the purposes of democracy in education, and inspired by Pol (2006), we understand that we can approach democratic inspirations as coming from three fields: politological, reform-pedagogical and managerial. The politological view allows us to look at democracy in education from three points of view: liberal (democracy as an individual opportunity); social (democracy as an opportunity for groups); participatory (democracy as a local voice and influence) (Pol, 2006). The reform-pedagogical view allows us to build on educational theories as listed in Bertrand (see Chapter 3.1) and the managerial view (confidence in man and his/her abilities, communication with man) allows us to build on systems such as Senge´s (2008, 2012) school as a learning organization, as described in Chapter 3.3. To these inspirations, we add the learning ecosystems theory (Luksha et al., 2018), as described in Chapter 3.4, and we are open to anything new and inspiring that comes our way as we view Labyrinth as a changing organization within the changing world.

In general, democracy is often associated with values such as participation, justice, equality, joint decision-making, teamwork, cooperation, division of powers, mutual respect, diversity, participation etc. It is understood that democracy cannot stand in isolation, it must rely on the presence of democratic methods in all social relations, i.e. the right to equal treatment, the right to information, participation in decision-making and the right to respect. Thus, relations with all groups of educational actors are fundamental to this democratic process (Pol, 2006). For a student to accept democracy as a way of life, certain conditions must be met. It is vital for a student to be given the opportunity to learn what such a way of life means and how it should be led; further, for the curriculum to emphasize the transfer of democratic experience to young people and for the democratic structures and processes for school life to have been established. It is a matter of respecting the pupil, acknowledging that learning is what pupils "own" and have a significant influence on (Pol, 2006). If schools are to be democratic places, the idea of democracy is expected

to be reflected in the roles that adults take on in school, in the creation of specific structures and in all the relationships altogether (Pol, 2006).

The managerial inspirations (Pol, 2006) lead us to pay significant attention to the internal relational characteristics, i.e. human relationship to work, to co-workers, leadership, climate and culture. Internal relational characteristics thus displace the external ones, i.e. inner motivation replaces reward, punishment and control (also in Nováčková, 2009; Robinson, 2016); a clear definition of superiority and subordination is being erased. The theory and practice of successful leadership thus begin to be perceived similarly to what is typical of democratic order and the attention is paid primarily to the school climate, school culture, cooperation, respect and equality and justice (Pol, 2006). Thus, as described by Beane and Appel (1995, in Pol, 2006) Labyrinth works with the following determinants of the success of democracy efforts at school:

- Open flow of ideas regardless of their popularity (ensuring awareness).
- Confidence in people's individual and collective ability to solve problems.
- Applying critical reflection.
- Caring for the common good.
- Care for the respect and rights of individuals and minorities.
- Understanding democracy not as ideals to be realized, but rather as an idealized set of values that we should live by.
- An organization of social institutions that supports and expands democracy. Way of life (Pol, 2006).

As described by Ekholm (2004, in Pol, 2006) democratic learning is a matter of experience - it is hidden, i.e. the teaching itself could be possibly taking up the time a student needs for this hidden learning. In order for a student to be able to learn democracy in practice, s/he must be able to ask important questions, participate in decision-making, take responsibility for decision-making and participate in the evaluation of the entire process. Thus, if students are to learn democracy in school, it seems inevitable to devote more time to experiential learning and less time to traditional teaching.

References

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