

Chapter 7

The Purpose of School: Promoting Equity and Social Justice

It is often in the clash of irreconcilable ideas that we can learn how to test or revise ideas, or invent new ones.

—Deborah Meier, 1995

Several years ago, I (Janet) attended a powerful week-long institute offered by Facing History and Ourselves, a nonprofit organization designed to provide middle and high school educators with content and curriculum that connects human behavior with the events of history.¹ This training broadened my awareness of the meaning of democracy. It opened my eyes to the inequities and tragedies that have historically devastated people who are different. It propelled me forward to be more of a voice for equity and social justice.

The Facing History pedagogical approach uses a case study to explore how a new democracy established after World War I in Germany collapsed and led to the rise of Hitler. Through factual stories grounded in historical events we learn how such evils as racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, sexism, and violence were allowed to happen then, and continue to be perpetrated in today's world. We learn how often members of a society, consciously or unconsciously, have oppressed others. Forty-eight years old, at the time of this training, I had never really thought about the conditions that existed and allowed Hitler to rise and wield such destructive power. Growing up as a White, middle-class woman in an all girls' Catholic school, I learned about Hitler and the genocide of the Jewish people. I was never taught anything about how the Holocaust came to be. I had never questioned why many nations of the world, including my home, the United States, had not acted immediately to stop Hitler in his tracks. I had not heard of the term *ethnic cleansing* (a term that refers to the conscious annihilation of people thought to be inferior because of race, skin color, and other physical manifestation), nor could I imagine that the term would still hold meaning today in places such as Sudan.²

I have long since recognized that I have been at an advantage because of my white skin color and the middle-class status given to me by my second-generation Italian-American father. My working class father labored in the rag business (as the manufacturing of women's clothing was called) to provide me with the gifts I have been given. I have never known poverty. I have never experienced hatred or been oppressed for my race, my ethnicity, my religion, or my sexual orientation. Like too many women, however, I have been oppressed because of my gender. I have struggled to overcome inappropriate and at times violent male domination both personally and professionally.

As a life-long educator, I have dedicated my work to making the world safer for our children. I continue to be committed to creating safe and caring schools. Such schools teach adults and children about the inequities and injustices that come with individual and institutional racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression. In my eyes, after parents, only the school possesses the incredible power to shape the bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits of our youth. Increasingly, I recognize the critical role that I play. As an educator, I am able to break down stereotypes and challenge racist, classist, and sexist attitudes. I can empower others to prepare our children to live lives that acknowledge and promote equal access for all human beings. As teachers and leaders, we have the opportunity and obligation to equip young people with the skills that prepare them to question the way things are and to challenge them with dignity and respect. For the good of humankind, our children need to be taught to care about and participate in actions that promote the social well-being of not only their North American brothers and sisters, but also their global family. Our youth deserve to be informed early on about the paths to promoting equity and social justice. They need to be expected to be part of the solution to creating a just world.

While my early education grounded me in academics and taught me the value of caring for others, it did little to challenge me to become an active contributor to our society. It has been my critical questioning and search for understanding as an adult that has taught me to view the world through multiple lenses. Today's youth are growing up in a multicultural world that *requires* them to have knowledge and skills to question, problem solve, listen to diverse perspectives, make decisions, and act as socially responsible participants in our democracy.

This chapter explores the purpose of schools in a democracy. It asks you to rethink the questions, "As an educational leader, what do I value?" "What do I want our children to take with them into the future?" "What is the leader's role in developing a social conscience in our youth?" It provides a perspective of what the teaching of social justice, equity, and social responsibility looks like in today's schools. It acknowledges the imbalances of power that exist in our society and talks about ways to address these in schools. It asks you as an EQ leader to reflect on strategies for increasing empathy and intercultural sensitivity in all members of the school. Finally, it offers suggestions that will help a skilled community reach common ground during difficult times.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN AT SCHOOL TODAY?

Before you read any further, stop for a moment and ask yourself, "What do I most want young people to learn in schools today? Take a pencil and jot these ideas down, right here:

It might be interesting to inquire of others around you what they think young people should learn before you even read this chapter. When Jim and I ask this question across the nation to thousands of educators, the responses are unanimous. They include comments such as to respect self and others, to care, to believe in themselves, to honor diversity, and to be self-motivated. Equally important as the teaching of math and literacy is the teaching of the social and emotional skills, such as how to get along with others.

A momentary visit to the beginnings of American schools reminds us that the purpose of schools in the early 1800s (primarily owned and run by religious and private groups) was to teach "Protestant ethics, non-partisan patriotism, instruction in

American English, norms of punctuality, achievement, competitiveness, fair play, merit and respect for adult authority." As schools became more centralized and public education compulsory, the focus of schools shifted toward the development of the nation's intellectual capital by providing a sound basic education rooted in academics.³ Over 200 years later, the debate continues as to what should be the purpose of schools.⁴ While the consensus of many Americans is that schools should teach children the basics of reading and writing, those who are hiring our graduates ask for more. They want employees who can think, make informed decisions, get along with others, and be flexible, creative and able to adapt to and lead in our quickly changing technological world.

Many believe that schools today should assure that young people learn the much-needed skills to actually participate in a democracy. In the high-stakes testing climate of schools today, how can we encourage young people to dialogue about sensitive topics such as prejudice, discrimination, and other social injustices? A good place to spark such conversations around difficult issues is by reading one of the many provocative readings in the Facing History Resource guide titled, "What did you learn at school today?" This reading is set in the Weimer Republic in post-World War I democratic Germany, in the 1920s. It was here, in Weimer, that the new government officials wrote their constitution and created a democracy. But Germany's loss and the newly imposed political sanctions they faced angered many Germans. They had fought long and hard and now had to concede too much power and ways of being. Unrest stirred. By 1921, Hitler had formed the National Socialist German Workers Party. This party and other political groups began to fight against much of the post-war imposed changes. As all of these events were developing, school life continued as it had always been. Schools taught that there was a natural God-given order to things and a hierarchical distribution of power. The newly imposed democratic ways did not seep broadly into the minds and hearts of young children. The following paragraph from the reading allows us to see into the mind of one German high school student named Klaus:

There was a great deal of control over my life and that of my friends from the school and from parents. But somehow, we all felt this was necessary; so that we could get through that Arbiter [high stakes exam], get into a good university, and be free. We lived for the future. We had to think very little, take almost no initiative; our days were charted out for us. It seems strange that with bloody street fights almost every weekend, groups of brown-shirted men singing aggressive songs on Saturday mornings as they marched to their training grounds, political assassinations on the front pages of the papers regularly, we never felt threatened, never afraid of anything but failure in school.⁵

Failure in school, pass the tests, violence around me . . . I can't help but shiver at the remarkable similarity between some of what goes on in many American schools today and schools in Klaus's day. Schools in a democracy should promote critical thinking and help young people to question the events that are happening around them. While our nation strives to close the educational gap between children with privilege and children in need, I worry that the way we are going about this could just be all wrong. While "what is" isn't working in much of our public education system, I worry about the groupthink that can occur by promoting cultural literacy and standardization of learning for all children in schools. Knowledge is indeed power. We must be sure that our children have access to both. But, there are many paths through which we can access this knowledge. While our children must learn to read and write, they must also be able to think independently. If affirmed for who they are, they will challenge mediocrity, speak up against injustice, and question the status quo when necessary.

Ironically, the public pressure that demands that we *leave no child behind* can too easily ignore the need to develop the social, emotional, moral, and ethical development of our

youth. We must be careful not to extol nationalistic views without the encouragement of the expression of differences. We must not promote academic learning at the expense of developing the hearts and social behaviors of our children. We must open the doors to our children's questions, promote debate, and give them the social skills that will lead to the development of great minds and caring people. Their critical thinking will help them bridge the gap between the past and now. As informed citizens, they will actively seek to address the problems in their present-day local, national, and international environments.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING

Gary Marx, Professor Emeritus from M.I.T, invites us to consider a number of challenges that will alter the way we envision school in the upcoming years. First, the number of our nation's older generation has surpassed the number of young people. While our nation's schools continue to grow, the large majority of its teaching force is on the verge of retirement. School systems across the country are already grappling with ways to fill the shoes of those who are leaving, teachers and school principals alike. By 2030, the baby boom generation will be between sixty-six and eighty-four years of age. They will be drawing upon their social security benefits. It is imperative that today's educated young people secure good-paying jobs that add to the supply of available revenue for this generation and those that follow.

A second shift is that our nation's traditionally minority populations are increasingly becoming the majority. Shortly after 2050 the White majority will shrink to below 50 percent of the U.S. population. We will be a nation of minorities, although the power structures will not adequately resemble these changes. Issues of class and education will further separate us out as majority and minority. The gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" will continue to widen.

Another trend to consider is the fact that "knowledge" and "relationships" are becoming the new basis for wealth. Those who have sharp skills in managing themselves and others will be at the forefront of change. People will want to know more and be included in decision-making discussions. In schools, as we continue to stress the high-stakes performance of our children, the parents of those who are not succeeding will demand personal explanations and appropriate services for their children. The millennial generation, children born in 1983 and beyond, will use their knowledge and relationship skills to demand solutions to an accumulation of problems and injustices. This is the population of people who will be in positions of national and world leadership. Their moral and ethical calling will be to right the wrongs and deal with injustices.

We will continue to move through the age of information and technology. Nanotechnology, technology at the molecular level, will drive the economy of the future. Schools will be pressured to adequately prepare children for the current times. Young people will arrive at classroom doors with more information than most teachers have (see more on this in Chapter 9). Given this change in the dissemination of the knowledge structure, schools will have to consider teaching more across disciplines, incorporating multiple intelligences and making a commitment to prepare students as intellectual entrepreneurs. Scientific discoveries and societal realities will force widespread ethical choices. It will be incumbent upon schools to help young people to problem solve and explore solutions to ethical dilemmas.⁶

In short, we better start rethinking our business of schools now. We need to find ways to give young folks the skills to work within the framework of a democracy. More voices will be at the table and higher demands will be placed on what we are teaching our children.

TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR DEMOCRACY

Teaching to impart democratic values is not widely at the forefront of the schools' purpose. From the enactment of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in the 1950s to the present day No Child Left Behind legislation, we have embraced the realization that schools do not serve *all* children. Legislators and politicians continue to impose a number of measures to try to create equal opportunity for all children. While positive changes have been made in this direction, they are not enough. The real issues of social justice and democracy receive fancy band-aids. Real change that can create more inclusive schools for our global community never quite makes the cut. Multicultural education, while recognized to make a difference in the way we interact with and instruct diverse populations, is still questioned. Bilingual education has taken a back door to the "All English" movement. The number of children of color in special education classes across our nation is on the rise.⁷

Deborah Meier, educator, activist, and author known for her successful work at Central Park East in New York City tells us,

Children grow up and the kind of habits of mind they bring to both the workplace and the polling place will determine our common fate. It's quite possible that American society can develop a viable economy that ignores the fate of vast number of its citizens, one not dependent upon a universally well-educated public. But only at a cost to democracy itself. Schools dependent upon private clienteles—schools that can get rid of unwanted kids of troublemaker families, exclude on the basis of this or that set of beliefs, and toss aside the "losers"—not only can avoid the democratic arts of compromise and tolerance but also implicitly foster lessons about the power of money and privilege, a lesson already only too well known by every adolescent in America. In schools that are public, citizens are joined by right, not by privilege.⁸

Teaching for democracy matters. In order to promote the teaching and learning of democratic practices, we need to provide teachers with appropriate professional development. First, school leaders need to have deeper inquiry-based conversations with their staffs. The leader's vision of a democratic school needs to be embraced by everyone. Through ongoing dialogue, leader and staff can come to a place of agreement as to how to take that vision into practice. Second, professional development opportunities need to provide new skills. Here, initial conversations extend to intensive discussion about practice. Instructional practices incorporate the use of critical strategies such as cooperative learning, debate, dialogic inquiry, Socratic seminars, and decision-making models. Teachers learn how to build on students' prior knowledge as they construct meaning from classroom lessons and life. Lessons carefully blend cognitive knowledge with affective strategies to foster acquisition of the new learning. Young people actively engage in learning rather than remain silent and compliant. Their voices, freely expressed, reflect investigation of facts, critical thinking, and well-formed opinions.

Third, when teachers feel comfortable and safe they are willing to take risks. Making mistakes is part of everyone's learning process. Novice teachers, often receptive to new learning, may lack the teaching expertise for effective implementation. Seasoned teachers may make attempts to use more collaborative forms of instruction, but may be restricted by more patterned authoritarian approaches. Both novice and seasoned teachers may be challenged by democratic practices, such as sharing the rule making with their students. They may believe that the teacher sets the rules and children are expected to follow. Alfie Kohn reminds us:

Some educators reject rewards and punishments, believing, as I do, that a child may act in the desired way only in order to receive the former or avoid the latter. These educators

want students to be self-disciplined, to internalize good values so that they no longer need outside inducements. But even this goal is not ambitious enough. The self-disciplined student may not be an autonomous decision maker if the values have been established and imposed from outside, by the adults. Accepting someone else's expectations is very different from developing one's own (and fashioning reasons for them). Creating a classroom whose objective is for students to internalize good behavior or good values begs the question of what we mean by "good." Moreover, it may amount to trying to direct students by remote control.⁹

As leader, your task is to help teachers feel safe enough to experiment with "new ways of being" such as classroom management in which young people are part of the discussion, rather than the recipients of the "teacher's rules." Your encouragement and support are critical ingredients. Make the resources and professional supports available for them to expand their repertoires. Create school schedules that allow teachers to work together to build their lessons and share their expertise and ideas. Form study groups at lunch time like Principal Ellen did in Chapter 5. Free a teacher up so that he can observe his colleague teach a lesson. Remember, in order to learn democracy we have to practice democracy. Recognize that, at times, cultural norms are such that democratic practices can be seen by children and adults as "time for play," and "not so serious business," or even as inappropriate subject matter for schools to address. Advise your teachers how to go about democratizing classrooms at the pace that both their students and your school community can accept. At times, you may even be challenged to defend their actions to community members and district officials who distrust the new methods they are utilizing. They need your support as they teach children our history of democratic practices that challenges the status quo and urges their involvement in social action.

When Jim's son, Matthew, was in the fourth grade, he and his classmates studied about the Japanese internment in U.S. camps during World War II. Many of the Japanese-American children at the time were taken out of schools and placed with their families in internment camps. The fourth graders conducted research, read stories, and culminated their learning by writing a play based on their research. Their play told the stories of the children who were sent to the camps and the reactions of their classmates who watched them leave. They prepared to perform their play in a school assembly but were stopped along the way by the school's principal. Jim, a parent in the community, questioned the principal regarding her reasons. She explained that another parent complained about the nature of the play. This parent felt that it showed America in a negative light. She didn't want her child exposed to this. Jim expressed to the principal that he wanted his child, Matthew, to be exposed to many points of views, to question motives, challenge actions, and form his own opinions. Despite Jim's attempts, the principal stood firm and the play did not go on. This school leader's actions dampened the children's creativity, freedom of speech, critical thinking, and excitement about learning. In telling me the story about his son and his courageous teacher, Jim, a teacher himself for many years, said:

Teachers often say they want their students to learn how to think for themselves and to stand up for their convictions yet they seldom encourage students to challenge them about what they are teaching. They evaluate children all the time but do not often invite young people to give them feedback on their teaching. How can we empower students to grow up and change the world if we, the adults in their lives, do not give students the power to change us?

An EQ leader should welcome constructive controversy as a pathway to a democratic school.

Lessons that Matter

In this section, we provide a few examples of how to foster democratic teaching and learning in schools. In early childhood, the teacher is well positioned to start the thinking process of abstract concepts such as peace, justice and freedom. This will set the stage for later, more profound, moral reasoning. In Jack Sloan's class, he and his students use a "sharing circle" to talk about things that matter to them. They read stories about characters that have fought for justice such as Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela. They have many conversations about how each young person in their class makes a difference by helping others, sharing resources, and becoming allies for someone who is being mistreated.

Today, Jack encourages the children to share an object such as a favorite book, a cuddly blanket, a piece of artwork, a special photograph, or an event like a visit to a special friend's house or the loss of a pet or family member. He wants them to go beyond the concept of just liking something to understanding that some things hold a deeper "meaning" to them. Imagine, for a moment, five-year-old Jon, who brings in a picture that he drew of a man on top of a fire engine. When Jon introduces his artwork to his classmates, he says, "I like this drawing because it is a bright red fire engine." Jack then helps Jon to invite his peers to ask him questions about his artwork, and hopefully help him to extend the reasons why the red fire engine matters to him.

Initially, the children might ask things like, "Jon, do you like fire engines? Do you like the color red? Who is the man on the fire engine? Have you ever been on a fire engine?" Through conscious questioning strategies, Sloan encourages Jon to discover what has meaning to him. "Jon, you said you like your drawing because you like fire engines. Why do you like fire engines?" Jon replies, "Because they are fast." . . . "Ah, so they are fast," the teacher paraphrases. "Yeah," Jon continues, "and my daddy drives them." "Oh, so your daddy is a fireman and he drives a fire engine?" "Yeah," Jon continues as he looks wide-eyed at the group, "He saves people." Jack Sloan, using a questioning tone, now paraphrases for Jon and his peers, "So, you like fire engines because your daddy is a fireman? You are proud of your daddy because he saves people? Saving people matters to you?" Jon, shakes his head and smiles.

This format of the sharing circle deepens the child's ability to think and feel about what and why certain things have meaning to them. When five-year-old Carla has her turn, she says, "This book is special to me because mommy reads it to me every night." Carla is more able to immediately attach the object and the reason why it matters for her. Jack Sloan might extend her thinking further by asking, "Carla, how do you feel when mommy reads to you?" Possible answers could include that she feels warm or special or loved. As one child is sharing, other five-year-olds listen to the different perspectives and values of their peers. Of course, they will want to chime in with their own stories about *their* mommy reading to them too, but the teacher helps them to listen to Carla's perspective. When the next child takes his turn, the teacher asks him to paraphrase what mattered for Jon and Carla today, before he introduces his sharing object. In this way, the teacher highlights that each of us have different ideas about "things that matter."

Small children could also share events that had meaning for them because they had positive or negative emotions attached to them. A child who shares, "I don't like it when they call me names," lets the group know that he has been hurt and that being treated peacefully and respectfully matters for him. Another child might speak up in support of a classmate who was criticized or hurt, letting the group know that mean behaviors are not appropriate or just. Through these and other teaching strategies, young children can learn that everyone's voice matters. They are learning perspective taking, building empathy, and participating in dialogic inquiry, at a very basic level.

Young children are not beyond taking social action that they themselves initiate. In one school where Jim was consulting, a young second-grade teacher was asking her students about current events. One child blurted out that she had heard that a six-year-old had killed someone with a gun. The teacher was shocked that a number of her students knew about this tragedy and momentarily did not know what to say. Another student asked, "How did he learn how to shoot a gun?" and another child answered, "He saw it on TV." The teacher then asked her class how many children have seen violence on TV and most raised their hands. One little girl, however, boasted that she changes the channel when she sees anything violent. An excited discussion followed and many of the children said that they too would follow the girl's lead and change the channel.

The excitement of the children's spontaneous action soon was channeled into learning. The children interviewed other classes and took a survey of watching violence on TV. They read books about TV and wrote news stories based on their research. Finally, they started a campaign in the school to *Change the Channel* and transformed their classroom into an exhibition for their campaign. They invited each class to visit and learn about TV and about their social action. The local news found out about these young activists and a local TV station broadcast their story. The reporter interviewed the proud little girl who started it all. It is likely that she did not change the channel on that show!

In early and middle adolescence, democratic practices become expected by young people who learn that their voices are acknowledged and their thoughts and opinions are valued. Karin, a bright young Native American eighth grader, studies the course of events of her native tribe throughout history. As a Lakota, she experiences much joy and pride in her family and ancestral history, but also much pain. As part of their integrated unit in American History and literature, Karin's class reads *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown.¹⁰ After a heartfelt discussion with her teacher, she decides on the focus of her presentation and subsequent dialogue that will follow. She and her small group of six students research the history of the Lakota people and facilitate a dialogue based on this book.

Using the fishbowl as a strategy, she sits in the center of the circle. Karin precedes the book discussion with a more feelings-based introduction. She shares, "As a Lakota female, the events of my ancestors hold a lot of meaning for me. I feel very strongly about my people and my culture. I hope you will understand why after this presentation." She then reads a powerful short paragraph from one of the few survivors of the Wounded Knee massacre. She follows this passage by asking her small group to respond to the question, "What did you think of when I was reading that story? How did what I just read make you feel? What questions did it make you think of?" The students respond revealing the horror, shock and anger elicited by the paragraph. They then raise questions such as, "Why did the United States lead such a bloody battle? How did they let this happen?" They risk asking Karin, "Weren't the Native Americans at fault at all?" She asks her fishbowl peers to use their texts to explain the events that precipitated this battle. The group of six responds adding insights to the political, social, and economic factors that promoted the oppression of the Lakota people, and eventually led to the well-known battle at Wounded Knee. Young folks in the larger circle take notes and prepare questions that they will later ask their peers.

What skills did Karin possess in order to lead her group? What does Karin learn as she partakes in this activity? What about the others in the fishbowl? And the larger group? Both Karin and her peer facilitators learn a multitude of skills both in preparing for and leading this activity. They decided on the material to be covered, read it, and outlined their focus. They had to distribute leadership for gathering the appropriate research and for preparing the presentation. They tested their facts for accuracy and thought about provocative questions that would stimulate the discussion. They researched answers to

questions that might arise, or places to go for further discussions. They also worked together and trusted that each person would contribute their part to the whole.

What about the larger groups of students? They had to listen to different perspectives, ask clarifying questions, agree to disagree, problem solve, and make judgments based on factual information and literature. They also had to trust in their classmates to obtain the information. All students also heard a personal perspective from a student who represents the background of the group studied. Not only are the young people in this scenario gathering and disseminating facts, but they are using those facts to dialogue with their peers and form their own perspectives. These older children are learning how to reason morally. They are forming their opinions about the events that have occurred, in this case, the events at Wounded Knee.

Berkowitz and Gibbs conducted a noteworthy study designed to measure ways we can move someone out of their own perspective toward accepting the perspective of others.¹¹ They identified a mode of moral discussion called transitive discussion, which is "reasoning that operates on the reasoning of another." In this form of discussion, each person engages the reasoning of the other person with her own reasoning. Then, she makes her own consecutive assertions. Their data revealed that a type of behavior called "operations" required that the person operate on or transform another's reasoning. This is done through clarification, refinement, extension, contradiction, integration finding common ground, or comparative critique. These operational techniques showed significant development in moral reasoning from pretest to posttest. In other words, being active participants in a dialogic inquiry-based process can help us to embrace others' perspectives and develop the ability to think morally and ethically about difficult situations.

In our work with Educators for Social Responsibility over the years, we have used a process developed by Peter Elbow to help others see beyond their own perspective and into that of another person. It is based on a concept called methodological belief.¹² Elbow developed this process while teaching writing to his students. He wanted to enlarge their vision and distract them from the overuse of critical thinking or what he calls *methodological doubt*. Students learn to consciously question hypotheses, find inconsistencies, and raise doubt about a situation or dilemma. On the other hand, "*Methodological belief*, is the equally systematic disciplined and conscious attempt to BELIEVE everything—to believe all hypotheses, premises and inferences, no matter how unlikely or repellent they seem—in order to find virtues or strengths we might otherwise miss." We have used Elbow's believing technique in our work to help workshop participants and classroom students suspend judgment and listen to different perspectives as they try to reach resolution in difficult situations. This powerful technique allows others to see beyond their own clouded lens that is often covered with years of their own experiences, point of view, and prejudices. The intention is to help them risk listening to someone who outwardly appears to be 180 degrees opposite to their own beliefs. Elbow tells us, "The believing game encourages what may be the most valuable intellectual or wisdom-generated mental event, namely, the act of seeing the strength in the other fellow's position and the weakness in one's own." As school leaders and teachers we may possess some very critical and judgmental points of view. Differing beliefs in effective instructional approaches, for example, can cause anger and resentment to develop. The believing game needs to be played on a regular basis to help the adults in schools bring flexibility and wisdom to their practice rather than pride, indifference, and unwillingness to change. (Play the believing game in the Chapter 6 skills section.)

In our thirty plus years in education, Jim and I have seen too few schools that encourage young people to develop such high level skills as those described here. While we do teach our young people about civics and democracy, we don't often teach them how to live democratically. But, in those schools that do, such as the Hudson Public

Schools (described in the previous chapter), empowered students struggle with moral dilemmas, take on new perspectives, and pursue social action. And the students in Hudson are not the only ones learning how to put democracy into action. On March 5, 2003, thousands of high school students joined college students in a march to protest the then-impending war with Iraq. Whether you agree with their position or not, you can value their exercise of their citizenship.

Critical to our thinking about teaching and learning in a democracy is the reality that many of our children face set backs because of race, class, and other inequitable conditions. Youth who face poverty, violence, and discrimination on a daily basis may feel less efficacious. Schools who nurture the hearts and minds of these young people must take into account the economic and political reality they face. We need to help young people gather all the tools they need: excellent reading skills, mathematical ability, higher-level critical thinking and problem solving skills, and well-developed social and emotional competencies. It is the moral responsibility of schools to inform and prepare these young people to access knowledge that will allow them to shape the course of history, instead of letting it shape them.

Institutions of higher learning have to prepare teachers to think and espouse democratic values. Our teacher education pedagogy needs to be replete with democratic practices. The Lesley College Masters Program in Curriculum and Conflict Resolution in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is one such rich program that models and teaches democratic practices.¹³ In the School of Education at Hunter College of the City of New York, we strive to best prepare our educators to uphold the morals and values we are discussing in this chapter. Though social justice rests at the center of our vision of how we frame learning for our students, we have little guarantee that our aspiring educators will be able to transfer this knowledge into their classrooms in schools, too often, void of such purpose.

Democratic and Just Schools

Democratic schools are collective communities that work together to assure that the process and the outcomes of education are ethical and just. In speaking of her work at Central Park East elementary school and secondary school, Debbie Meier shared her staff members' ideas regarding democratic schools:

We saw schools as examples of the possibilities of democratic community and what we meant by this was continuously under debate and review. It wasn't simply a question of governance structures and certainly not a matter of extending the vote to four year olds. Although classroom life could certainly include more participation by children in decisions than traditional schools allowed, we saw it as even more critical that the school life of adults be democratic. It seemed unlikely that we could foster values of community in our classrooms unless the adults in the school had significant rights over their own workplace. For us, democracy implied that people should have a voice not only in their own individual work but in the work of others, as well. Finally we saw collaboration and mutual respect among staff, parents, student and the larger community as a part of what we meant by calling our experiment democratic.¹⁴

The staff members at Central Park East primary and secondary schools were committed to continual learning. They wanted to make the school the best that it could be for the children it served. Two-thirds of the African American and Latino young people from a lower socioeconomic neighborhood in New York City's East Harlem went on to college. This success tells us that the continual learning process they were involved in worked for their kids. Dewey would remind us that Meier's school was a learning laboratory in

which practices were tried and retried. Experimentation was rich. Decisions were shared as appropriate. The commitment to communal values and goals were clearly the driving force for continued change and improvement.

Carl Glickman has been passionate about the study of democratic schools for many years.¹⁵ His recent work in identifying Great American schools reports his findings from a study of twenty such schools. He conducted interviews, made site visits, and looked at data in each of these schools. In his review he chose schools who met the following criteria:

- Had a history of ten to thirty years of sustained consistent reform that was aligned with the school's initial core values;
- Followed progressive education, which he describes as that which utilizes activity-based and participatory learning, team structures, links between school and community, performance-based assessment, and inclusive heterogeneous placement of students;
- Cooperated under the governance of a school district with the same funding and student enrollment conditions as other schools in the district;
- Had documented student results better than those of comparable schools on a wide range of measures, including: student test scores, student performances and demonstrations, success in later life, lower dropout rates, and parent and student satisfaction. Glickman was also careful to be sure that his schools represented the multiple geographic and ethnic diversities in the United States. Reporting his findings, he tells us:

In all schools three components were consistent: there was a covenant of beliefs, a governance structure for school wide decisions and an action research process for continual internal study. The covenant of beliefs was developed by all members of the school community and covered broad beliefs related to areas such as teaching pedagogy, curriculum development, professional development, grouping practices, use of school space and more. The strong governance structure for making decisions in these schools allowed them to come together as a group to resolve conflicts and move forward. Action research processes informed them as they developed and changed along the way.

Leaders of these schools were willing to modify their beliefs in light of the group's commitment to their core values. Glickman expresses that these leaders, like many others, had to face the opposition of those who disagreed with their motives for one reason or another. But, he says, "If the school has begun by laying a solid foundation of common beliefs, leaders have the moral authority to support the school's vision of education."¹⁶

Glickman cites an example of a middle school in the midwestern United States that had a poor record of student achievement. A few staff members did not want to use the agreed-upon performance-based assessment process. They wanted to work with more flexible schedules. The guidance counselor, who led the opposition to this movement, kept sabotaging the proposed changes. The principal ultimately removed him from his assignment and even began full procedures for dismissal. Glickman's principal responded to the needs of his community. He behaved in an ethical manner and basically advised the uncooperative naysayer out of the business of his school. He took action for the betterment of the whole. This is the kind of commitment to the common beliefs that is needed to create trust and move a staff forward toward exemplary practices.

Christine Sleeter reminds us that schools that are democratic are also "just."¹⁷ They work to reduce or eliminate gaps in student achievement that correlate with group membership, such as social class, gender, or race. Social justice work stems from many larger bodies of knowledge, including anthropology, race and ethnic studies, developmental

and social psychology, and the historical studies of groups throughout time. Through a focus on social justice issues, students develop empathy and even altruistic behaviors that can help move a society forward. School teachings concentrate on fostering positive intergroup relations. They explore the meaning of prejudice and discrimination, the role of power and privilege as it affects individuals, institutionalizes racism and oppression. Students learn the tools to analyze, evaluate, and transform individual and systemic threats to social injustices. In the context of these schools, young people think and feel about their own cultural lenses, and how discrimination and marginalization of groups promote powerlessness and often violence.

Sleeter prompts us to think more deeply about the ways in which we, as leaders, are responsible to produce schools that provide young people equal access to school resources. One school should not succeed and another fail because of accessibility to high-performing teachers, adequate facilities, and research-driven curricula. The Coleman Report had largely attributed school success or failure to socioeconomic status.¹⁸ The effective schools movement of the 1980s and 1990s sought to equalize these differences and discover within-school differences that contributed to excellence. Schools that were effective were said to have:

- a clear mission
- high expectations for success
- a principal who was a strong instructional leader
- frequently monitored student progress
- many opportunities for time on task
- a safe and orderly environment
- strong home-school relations

One study conducted by Reyes, Scribner and Scribner (1999) looked at eight schools along the Texas-Mexico border that were serving primarily low-income Hispanic students and demonstrated high achievement. These schools were characterized by:

- high involvement of community and families with a shared decision making body in which parents participated.
- collaborative governance and leadership with a more facilitative leadership and a common vision and mission.
- use of a "culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers had high expectations for children's achievement. They built upon the children's home knowledge and learning, used higher-order thinking and constructed knowledge from these.
- use of "advocacy-oriented" assessments to assign grades or describe achievement levels. Assessment was used to improve performance not just provide outcome measures of success or failures.¹⁹

We now have a knowledge base that supports teaching and learning practices that make a difference for children, especially children of color. As leaders, you must also find ways to initiate this dialogue among the adults and young people in your school to assure that the scales are balanced and that justice is upheld.

The Power Lens: Individual and Collective Work

As we strive to give all children the opportunities to be successful in schools and, ultimately, in society, we have to equalize the power-sharing playing field. The way it stands right now, kids of color and kids from families with low socioeconomic status are not part of the culture of power in our country. This said, it is even more incumbent upon us to find ways to provide these young people the much-needed basic skills, democratic social skills, and emotional competencies within the fabric of a just and caring school.

Lisa Delpitt tells us that students and adults need to know both the explicit and the implicit rules of power as they try to create a more just society. She speaks of five aspects of power dynamics that are at play in our schools and classrooms every day. It is the job of the school leader to know these, embrace them, and educate others in the school about their existence and effects on young people. These are aspects:

1. Issues of power are enacted in the classrooms (teachers/students and students and students).
2. There are codes or rules for participating in a culture of power (these include ways of being, dressing, behaving, etc.).
3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power.
4. Being told the rules of the culture of power helps others who are not in the group acquire power.
5. Those with power are least aware of it and often not even aware that they have it.²⁰

Recognizing the power imbalance that so many of our children face in their daily lives, Lynn Fischer, a colleague and friend, suggests the use of a reflective tool that she calls the "power lens." This useful model helps young people evaluate their own personal and collective powers. It helps them to honestly see where they are in the larger power structure. It puts the diversity discussion on the table and lifts the taboo of talking about issues of privilege and differences. This allows trust to build in the classroom and opportunities to help young people build the tools they need to lead successful lives. Fischer's power lens also helps young people practice identifying and cultivating their innate powers. In working with a fifth-grade class she asked them, "What powers could never be taken from you?" One by one, using the lens, the children responded with statements such as, "The power to love, learn, communicate with my soul, determine who I will become, think for myself, listen and make choices." They began to find ways to express that innate power. Fifth graders enlisted as peer mediators or volunteered to be team leaders. High school students became mentors and coaches for younger students. Lynn believes that young people need to recognize and draw upon their innate powers in order to become effective change agents within existing social systems. It gives them another tool with which to maneuver the inequities that exist.²¹

Once the safety has been established, young people can learn from hearing each other's stories about experiences that have impacted their individual perspectives. Some of us are members of dominant cultural groups. Some of us have inherited a legacy of oppression. Lynn shares, "As we share our stories we see ourselves not as victims or perpetrators but as active players within the social systems that help to determine the circumstances of our lives." I can remember doing this very activity with the Young Ambassadors at my school (described later in this chapter). After many months of working together we held a retreat that was dedicated to expelling the myths of individual and group differences. Our goal was to build community through individual and group storytelling. The healing that occurred that weekend was amazing! That group of young people came together as a community rich in diversity and established a common ground of authentic communication.

Finally, adults also need the safety to feel they have an equal seat at the table. In many of the classrooms across our nation the very adults who are working with children have spent a lifetime grappling with these same inequities. As leaders of schools, no matter what our own cultural and racial identity, we need to address these issues. When there is a common language that acknowledges that there are differences in the rules people play to be successful in life, all members of all groups learn how to play the game. Even in a multicultural school environment, talk about racial, gender, sexual

identity and ethnic differences can go unspoken. It's important to remember that silence does not imply harmony. Too often, inside the hearts and minds of children and adults, these power imbalances are taking their toll.

An emotionally intelligent leader structures her leadership to increase empathy between those who are different. She also promotes the richness of the diversity in the organization. If the school's culture squelches individual differences, the leader has to find ways to get those voices heard. Communication and conflict resolution skills have to be so strong that they can help others in the organization listen, question, and collaborate together to improve the culture and performance of young people. Experience tells me that leaders often have to name these differences outright. And, they have to encourage others to do the same. When I saw any hint of intolerance of differences in my school, whether among adults, or adults and children or among children themselves, I called it. Putting the unspoken on the table allowed us to use the information collectively for positive change. I learned that the only way that I could open up the conversation about differences was to admit that I was a learner; I encouraged others to see themselves as learners too. I let it be known that I had to ask a lot of questions and assure that all groups were being heard. This was not easy work. It would have been so much simpler to just put a top on it all and let it simmer. But, a pot of simmering water will eventually boil over, or burn the pan! The only way that you can assure that the school provides a safe place for everyone to develop and learn from one another is by directly working with the issues as they arise.

YOUTH IN ACTION: TOMORROW'S LEADERS

In this section, we will talk about what leaders can do to increase social responsibility among the youth in their schools. We will look at ways to help young people develop empathy and expand values and beliefs into moral and social action. Building on the research of theorists Kohlberg, Damon, Erickson, and Gilligan, we need to think about the causes that compel someone to go out on a limb for another. Why did many people open their homes during the Holocaust and save lives, while others slammed their doors shut? Why did people risk their lives in transporting slaves from the South through the Underground Railroad while others reported them and gloated in seeing them lynched? During the German occupation of France, at Le Chambon, a small town in south central France, the entire community risked their lives as they actively hid Jews from all over Europe. When the war was over and Madame Trocme, the wife of the local minister, was asked why they made such a risky decision she replied, "There was no decision to make. The issue was: Do you think we are all brothers or not? Do you think it is unjust to turn Jews in or not? Then, let us try to help!"²²

Thomas Lickona, psychologist and education professor, tells us that moral action is a component of character. It puts into action our knowledge about what is right and wrong, and our feelings about "how much we care about being honest, fair and decent towards others." He tell us that in order to take moral action, we need to have skills to act, the will to mobilize, and a developed habit of acting in a moral way.²³

To accomplish the dual goal of developing civic responsibility and moral action of youth, increasingly more schools are integrating service-learning projects into the heart of the school's culture. Service learning is a teaching strategy that integrates youth service into core academic curriculum. When competently utilized, it provides students with opportunities to learn real-world applications of their studies, and take an active role in solving community problems. Approximately one-third of public elementary and secondary schools, more than 13 million students, use service learning in their programs.

The benefits of such program efforts include improved academic learning, civic responsibility, and social and career development. Service-learning efforts have documented increases in student attendance, school engagement, self-efficacy, greater relations with adults and other students, and a wider acceptance of cultural diversity. One study of high school students who participated in service learning activities reported that students were more likely to vote in national elections fifteen years after their participation in service-learning programs.²⁴

In Chapter 5, we shared some of the wonderful service learning projects of Shelley Berman's young people. In this section, we share stories of young people who have taken leadership to create safety, a nonviolent culture, and an appreciation of diversity in their schools.

Lessons Learned from Youth

In the book *Waging Peace in Our Schools* that I co-authored with Linda Lantieri, I spoke about the work my colleagues and I did at Roosevelt Middle School in California to increase self-efficacy and develop moral action in our middle school students.²⁵ Prompted by the increasing separation of young people by ethnicity, status, and gang participation, we set about to infuse the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program into the school. The three to five-year plan was to have a school with fully integrated conflict resolution visible in every classroom and every aspect of the school and community.

A near-violent gang-related incident during lunch one day caused us to move even more quickly. My colleagues and I brought together a group of school leaders to help us figure out what we could do to change this increasingly violent culture. Fear and instinct told us that we adults could not change the culture of this school alone. We needed the young people. I can still remember the exact moment when about ten adults and young people sat around the table in Principal Jewell's office. At the table sat Stan and Tommy, bright, eighth-grade African American boys who were negatively influencing the younger African American children toward violent behavior; Manny and Cesar, two Latino boys who led the Vista Home boy contingency; and Joey, a Caucasian student who identified with the growing white supremacist movement. We invited the students to help us create a peaceful school environment rather than participate in the violence that was brewing. We agreed that we were all losing and we wanted a win-win solution. The students suggested the names of other leaders to invite into the group. Overall, we selected students with leadership skills from all groups by gender, ability, race, status in the school, and academic performance. No group was excluded. We named these student leaders "The Young Ambassadors."

From this moment on began the most incredible experience I have witnessed in turning around a culture of a school. The key factor was a critical mass of young people equipped with the very beliefs and skills we had hoped all adults and children would possess over time. These included: a belief in nonviolence and an understanding that discrimination and exclusion are hurtful forms of violence; awareness that caring communication skills such as active listening and assertive language help resolve conflict and increase empathy; and, negotiation and mediation skills are tools that, used well, could replace aggressive or passive behavior and ensure peace instead of violence. Furthermore, they knew that they had the power and responsibility, as a member of the school community, to make it a safe place for everyone.

We began to develop this critical mass of advocates by teaching in-depth skills in conflict resolution to our core group of twelve young leaders. We met once a week during lunchtime and later in the year organized a three-day retreat. The time we committed together allowed for the establishment of trust among these youth leaders and between adults and youth leaders. The sessions provoked deep feelings stimulated through the use of dialogue in small and whole groups. We taught perspective-taking

skills, active listening, and I-message. We told stories of pain and hopelessness. We expressed our fears and hopes for the future. We shared the pains of oppression and discrimination and the joys of achievement and power used to help others. We planned the approach we would take to bring other youth into our fold and to get more young people involved.

Within about two months, rumors were abounding on campus that these Young Ambassadors were afoot and that they were the school's "chosen ones." Since some of these chosen few also had aggressive tendencies, they caught the attention of students and teachers alike. The students were not sure of what to make of this experiment. In the past, Stan, Manny, and some other Young Ambassadors used to live in my office for breaking the rules. Now, they were being extolled as school leaders. This seemed like a cool thing. The teachers, on the other hand, were skeptical. How could we honor these potentially violent kids with a position of status in the school? We were, they believed, too lax.

Many believed our experiment was doomed to failure, but we were determined to make it work. We knew weekly meetings were not enough to change deep-seated negative behaviors of the troubled youth leaders. As assistant principal, I created special contracts with these more at-risk leaders. I followed them to assure they were doing their schoolwork. I contacted their families and got them to cooperate with us. The school counselors and I spent countless hours doing one-on-one and group counseling with the kids who needed it. I became a visible force on the campus. I followed kids on the playground, into the bathrooms, and wherever they gathered. I watched their interactions with other kids. I held them accountable. When they broke the rules I came down hard, but short of violent acts, there was always a chance for them to regain their position of status.

The next step was to create schoolwide visible recognition. We bought and they designed their T-shirts. We asked them to wear them to our weekly meetings. At first, they refused. "We aren't going to look like a bunch of elementary school children walking around here with these T-shirts. They'll laugh at us. They'll never believe in what we are doing. Twelve of us are not enough. We need 30 of us, 100 of us." We begged them to be patient. We knew they were right, but we weren't there yet. So, we bought the T-shirts and they put them on. I remember that first day they walked the campus with those black and red Young Ambassador shirts. The bulletin announcement that morning went something like this:

Attention Roosevelt Students: The Administration wants to let you know that you will see on campus today our twelve Young Ambassadors. These are the young people who have dared to make a difference at our school. These kids believe that we can do things differently. They want to be champions for peace instead of violence. They are looking for others of you who want to "walk the talk" of nonviolence. If you are interested in becoming a Young Ambassador, you will have to follow their steps. Let us know of your interest. But, first, you have to "walk the talk." We have to believe that you care.

I can still remember the fear in these courageous young leaders that day as they struggled to uphold our cause and model what they had learned in our private sessions over the preceding three months. I was so proud of them. At the end of the day they were flying high. They came rushing to tell our lead teacher, Elaine, and me the stories of the many positive events of the day; the number of times they spoke up and stopped possible altercations. They were glowing. They had made a difference already, and they knew it.

This was the beginning of a movement in that school that swelled from twelve courageous soldiers to one hundred. From our efforts at Roosevelt, the model was replicated in the school district of some 25,000 young people. Young Ambassadors became a common district name. It still is. The culture of Roosevelt changed drastically with the help and service of these young people. As assistant principal, my role changed drastically

too. In time, I no longer spent my days with a multitude of fights and interventions.—so many occurrences were stopped by the words and actions of our Young Ambassadors. At times, when it was safe, they intervened themselves. Other times they sent us notes and warned us of possible dangerous situations. But the role of the Young Ambassador blossomed into so much more. These young people became true leaders of the school. Soon they were

- leading Unity days at the school;
- teaching lessons in classrooms at the sixth-grade level and at the elementary schools;
- building peace quilts in the school;
- becoming mediators (They attended an advanced three-day training);
- speaking at public events, on youth panels, and at local and national conferences;
- arranging peace marches in the district;
- cleaning graffiti on weekends;
- developing and performing public service announcements on their local cable stations for peace; and
- writing grants to support our efforts.

I watched our campus change from a place of potential violence to a place that promoted peace. Once threatening, “wanna-be” gang members lost their importance. The new role models were our Young Ambassadors. Teachers, reluctant to empower young people, called for them to diffuse potential fights and sent their students to mediation.

I learned a tremendous amount from this experience with these young people. First and foremost, I learned that when you respect young people and allow expression of their voice, you build their trust. With trust, you can build self-efficacy and have the chance to turn around even the most wounded young person. Through the stories of the children, I learned about the inequities they suffered due to racial, class, and cultural differences. We learned as a group, adults and young people together, how to make inroads into changing these power dynamics.

Our united actions led to numerous activities that made our mission loud and clear. We organized multicultural fairs and monthly activities led by students, such as women's history fairs, dance concerts, and ethnic celebrations. Every winter, celebration of just Christmas was replaced by the schoolwide study and coordinated planning of winter festivities of numerous cultures. Throughout the year, students organized daily lunchtime activities that celebrated our unique school cultures. I knew we were getting our message across when a sixth-grade Chinese boy came to the office one day and said, “Excuse me, Ms. Patti, but I know we have been having cultural events at lunchtime, and I noticed that we haven't had enough Asian activities. I wonder if I could organize a martial arts performance at lunch?” “Great,” I said to him. “I'll tell one of the Young Ambassadors to meet with you about the details.”

Our new focus was not confined to activities and events. We organized committees to ensure that our curriculum reached all children. We recruited parents of diverse ethnic backgrounds to be more present in our schools. We organized adult/student leadership meetings to address issues of concern regarding student needs. These were joyous and celebratory times. As I write this book, I wonder what career paths these Young Ambassadors have chosen. I wonder what they would say about these early experiences. I wonder if they know they remain my heroines and heroes to this day. They taught me how the power of one can become the power of many.

Many young people across our country are performing similar acts of service. They are making inroads towards creating cultures of peace. Gregory Thomas, former Director of School Safety and Planning for the New York City public schools, recently shared a story with my students and me about incredible youth leaders in the

Brownsville section of Brooklyn. As a response to the school administration's and students' reports that weapons and student bullying were the school's major offenses, students and adults together conducted research to uncover the depth of the problem. Survey results indicated that students were bringing knives, box cutters, and other weapons to protect themselves on the way to and from school. Students, with police officers, identified the sites where bullying most occurred inside and outside of school. School community members, police, and local politicians worked with the students to write grants. They raised money to support their efforts to change the violent culture and ensure safety and peace.

The young people became known as the *Brownsville Youth for Peace*. They instituted a number of changes at Junior High School 275. They drafted a peace pledge that all students signed. They went out into the community to create an awareness of their needs for a peaceful school. They continued to raise funds. They instituted weekend events such as basketball tournaments, music jams, and role-play discussions that addressed youth issues. They even implemented a highly successful reward program for students who bought into their new agenda. The changes at the school soon became evident. Teachers and students felt safer, both inside and outside of their school. Many of the twenty students who began the original Brownsville Youth for Peace program have since graduated. They continue to speak at local and national peace forums, work at violence reduction in their local communities, and come back to speak to the fledgling Brownsville Youths for Peace at J.H.S. 275.²⁶

As Sheldon Berman reminds us, "Educating for social responsibility helps young people understand that their lives are intimately connected to the well-being of others and to the social and political world around them, that they make a difference in their daily lives by their choices and values in the world that can enable them to live with meaning, integrity and responsibility."²⁷

The Best Practices Club

The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Emerson's quote is at the bottom of every email that I (Jim) received from Ariela Rothstein, a senior at Lexington High School. Emerson's sentiments are lived out in the Best Practices Club, a club which Ariela began with a group of friends in her Lexington, Massachusetts, school in 2004. The friends wondered, after commiserating about some bad teachers, "What if there was a place where students could talk about what works for them in the classroom?" When they posed that question to one of their teachers, the dialogue led to the formation of a student-run club with the following mission:

The purpose of Best Practices is to involve students in the process of improving teaching and learning at the high school. Teachers volunteer to invite student observers into their classrooms to observe and document teaching and learning. The results (the information and examples of best teaching practices that students glean from these classrooms) are analyzed, discussed, and shared with the school community.

Students observing teachers and giving feedback? Students involved in the process of improving teaching and learning? In the power structure of many schools, students have little real voice in these matters. "Lexington is different," says Michael Jones, the principal. "Our Best Practices club is really an outgrowth of a rather remarkable culture at Lexington High School that encourages students to pursue their interests, often through

clubs like this one." Jones had only become the principal a year ago but he had bought into the culture of student empowerment that he had inherited. "I was so intrigued with the idea of students taking an interest in pedagogy and teaching methods that when Ariela asked me for an afternoon with the entire faculty to share both teacher and student experiences, I gave her the OK."

At the faculty meeting, which was led by the student club members, teachers who had previously volunteered to be observed shared their experiences and students led faculty in small groups to discuss teaching and learning. The groups were then brought together to process what they had learned and how they might apply best practices to the curriculum at the school. That experience prompted the club to plan monthly forums where any faculty member and any student can constructively explore their ideas relating to a theme.

The first forum was guided by the question "How do you think about student participation in the classroom?" "We had 20 to 25 people there," Deborah Johnston, the club's faculty advisor, proudly explained. "I learned a great deal. My teaching style always included my own reflections and encouraged feedback, but I never discussed feedback with my students in the classroom after I received it. I came out of the forum with five things from other teachers and students to use the next day."

Though the forums are important to Ariela, it is the observation of teachers that she believes is key to Best Practice:

Without our observations we would have no material, no best practices, to spread throughout the school community. Knowing the importance of observing, we put a lot of time and energy into developing a protocol that would be useful, efficient and effective.

As a group, we created a tool that we call the Best Practices Report (BPR). We chose to use several open response questions on a few subjects (like Atmosphere, Teaching for Understanding, etc.) We have continued to fine-tune our BPR in the hope that all aspects of the classroom can be described using our observation tool.

When we explain our BPR to teachers, many have questions regarding the specifics. So here's a breakdown of how a student observation usually goes:

- 1. A BP member checks their schedule for available blocks.*
- 2. Then, s/he sees which teachers who have already volunteered (we don't observe teachers who don't want to be observed) teach during those free blocks. Matching their block with the teacher's, the student chooses a class to visit.*
- 3. The student emails the teacher ahead of time to check that a given day would be a good day to observe (not a test day, for example) and asks some preliminary questions (such as, "What level is this class?" "Is there anything in particular you'd like me know about this class?" "What's your plan for the class?" etc.)*
- 4. On the chosen day, the student shows up at the class, takes a seat in the back and observes. The student fills out as much of the BPR as possible, knowing that some questions might not apply to a given class.*
- 5. After class, the student writes up an assessment, summarizing the best practices seen in the class.*
- 6. The student and teacher meet together to discuss the good things that the student has observed. This is also an opportunity for the student to ask any questions about the methods of the teacher, or for the teacher to ask the opinion of the student on a specific teaching practice. These meetings run between 10-45 minutes long.*
- 7. The student submits the BPR with the assessment to Best Practices to be archived and used in later presentations.*

Sample questions on the BPR might include any of the following:

How are students coming up with new ideas?

How are students showing they understand?

What kind of questions are they asking?

What kind of questions is the teacher asking?

How are students showing their involvement (paying attention, participation)?

How does the teacher make sure students are staying engaged?

Describe the flow of the conversation. Are students' comments related to each other?

How does the teacher encourage students to develop their own ideas (including constructive criticism)?

How does the teacher find out whether students are understanding "it" or not?

How does the teacher incorporate student comments into the flow of the discussion?

How does the teacher show awareness of students' daily lives?

How is the teacher demonstrating respect toward the students?

Is the teacher supporting the discussion (posing questions, connecting comments, listening to students)?

As a result of their efforts and of their allies in the larger school community, the Best Practices Club can point to some tangible outcomes. Though still small in number relative to the size of the staff, teachers who have been observed are overwhelmingly positive about their experience, with one teacher proclaiming, "BP was the best thing to ever happen at LHS." The assistant principal is compiling the identified best practices and model lessons for a New Teacher's handbook. Supported by the principal, the club won a grant that enabled them to present BP at a Coalition of Essential Schools conference. A BP website is up and running.²⁸ Most important, younger students have increasingly become interested in the club after members of the club began making classroom presentations. The students are learning about the challenges that teachers face while getting the opportunity to have a say in their own learning.

From a school leadership perspective, it is clear from this case that true student leadership does not necessarily lessen the influence of the formal leaders. Instead leadership in the school is expanded. Michael Jones and Deborah Johnston's power came more from the expertise with which they found common interest with Ariela and her fellow club members than from their formal authority. According to Deborah there was more resistance to Ariela's idea than she had anticipated, but the fact that the resistance surprised her suggests that the culture of the school is at least open to what has been called the "messiness" of democracy.²⁹ To create a democratic school, leaders must be able to deal effectively with the messiness of change, the expression of diverse opinions, and the ache of uncertainty. They must creatively manage the conflicts that are sure to arise and find ways to the means to bring groups together for dialogue and shared understanding. Ultimately, they must get out of the way and let others lead.

Ariela will be leaving Lexington High in June. She is aware that she has to step back and let others take up the reins of the club. A junior will lead the next forum and Ariela knows that it will be hard for her to not jump in if the junior falters. But she also knows that the future of BP lies with the younger students so she will step back. It's what a good leader does.

When I communicated with Ariela via email and phone, I was reminded of the fact that lessons about leadership can come from many people if we are open to listening to

their voices. For all I thought I knew about leadership I learned still more from Ariela's answer to my question, "Given what you know now about the challenges you faced and the impact your project had, would you do it again, and if so, why?" Her response was:

On a personal level, leading Best Practices has been the most rewarding growth experience of my life (so far). I am obviously still continuing to learn a lot, but I have already had to deal with organizing very different groups (students, teachers), navigating an institution and figuring out the most effective way to make change, creating "lesson plans" for meeting after meeting after meeting, and learning how to delegate. The most challenging aspect of starting Best Practices has not even happened yet, and that's passing it off to the next motivated group of students at my high school. No matter what happens next year, though, on a personal level I would not hesitate for a second to repeat the process.

On an impact or business level I still would not hesitate to do it again. That's not because I've had as much an impact on my school as the process has had on me, but rather because the ball has begun to roll. There were plenty of bumps, and there remains to be mini mountains to get over, but just starting these kinds of conversations has had an impact on at least the teachers who have been observed or come to forums and at most every single teacher at the school attended our faculty-wide workshop, and maybe have talked about us in the coffee rooms. In the Jewish faith, there's a song we sing during the holiday of Passover (that's coming up on Wednesday, so it's fresh in my mind) called "Dayeinu," Enough. It's a list of things that God did to take the people of Israel out of Egypt and after each heavenly miracle we sing "Dayeinu, v'lo dayeinu." It would and it would not have been enough. Best Practices at Lexington High School fits the model of "Dayeinu" pretty well. If we had only had weekly meetings of students just talking about what they thought worked in the classroom, it would and it would not have been enough. If we had only brought a few teachers we felt comfortable with into a small meeting, it would and it would not have been enough. If we had only led a faculty-wide workshop, it would and it would not have been enough. If we only observe 20 teachers out of 200, it is and it is not enough. If we only start student-student, student-teacher, and teacher-teacher dialogue, it is and it is not enough. There is always more work to be done, more people to reach. Everyday I learn of or think about new ways to improve LHS. But, already, the students in the group have been empowered, been given a voice in changing education at the school, and the teachers have had helpful, effective, respectful, and trustful feedback from their peers and their students. And I believe something will continue in future years that might not be an exact replication, but it will foster change. It is, and it is not enough.

STRATEGIES FOR REACHING COMMON GROUND

In Chapter 4, Jim addressed ways leaders can set the tone for establishing a school culture that promotes nonviolent conflict resolution at its core. The EQ leader uses strategies such as high-level communication skills, problem solving, consensus building, negotiation and mediation, and dialogic inquiry. The EQ school leader recognizes that schools are service organizations and service is inherent in this role.

When conflict and disagreement arise, the school leader does not close the door. Conflict avoided will smolder and burn up the school. When there are strong differences of opinions, the root of the disagreement often goes deep. Conflict may be attached to long-held beliefs, often based on religion, gender, race, and ethnic differences and the power imbalances that come with these. At times, someone's response stems from painful early experiences that have created a history of mistrust. The role of the school leader is to help bring others through these hard times, reestablish trust, and create

common goals. And even receptive and emotionally intelligent school leaders have to suspend judgments, expand their perspectives, and be willing to do and say things differently. As we think about creating just communities that promote a belief in reaching common ground, the following points may be useful:

1. Establish and review community group norms that demonstrate the ways adults and young people will behave in the school. Post these around buildings in classrooms and on walls. Use them before difficult meetings, at parent meetings, and before student or adult mediations. Incorporate these ways of being into your school curriculum. Create acknowledgement systems for those who model these ways of being.
2. Recognize, early on, that a variety of power relationships exist in every school. The more you understand these and work to navigate them the more everyone will feel they have a place at the table. This will give you more support as you seek to implement your vision.
3. Build trust. It is impossible to move any agenda forward without a trusting community. Find ways to become more transparent yourself so that you are trusted. Help others to feel safe enough to do the same.
4. Acknowledge and promote intercultural understanding. Employ multicultural education methodologies in your school. Let this lens permeate everything you do. Provide opportunities for adults and young people to honor themselves and others. Promote the safety for people to ask questions and learn from one another. Encourage storytelling and celebration as a means to promote unity. Explore ways to make practices relevant to the variety of cultural groups in your school. Educate yourself and others.
5. Enlist diverse voices to examine school policies for the purpose of inclusiveness and modify policies to reflect this. Bring in the experts when needed. If you cannot suspend your frame of reference in a given situation, you may need to utilize the strengths of someone else. Someone outside of the organization can help build bridges.
6. Put the structures in place for the staff to problem solve and negotiate about curriculum matters and about the way they communicate, act, and adhere to the school's mission. Promote conflict resolution practices and reflection on emotional intelligence competencies for all students and adults. Educate and promote dialogue and dynamic inquiry at every opportunity. Professional development in these areas will create a common language for the entire community of learners.
7. Learn how to effectively use consensus-building skills. These skills can be extremely effective in bringing your staff together about critical directions that you want to move ahead with as a school. Remember, you can't mandate that people embrace deeper core values such as a belief in equity and celebration of diversity.
8. Understand that reconciliation and forgiveness are often needed where lots of hurt and damage have been done. This cannot be handled in the short run. It will involve an ongoing commitment to rebuilding a relationship that has been severed. This is, perhaps, the hardest work of all.

IN SUMMARY

In this chapter we have asked you to explore your values and beliefs as to the purpose of schools in a democracy. We have talked about the skills we hope to instill in our children, those that will prepare them to be active participants in their future. As educators we *can* and *must* teach young people ways to be socially responsible, so that they will be able to take a stand for equity and social justice. Young people can be and are actively engaging in making our schools, communities, and world a better place. This said, we

recognize that there are inequities that run deep, power structures that restrain us all. We need to give voice to these discriminatory practices and create structures in our schools and communities that counter them wherever possible. The emotionally intelligent leader bears the responsibility of increasing empathy and intercultural sensitivity in all members of the school. Finally, we have offered a few thinking points that can help a skilled community reach common ground during difficult times.

In closing this chapter it feels appropriate to share with you a letter that one principal sends to his teachers on the first day of school each year. May it kindle in you the hope and righteous indignation to move forward and build a school of young people and adults who know "what matters."

Dear Teacher:

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness:

Gas chambers built by learned engineers.

Children poisoned by educated physicians.

Infants killed by trained nurses.

Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.

So I am suspicious of education.

My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.

Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.³⁰

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Are there events from your background, gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, or abilities that challenge you in your personal and professional life? Are there EQ competencies that can help you to make sense of these and use them as strengths rather than limitations in your day-to-day lives?
2. In your school, does everyone have a "voice at the table?" What steps do you take to assure that everyone is included in your school's vision and mission?
3. As a leader, what messages do you give to others that reflect your vision of the school's purpose?
4. In what ways do the behaviors of the young people and adults in your school reflect their understanding and application of your school's vision?
5. When you think of your school in light of the reading in this chapter, where do you see your school now, and where do you hope to see it three years from now?

LESSON FROM THE FIELD

Matt Bromme

One of the most difficult situations for a leader to address is how to navigate the turbulent waters when a conflict exists in the organization and/or in the community the leader serves. As educators, we are faced with conflicts that can become crises just by the manner in which they are dealt with at their embryonic stage. If we believe that educating

children is a moral commitment, then how we address a conflict and bring it to closure serves as a model for moral leadership. As the Americans who were portrayed in Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*, leaders must choose a moral decision even when that decision may be a career ending decision.

An example of this is when I was faced with a conflict with parents in one of our schools. The extremely volatile issue was over the rights of students with special needs to attend an appropriate educational environment within the classrooms of students who did not have special needs. I believed that based on research, and the prior experience of several of our schools, the philosophy of least restricted environment was and still remains the most appropriate instructional program for all of the children we serve.

During the late spring and summer, one of our higher performing schools was selected and key people and I carefully planned to begin the inclusion program. We followed the same pattern as we had in the other schools where we introduced inclusion. We first met with the service providers of the children who were to be brought into the school, as well as the school and community school district staff. We carefully identified the students who would benefit from this model of instruction, as well as identified the teachers at the school who would embrace the inclusion model.

In this particular situation, the conflicts arose when the parents of the children who did not have special needs learned that their children were to be part of the inclusion program. This higher performing school was chosen as an inclusion site for autistic children. It was to be a partnership between the school community, the providers of the special needs students and the community at large.

I scheduled a meeting at the school for the different groups who were involved in the issue. Students with and without special needs were invited. Parents with children who had special needs and select parents of children without special needs were also asked to attend, as well as the professional staff. Since the leadership of the Parents' Association had been involved and aware of this new program, I believed that all of the necessary members of the community had been educated about the program. However, the Parents' Association quickly turned this into a conflict. Members of the Association started to make demands that were outside the scope of a Parents' Association and violated the rights of the children. The parents demanded to meet the students, have knowledge of the students' handicapping conditions, and ask questions about the children while the children and their parents were present at a meeting. This was the same Parents' Association that had rejected the opportunity of securing a gifted program because it meant that students from outside their school zone would have the opportunity to attend the school.

The Parents' Association's demands on the newly appointed, five-months-in-the-position Principal ended with a threat. They would place an advertisement in the local newspaper advertising a meeting to be held at the school to discuss and debate the merits of this issue. Knowing that some of the school's staff lived in the neighborhood, I believed that there would be staff members working with parents to defeat the plan. I also knew that five of the nine local Community School Board members were elected from that part of the community.

The Principal needed to know that I was going to support her in her efforts to ensure an appropriate education for the students at her school—no matter what stand she took. She supported the program, hosted the meetings and hand picked the teachers. Her concern was living with the adversarial situation in her first full year as Principal. As Superintendent, I decided to take a stand that I knew was ethically correct, but politically incorrect. The inclusion model would be instituted. I informed the Principal that she should relay my decision to the Parents' Association. I then informed my School Board of my decision.

Although we had followed the educational textbook on communications, a very passionate segment of the community decided to oppose our plan. I truly believed their opposition was based on all of the wrong social and educational reasons. It would have been much easier for me to capitulate to this group of parents. I would have won peace with the local media and political leadership. There would have been no threats of letters, emails, and protests to prevent "those children" from attending school with "our children."

Leaders need to decide how to handle conflict. While my initial tone is that of collegiality and full disclosure on all issues, there comes a time when for the benefit of the children we serve, we must as leaders take a strong stand and make the right decision. It may mean that a particular conflict will escalate. It may mean that you will lose personal associations. In the long run, however, you will gain respect and have fewer conflicts as time moves forward.

All leaders must remember that at the end of the day we must take the ethical and moral position that is best for the sake of all children. We must have the courage to serve our children well. This is the only accolade that counts.

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