A Values-Based School

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Abstract

Students today encounter numerous life challenges. The ability to overcome these obstacles depends on the educational system's ability to prepare youth to make healthy decisions. Values-based schooling requires substantial standards of value to be placed on students in order to meet the growing needs of society. An emphasis on love, relationships, care, and empowerment by educators serves as a foundation to prepare youth for their future.

Schools are always faced with pressure and criticism as well as opportunity to be considered values based. There are many factors to consider when seeking the right school. One must first determine the values that are important, because different schools have different approaches. Values such as love, relationships, care, and empowerment serve as a foundation for enabling youth to prepare for their future.

Love

There are many interpretations of the word *love*. When Freire referred to the notion of love in regards to the school system, he signified the type of love that is vivacious, influential, stimulating, analytical, and thought-provoking (as cited in Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009). It is a call to humanity in this economically, socially, and politically oppressed world. Teachers in a values-based school often feel responsible to create solid relationships with their students to educate, equip, enable, and empower them to fight for social justice in the aggressive world they live in. Although teachers do not have the power to emancipate their students, teachers instead have the opportunity to encourage their students' freedom by empowering students to want to take initiative to defend themselves and the rights of others. In order to attain this commitment to humanity, teachers must effectively create relationships with their students based on humbleness as well as valour, and rooted in love.

Relationships with Families, Communities, and Students

A values-based school is possible only when dedicated educators invest their time to discuss the viewpoints of its students, families, and communities, and collaborate on what will most benefit the children (Lipman, 2009). The development of relationships with students and their families, and the collaboration among teachers and administrators, are two key factors for a successful school (Eslinger, 2014). The shift of the principal's role from a leading and controlling position to a caring and supportive position provides an environment of care for the teachers to flourish and, in return, incorporate such practices into their own classrooms (van der Vyer, van der Westhuizen, & Meyer, 2014). The collaboration among teachers, administrators, families, communities, and students will bring about changes that will meet the students' needs.

Reciprocal Relationships

The teaching-learning process requires a reciprocal relationship. Since teaching is a social profession, both teachers and students contribute to successful learning, as both offer valuable insights that can be built from one another's ideas (Hagenauer & Volet, 2013). The teacher is merely the facilitator who creates opportunities for students to inquire and share their ideas about the concepts, rather than the teacher dictating what is to be memorized for understanding. Reciprocal relationships can form with daily interactions between students and

teachers, which is meaningful for social development and creates the classroom climate necessary to instill productive conversations (Salminen, Hannikainen, Poikonen, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2013). Through these close relationships, students can be guided into making socially responsible choices.

The best teachers build relationships with their students (Hattie, 2009). These relationships require the teachers to be caring, empathetic, positive, and good listeners. When teachers lack these skills, students may dislike their teachers and be reluctant to attend school or to participate in school activities. Teachers can exhibit value in their students by seeing the students' perspective, and enabling them to feel purposeful and prioritized.

Relationships with the School

School connectedness has played a significant role in decreasing problem behaviours from students (Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, & Shochet, 2013). A connection with the school has been associated with decreased drug use, decreased teenage pregnancy, increased self-concept, higher GPA, greater attendance, and more positive feelings of support and personal strengths (Scales & Leffert, 2004). Having teacher support and feeling valued are substantial factors to create student connections with the school. One intervention that schools implement to support school connectedness is the provision of extra-curricular programs. These extra-curricular activities in schools have shown a positive influence on test scores and on the attendance of low-income youth (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). Students' relationships with the staff show that the staff members care, and the provision of activities designed for the interest of the students encourages participation and a connection with the school.

Care

Caring teachers familiarize themselves with their student population.The more teachers know their students, the more the teachers will care about each student (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006) and feel accountable to individual students. In multicultural Canada, various ethnic groups are dispersed within the population, requiring individualized awareness with respect to expected differences among some cultures. In contrast, teachers who use generic teaching practices would expect the same results from every student, negating opportunities for growth in individualization. Schools are attempting to implement minority groups' culture, language, and history into the curriculum and everyday practices in an effort to end the inequitable practices that dehumanized students in the past (Bartolome, 2009). Through reflection, educators can create learning environments that are sensitive to the current needs of the students by taking the time to get to know them and understand them.

Implementing culture in the classroom is deeper than superficially enjoying ethnic cuisine or using various cultural names as examples in classroom studies. Instead, culture and curriculum must be brought together actively and simultaneously, and established within and through relationships amongst various cultural groups (Grande, 2009). The historical relevance and the emotional stigma that numerous cultural groups have endured should also be explored in respects to creating an equitable learning environment and a socially just future. Inviting guest speakers into the school, in order to share and communicate ideologies, provides opportunities for understanding. Discussion and real-life experiences from the heart have the power to clarify understanding, more than a textbook is sometimes capable of. This opportunity for openness to be shared by oppressed cultures attempts to create a balance between cultural honour and critical opposition to leadership, by educating students of the actions and effects that have been imposed on people.

Empowerment

Within society, questionable practices are attempted constantly; without addressing these issues, opportunities for inequalities arise. In order for these issues to be addressed, citizens need not only to be aware of the social injustices, but also to be empowered to believe that they can stand up against the status quo and change the current system (Peterson, 2009). Critical literacy encourages people to stand up for their beliefs in order to create a society based on justice and equality (Shor, 2009). Students should be given the opportunity in the classroom to express their beliefs and question current practices, rather than simply accept authority for what it is. Although many leaders may prefer not to be challenged, questioning current methods develops critical thinking, and forces the justification of why such practices are obeyed. Students should be taught to analyze current policies, and see the possibilities available to them to create a change for the better (Giroux, 2009). The education system has the power to create either passive citizens who will accept authority robotically, or citizens who will stand up for their beliefs and the rights of others, and question the social order imposed by those in power. It is up to the school system to develop critical thinkers who believe that they have a powerful voice within a democratic society.

Schools such as Creighton Community School have attempted to improve students' growth and development through the integration of programs such as "40 Developmental Assets." This program attempts to develop healthful, thoughtful, and reliable students through the implementation of the program by caring individuals (Roehlkepartain, 2009). The developmental assets are categorized in the areas of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. Incorporating these assets cultivates wisdom regarding everyday choices to guide positive decision-making and decrease the likelihood of the children's involvement in problem behaviours (Roehlkepartain, 2009). In the developmental assets program, youth are encouraged to demonstrate empowerment by getting involved within the community and are given useful roles. When youth are invited to share their ideas on a project, they feel valued and are more likely to contribute and work with others to establish a common goal. Youth are empowered by being included in the practice, and are invited to participate to make necessary improvements.

Conclusion

Schools have always tried to deliver the best educational experience for youth, in order to prepare them for any challenges they may face in the future. The educational system relies on teachers to serve as lifelong learners who dedicate themselves to seek and implement the necessary changes to meet the evolving needs of society. In order to instill the skills necessary for a successful future, students must be educated about the values that will enable them to make the best choices for themselves and for society. A values-based school regards love, relationships, care, and empowerment as a foundation for best practices in teaching.

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Biography

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