

Democratic Teaching: Revisiting Type-Four Core Curriculum

Gary Weilbacher, Illinois State University

Kimberly Rojas, Illinois State University

Greg Kocourek, Bloomington Junior High School

A little over five years ago, curriculum integration advocate James A. Beane (2005) concluded *A Reason to Teach* with these words:

That is why, no matter how bleak the current situation seems, the democratic way will find its way into the hearts and minds of more and more teachers, and into the culture and curriculum of their classrooms and schools. And from there into the lives of their students. (p. 139)

As I (Greg) write this, educational situations in many places are indeed quite bleak, arguably even more so than in 2005. Adding to the strain caused by accountability measures and scripted curriculum, progressive-minded teachers are faced with ever deteriorating economic and political conditions. Last summer, my hometown school district pink-slipped over 200 teachers, calling back just under 60 of them in the fall. Elementary teacher friends of mine have indicated that their second grade class sizes increased to 30 students (up from 22 the previous year) with roughly ten percent of those being students who have exceptional needs. More of the same is being predicted for the summer of 2011. In 26 years of being an educator, I cannot recall a more challenging time to be

in education, especially when one considers that now states must ‘race’ against each other to obtain a slice of federal funding and state governors are slashing education funding and attacking collective bargaining for teachers and other public employees in the name of balancing budgets.

One of the few encouraging aspects of education that I see in my work as a teacher educator comes from observing teachers who are practicing democratic forms of education. I am proud to say that I know a few teachers who have the courage and conviction to resist scripted test-prep curricula and take little stock in the standardized test results that currently pass for student achievement. Rather, they tend to view education as a collaborative venture that takes place during authentic interactions with their students. As prime examples of such teaching there is the seventh grade language arts teacher who uses bilingual poetry to teach about issues of social justice; the sixth grade social studies teacher whose students create dramatic plays to demonstrate how trading and the specialization of labor led to the spread of Greek culture; and the 8th grade algebra teacher who asks small groups of students to show how linear equations can be applicable to rising prices in neighborhood grocery stores. In these dynamic classrooms, teachers and students are engaged in authentically acquiring the kinds of skills and knowledge that will enable them to participate in democratic processes. Many of the techniques used by these teachers are quite similar to practices pioneered by past progressive educators (Dewey, 1916; Smith, 1921; and Noar, 1966).

Two additional examples of teachers practicing democracy in their classrooms form the foundation for this article. I came to know Kimberly Rojas and Greg Kocourek as graduate students in the curriculum course I taught in the fall of 2010. Kimberly has been a Spanish teacher for five years at University High School, the secondary laboratory school connected to Illinois State University. Greg has taught seventh grade social studies at Bloomington Junior High School for the past four years. Both Kimberly and Greg were intrigued by progressive forms of curriculum that were

presented as part of this class and decided to try planning curriculum democratically with their students. They used a planning approach that is probably best described as “type-four core curriculum” (Alberty & Alberty, 1962).

Type-four core curriculum diverges from the separate subject approach to curriculum planning as its organizing center focuses around the issues, problems, and concerns of young people. In type-four core, the term ‘core’ takes on a meaning that is quite different from current conceptions that depict core as consisting of math, language arts, reading, science, and social studies. As Lounsbury and Vars (1978) point out:

Core is a type of interdisciplinary curriculum in which the primary commitment is to help students deal directly with problems and issues of significance to them. Content from any subject is brought in as it contributes to the examination of a problem. Thus core curriculum is unabashedly student-centered, beginning with student concerns whereas correlation and fusion are adult-designed approaches that begin with more or less conventional subject areas. (in Vars, 1993, p. 23)

One foundation of type-four core curriculum planning is the premise that disciplinary knowledge, as it is typically presented through teacher-centered pedagogy, is not as valuable as the knowledge that the students are interested in because much of the content that is currently taught has little relevance to the lives of most students. In type-four core, teachers select a theme that is relevant to students and provide them with multiple opportunities to take ownership in exploring and acquiring knowledge related to the theme. Student ownership occurs as teachers and students use democratic processes to plan the big ideas of units, including the activities and the assessments. The shared responsibilities of co-planning a unit leads to a sharing of classroom power, making students and teachers co-learners and co-explorers who attempt to answer the essential questions of the unit together. Given that the essential questions are reflective of the concerns and issues of

the students, unit relevance is inherent and students learn how to actively use content from the disciplines to answer their questions. In addition, the students learn that there are relationships and connections among the contents of the disciplines and in order to effectively solve complex problems, it is often necessary to combine information from multiple fields of study.

After numerous discussions with Kimberly and Greg regarding their experiences planning democratically with their students, we decided to write about what took place in their classrooms. The article will conclude with a ‘dialogue’ of what the participants learned about type-four core curriculum and their own teaching.

Immigration in AP Spanish – by Kimberly Rojas

The idea of planning an instructional unit based on the specific interests and questions that were unique to my students was perhaps the most intriguing part of my curriculum class that I took in the fall of 2010. I doubted its practicality at first, wondering how a group of students would be able to determine the questions that guided the curriculum of any given unit. How would the objectives be met? What about the all-important standards?

In order to experiment with this curriculum planning method, I decided to work with my smallest and most mature class, AP Spanish, during the controversial unit of immigration. I chose immigration because I knew that I generally did a poor job of covering the topic and never felt that the students really connected with what was being taught. Instead of telling the students what they needed to learn about immigration, I asked them to come up with their own questions that they had about the topic. The students first formulated the questions individually and then collaborated with a group to discuss their questions.

After gathering these questions, my next step was to ask the students to identify common ideas or concepts among their questions and put them into thematic categories. These themes and their corresponding questions became the organizing centers for the unit:

Immigration Themes

Family

- If a person wants to adopt a child, how does he/she become a citizen?
- Is it true that undocumented women who have their babies in the US automatically become citizens? Why? What about the fathers?
- If a person from another country marries someone from the US, do they automatically have citizenship?

Politics

- What are the differences between George W. Bush and Barack Obama when it comes to immigration policies?
- What are the current immigration policies and what are the bills that are being talked about in Congress right now?
- What are the opinions of immigrants about the immigration policies of the US?
- Why do so many undocumented immigrants have an effect on our economy? Is it true that they are taking our jobs?
- Is it possible to be born in another country in which your parents work and be a citizen of that country and the US?

Process

- Is the citizenship process very expensive?
- What do you need to know in order to take the citizenship exam?
- How do immigrants (documented and undocumented) get a driver's license?
- How many people pass the citizenship exam?
- What is a visa? Why and when is it needed?
- How do you get a visa? What types of visas are there?
- For how many days is a visa or a green card valid?
- What is a green card? Is it really green?

- What is an I-94, K-1, K-2, and why don't we know about these things?
- How is it possible to be a citizen of two or more countries?

Undocumented immigrants

- Who are famous undocumented immigrants that live(d) in the US?
- What are the opinions of legal immigrants about illegal immigrants?
- How do undocumented immigrants get into the US?
- Are there undocumented immigrants from Canada?
- How can illegal immigrants become citizens?
- What is the situation in other countries that makes people want to come here?

Opinions

- What are the opinions of immigrants about the current US immigration policies?
- What stereotypes do people from other countries have about immigrants?

Once the questions were organized into themes, each student selected three of the themes that interested them the most to study throughout the unit. In a sense, each student made his or her own customized thematic unit, but students were allowed to work collaboratively on specific components of the unit.

Once the students had selected the themes that they would study, I had them design their own portfolio using a portfolio map that included an end product that would address the questions they answered in each theme (three products total). During individual conferences with each student, we discussed the types of end products they anticipated creating in order to present the knowledge gained during their research. The students were also given the freedom to change the type of end product they were going to produce if they felt, after their research, that they would like to do something different.

All changes had to be approved by me. Each of the three products had to be different and had to address the questions included in their chosen themes, although the students were given free reign as to how they wanted to present that information to their classmates. I chose this assessment strategy so each student could express his or her knowledge in a format that fit unique interests, talents, and learning styles. Also, students were allowed to collaborate with another student for each of their portfolio products if they were both studying a common immigration theme and answering the same questions. I stumbled upon this idea through an inquisitive student who asked if he could work with a partner to make a play, and I loved it because this really opened up the students' creativity and allowed them to collaborate and discuss the unit content. The projects that were chosen and designed by the students included a book, a family photo album, newspaper articles, essays, short plays, posters, a comic strip, collages, poems, songs, videos, an interactive game, and interviews.

This AP Spanish class is a hybrid class, which means that we met face-to-face Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and had class online or students completed individual work on Tuesday and Thursday. Because of this schedule, students were provided with ample time to do research, both independently and collaboratively while building the portfolio projects that were directly related to their theme-based questions. On the days we did have class together, we worked on required AP components and watched two movies that helped to answer the questions of "How do undocumented immigrants get into the US?" and "What is the situation in other countries that makes people want to come here?"

Toward the end of the unit (Week 7), I invited four Spanish-speaking immigrants and the 11 AP students to my house to discuss the experience of immigrating to this country. We held a dinner in which everyone could converse in Spanish and discuss the unique experience that the immigrants, both documented and undocumented, had while crossing the border into the United States. This was an excellent culminating activity for my students to

understand that immigration issues are more than political fights and headlines. They are issues that real people face when trying to find a safer place to live and a more promising place to work. This dinner also served as a way for the immigrants to express their frustrations and fears in coming to a foreign place and trying to survive in an unknown environment.

At the end of the unit, the students presented their projects over the course of two days. During the presentations, the students discussed the themes they had researched and the information they found to answer the questions in that theme. Each presentation was different, as the information was conveyed through various means according to their product design, such as a video, play, game, poem, or song. After the presentations, the students handed in their portfolios. I used a checklist to comment on each project's strengths and weaknesses and gave each project a score out of 15 points based on my comments, for a total out of 45 points. The comments on their strengths and weaknesses focused on the extent to which the students answered the questions included in the immigration categories being studied as well as the students' creativity and expressiveness.

I see several strengths in this project, with the most important one being the students' vested interest in what they were studying and researching because they were the ones who had asked the questions and created the projects. Their research directly answered their own questions, creating an inherent relevance within the unit. Also, the students designed their own assessments, so they were again able to highlight their own interests and unique abilities. This process incorporates the progressive notion that students should be at the center of what they are learning. The content should be based on their concerns/interests and the questions they have about the world, which is exactly what this unit featured. The entire unit felt like something that was really owned by them instead of me, which was very liberating from a teacher's point-of-view.

I liked that the students were able to do a lot of the research and portfolio creation during the days we did not meet face-to-face, but this was also a weakness of this unit. It was an effective use of

time to have the students doing their work out of class, but I very much felt disconnected from the unit since most of their work was not taking place in class. Other than the two check-points that I had set up electronically as a blog in Blackboard and a few small class discussions about their work, I did not have much to do with the research component. When I do this again, it would be a good idea to have at least one research day in class so I can make sure that all of the students are progressing smoothly and so that I could be there as a reference in case they have questions.

The students essentially taught themselves the unit content through their research. Honestly, most of the questions they asked were ones for which I had no answers. I was learning along with them through this unit that they had created. Because the students had created their own questions and categories and because they chose the three categories they were to study during the unit, they were very self-motivated to find out the answers. This strategy seemed to be especially empowering for this group of diverse learners because they were all studying and researching what interested them the most and were doing it at the time and place that was best for them during the days we didn't have class.

At the end of the unit, I asked students to write me a letter (AP component) reflecting on what they had just studied and presented throughout the whole research and portfolio process. The students noted many strengths, such as:

"This unit really impacted my learning and understanding of immigration – before studying this topic, I had no idea why so many immigrants were coming here and how they did it."

"I've never been able to help my class design their own unit like this – I really liked it!"

"I liked that the unit was based on our own questions, especially around such a controversial topic."

"The structure of this unit gave us a lot of freedom and

responsibility, which I imagine it will be like at college, so I'm glad to have had this opportunity."

"The format was out of the "norm" of all Spanish classes I've taken in the past – I liked that."

"It gave me the time to be creative, which I typically don't take the time to do in my busy life."

However, as with any instructional unit and its lesson components, there were some weaknesses that the students noted:

"We should decide what our portfolio will look like after doing a little bit of research – that way we have a better idea of what kind of products we could make for each theme."

"Because there were no rubrics, we weren't sure what you were looking for in the portfolio."

"I would give more time during the research process to discuss with our classmates, to bounce ideas back and forth."

"We need to have definite due dates throughout the project so we don't get lazy and leave it all until the end."

Although my initial thought about this type of curriculum project was that it would be very impractical, it turned out to be a great way for students to master the content of the unit and meet all of the objectives. Actually, they mastered more content and at a deeper level than they would have if I had taught it according to what I wanted them to know. The student-ownership made this project very personal and meaningful, as the students researched the very questions that they had asked in order to create the unit. This project has given me the inspiration to move forward and try this form of democratic curriculum planning in other classes, taking into consideration the knowledge gained about the strengths and weaknesses of my first attempt at such an undertaking.

Genocide and Reconciliation by Greg Kocourek

Bloomington Junior High School (BJHS) is one of the more diverse schools in central Illinois. As a seventh grade geography teacher I see students from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds. Approximately 62% of the students are white, just over 50% of the students qualify as “low-income,” and approximately 2% of our students are English language learners. Our team is the only 7th grade team that provides instruction for our English language learners and there are also 15 students on our team who qualify for special education services.

Our unit about genocide initially came up as an issue that was connected to Germany and Rwanda. However, I wanted students to understand genocide as a global and historical issue that has long had an impact on humanity. The idea of expanding my instruction on this topic was also connected to the more immediate need of addressing issues of respect, bullying, and tolerance within our team of students. As my language arts teammate and I began to look at resources related to genocide, we were concerned about the possibility of glorifying the more gruesome aspects of genocide, and thereby inadvertently supporting occurrences of bullying. We felt it was important to move beyond genocide by incorporating the process of reconciliation as it relates to genocide and its role in promoting peace and understanding between all the peoples of the world. As a result of our cooperative investigation, we decided to call the unit *Global Genocide and Reconciliation*.

The first day of our unit began with the students generating questions about the topic we were going to be studying. We had established this routine earlier in the year, so students were eager to ask questions knowing that their voices would be included in the unit plans. Given that many of the students asked the question “What is genocide?” and “What does reconciliation mean?” our first activity involved having the students create their own definitions for those terms. Students spent a great deal of time discussing in groups of four or five exactly what genocide and reconciliation were. I collected their definitions and had every class look at them in order

to create our working definition of these terms a couple of days later.

After having them write down their group's definitions I prompted the groups to discuss the following questions: "What questions do you have about genocide?" and "Are you familiar with any examples of genocide that have occurred?" and "What are some places where genocide has taken place?" The process of developing definitions and gathering student questions took place the week before our spring break, which allowed our team of teachers some time to gather resources and consider how the students' questions and interests could drive our unit.

Over spring break I created an outline for the unit, and aligned it with the state standards and listed the most important vocabulary and topics. By the time school resumed we were ready to bring the outline to our students. Given the potentially controversial subject matter of this unit, I also wrote a letter to inform parents that we would be studying genocide for the next few weeks and if they had any concerns to contact us.

For our first lesson after break, I put together a presentation about the origins of the term genocide. Then, together with the students, we completed our working definitions for genocide and reconciliation using the new knowledge gained through follow-up discussion as well as re-visiting their initial definitions developed before spring break. Also included was a short video about "Remembrance Week," which allowed the introduction of new concepts and the impact of genocide studies. This video included stories from survivors of the Holocaust and introduced concerns about the lack of response to post Second World War genocides. This lesson also introduced why reconciliation could be needed, and the precarious nature of trying to redress a crime on such a large and often anonymous scale.

The second lesson was a more extensive study of the Holocaust as the definitive example of genocide. This exercise introduced many important concepts and vocabulary which would run throughout the unit such as ghettoization, symbolization, and scapegoating. Using some short video clips from BrainPOP.com, this Holocaust video

introduces the process of how various communities within Germany lost rights and became socially ostracized. This lesson ended with a short informal group quiz and a class discussion of what they had learned.

Our initial introduction into the process of genocide led to an in-depth look into the Rwandan genocide, in a lesson adapted from the Center for Humanitarian Rights and Law. Using a jig-saw format, students were introduced to Rwanda's location and demographic structure. Then in smaller groups students created oral presentations that focused on major aspects of the Rwandan genocide that they used to teach one another. The critical lesson established genocide as an international problem and connected with many of the larger geographical themes that we had been studying throughout the year such as colonialism, imperialism, ethnic groups, and human migration.

After discussing possible activities to demonstrate what they had learned, we came up with the idea of creating a museum about genocide and reconciliation. Working with *Learning on Display: Student-Created Museums that Build Understanding* (D'Acquisto, 2006), I began to reflect upon how the students would create their exhibits. We decided that I would be responsible for organizing all the exhibits in an effective way as well as supporting the students in their role as exhibit creators and assessing the final quality of their exhibitions, and thus held the title "Head Curator."

In order to develop a more concrete conception of museums, we took a virtual tour of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum online exhibition on propaganda. Students were also evaluating the manner in which museum exhibits organize information to tell a story and provide an educational experience. The students completed this Webquest in class in small groups of three to four. The small group setting promoted collaborative inquiry and students were better able to share background knowledge on the topic with one another.

After completing the Webquest students began to explore the concepts of "ghettoization" and "scapegoating" through working

in small groups at five different stations. These stations included short videos, document analysis, and secondary source materials that focused on the origin of the word “ghetto,” as well as content related to how ethnic tensions that have continued in Europe since the Holocaust. As a result of exploring these stations, students became more familiar with the concept of “ethnic cleansing,” and the introduction of this phrase into widespread use following the Balkan conflicts after the fall of the Soviet Union.

We then shifted gears into the second phase of our genocide unit. Students were asked what a good museum should be like and what it should include. The students’ main concern was that the exhibition should not be “boring”; as a result, this sparked an excellent conversation about what museums could do in creating its exhibitions to not bore its audience and inform them as well. Students’ answers were compiled and then applied to the creation of a rubric that represented students’ suggestions in a more general/applicable way, or in “rubricese” as we often refer to it in class. The rubric was ultimately created based upon the students’ definition of what constituted a quality exhibition.

Students then used the next week to create their exhibitions in groups of four. Using the “Eight Stages of Genocide” (Stanton 1996) as a basic framework for the design of the first wing, groups of students created an exhibit that was focused on the eight stages of genocide, their meaning and implications. Another set of topics for the museum involved evaluating different events of organized oppression and determining whether or not the eight stages of genocide were identifiable within the context of these events. Students put these events to an “eight stages test” to see if indeed genocide had occurred. Some students were responsible for “case-studies” of post Second World War events we had not addressed in class, and then for evaluating whether or not that event was genocide. This evaluation could include “The Eight Stages of Genocide,” but ultimately students put it to the test based upon their own criteria with rationale. After moving through the first section of the museum, visitors were to enter the reconciliation wing, which

contained exhibits and timelines on how reconciliation has impacted the people of the countries we had studied. The final three exhibits dealt with 1) the issue of what a young person can do about this global problem; 2) bullying and its parallels with genocide; and 3) the exhibit that displayed the names of individuals who have been recognized as righteous by Yad Vashem or worked to help people during a genocide or humanitarian crisis.

The process of creating this unit together with my students was one of the most powerful teaching experiences I have ever had. The methodology of allowing student concern/interest to drive instruction is, in many ways, the opposite of my experience in school and therefore we challenged our collective idea of what our geography class could even be like. This also allowed for our class to study the topic of genocide in a relevant manner, because this was a collective investigation by all of us. The museum itself, which ultimately was the major assessment piece of this unit, was an organically developed and authentic method of assessment. Ultimately, my own perspective would bias any evaluation of the unit that I could give, but at the end of the year students repeated over and over again that the one thing I should repeat the following year was the museum. This is especially powerful because of the amount of work and investment that this museum required of students, which included spending hours after school finishing research, exhibition creation, and presenting the museum to our community. As I consider the way that I teach in the future, who better to confirm the quality of my methodology than the very young people whose investment in this process made our museum a reality?

Dialogue

In mid August of 2010, the three of us got together to discuss the units and what we had learned from participating in this experience. As their mentor, I was interested in understanding why Kimberly and Greg decided to attempt Type Four Core and hearing whether or not they planned on doing more co-planning with their students in the upcoming school year. What follows are excerpts from our

conversation that relate to teaching democratically.

Gary: So what made you decide to go ahead and do this?

Kimberly: Well, I think part of it was that you said no one had ever done it before, that no one had taken you up on your offer. (*Each year I have offered to participate with any of my students in helping them plan Type Four Core curriculum. Kimberly and Greg were the first to do so in 10 years of making that offer*). I always like to be one of those who do what others do not. But on that line, the whole democratic idea is something that a lot of teachers don't do. So you kind of put it out there as a challenge and while no one had taken you up on your offer, even what it actually was in and of itself was interesting. It sparked my interest as to what would happen. You know, "What would students ask? What would they want to know – would it be along the lines of what I already teach or it would it be completely different?" And you had talked about how they really would be more invested in their education and what they're actually studying.

Gary: Did that happen? Were they more invested?

Kimberly: Yeah, it did. In fact, I was thinking about that this morning. I'm positive that if you were to ask those 10 students what lesson or what unit they remembered the most for the whole year, it would be that one. I mean, I know that for a fact.

Greg: For me it was more of planning that way enabled me to be able to put a name to a face. It (co-planning with students) was something that I had been doing for a long time . . . and I always knew that one of the most powerful things that you could do was to let students make choices about what they were going to do and how would they would demonstrate what they learned or what they wanted to study. . . . Throughout the process the students end up discovering

instead of doing what the teacher is asking them to do.

Gary: Did giving this a name give you more confidence?

Greg: Absolutely. More confidence and knowing that it had been done, knowing that people had been struggling with the ways that schools are organized in the way that I have. So I could benefit . . . from the experiences of others and see what they did, and how they did it and I could try to implement it in my class and try to modify it.

Gary: I'd like to go back to something you said earlier Greg about control. I think sometimes that planning with students has been criticized for being an 'ok kids what do you want to do today?' kind of thing and it is sometimes seen as a bit chaotic. So I'm wondering was there ever a loss of control? And then how do you see control, the control that it sounds like you had to give up as being related to democratic practices within the classroom.

Greg: I would say the first thing is that I would never introduce this as a first kind of teaching style like when you are starting out. To manage a classroom as a young teacher it's very, very challenging, especially when you're just trying to get your foothold as a young teacher. But I also see the danger of if you get your foothold in a non-democratic way there is a good chance that you're going to be happy with where your feet are and stay there. So, I think that's a real challenge. But for me, I felt like I was at a place where I was comfortable and the students were comfortable that what we were going to be doing was challenging and important so that had already been established.

Gary: Can you talk a little bit more about that - what were you comfortable with?

Kimberly: I think your first year as a teacher you don't really know how students are going to react to certain things. You maybe don't know what to expect. So if you were going to go into this idea of giving students control, you may not

know how to handle what comes back, just because of the lack of classroom experience. I would say how well you know your students makes a big difference in this kind of planning. . . .which could be especially difficult for first year teachers, unless they were being mentored by someone to help them through it, then it could work. But without a mentor, I think it would be very difficult because they are just trying to survive that first year.

Gary: So you're saying comfort comes from knowing your kids and from being or from knowing that you're a competent teacher?

Kimberly: Well, after a while, teaching becomes a little predictable. After you do the routine a couple of times, you kind of know what to expect. Then you are able to open yourself up to a little more, to some new ideas and new ways to teach. And a lot has to do with the personality of the teacher. Because like you said, there are some teachers who just are comfortable and say "I'm going to stay comfortable because that's what I want."

Greg: For me I would say . . . it's essentially the argument that you do have to have some skills, like there is a set of tangible skills that you can learn as a teacher. And for me that's more of what it is, this first set of skills, not my idea of what of my classroom could be or what it should be but just how do you, say for example, get the classroom quiet when someone is talking? Not just me, but when students are talking. How to make sure to have those things in place, so that you can actually have a situation that's manageable, so I guess that's kind of what I mean by control. Which sounds negative, but when you're talking about students being able to explain something and be respected or heard, it's not me being in control.

Gary: Right, it's just more related to social graces and being able to communicate without arguing or chaos.

Greg: It's just classroom management, which is so huge and complicated it's hard to even talk about but it is you know, 'you need to work on your classroom management' – well thank you so much for that clear objective. (laughter from the group) Like that's the hardest thing, well I don't know if I should say that, but it's a very difficult thing to master as a teacher. How are you going to manage your classroom, because it's connected to your idea of what a classroom should be like.

Kimberly: And the whole democratic piece comes into that because we're talking about making the classroom more democratic, giving the students power over what they learn. I think that how you do that in the classroom is a whole other skill set that we have to develop, because as teachers we're not really taught about how to work with our students democratically. I mean, I know that's supposed to be there in classroom management, but it's not necessarily always there. And especially if you are early in your teaching career when you're scared because you want to have that control. And it's kind of expected that you do have control of your classroom – really. I think that could scare teachers away from this type of project, because you do have to let up on the control. You do have to know how to live and participate in a democratic environment. Where your students are, you know, nearing the same level as you are in the classroom in terms of equality, and opinions and thoughts and decisions. And I think those are skills that also have to be learned or really thought about before going into something like this.

Greg: And those are also ideas that I think a lot of people give lip service to. You know, not that they are doing that in a negative way but where people are like 'yeah, all my students have a voice and you know we're all equals but I'm going to talk now for the next half hour and you're going to listen'. You know, there's a disconnect there with practice and ideals.

Kimberly – (jumping in): I think because they don't see it (democratic practice) they don't know what it looks like. Really, I mean, where do we get that modeled?

Greg: You know, I came across this in graduate school so that means I didn't even see teaching like this until I was teaching for a while.

Kimberly: So if teachers don't go on to graduate school, they will probably never see it because they didn't see it in undergraduate work - it (democratic teaching) was not our focus.

Greg: Yeah, it wasn't the focus. And I had concerns too when I finished professional training. Do I really want to get a degree in teaching? Is that really something that's going to be powerful for me? And I learned right away that it would. But it takes a certain approach. I think I got to a point where, 'I'm ready to learn some new things, that there are gaps here that I want to fill. There's something wrong with the way things are done in schools and I want to know why. I want to know why things are organized the way they are.' So many teachers, if you talk to teachers about why they got started, many of them connected to social justice and thinking about good quality education for every single person in the United States, and that the classroom should reflect that in some ways.

Kimberly: It's interesting because when we started this project last year, I did it three times. The first with immigration, and then two more times in my Spanish 4 class on a smaller scale. And I saw the difference in my class as far the way the students responded to it. On my feedback for the end of the year, all my Spanish 4 kids mentioned it. That was the big thing that came out of the feedback – the fact that they were able to do their own projects where they were able to put their interests kind of at the forefront - and they had the decision-making power in how they were going to present

that information – how they were going to ‘share it’ (which was how they put it) and teach others. They were actually able to pick their own area that they were going to study. It was a little different than the immigration project. And then I went and did the cultural exchange program and spent some time in schools out of the country, in a different school system. And actually the whole time I was thinking back to those projects, because for some reason, getting outside of my own (educational) system and seeing how other schools do things made me think about how our system does things, and about how screwed up we are. And how screwed up the other system was. It was very direct instruction as well. And I’m like ‘No, you’ve got to get the kids involved, give them a voice’ and I thought, ‘so do we!’ You know we don’t do that in our schools. And for some reason I didn’t see that as much as I did until I was out of the system. Criticizing them and yet thinking the same criticism is applicable for us.

Greg: I think part of what moved me in this direction, too, was finishing college and entering the world of work and seeing a gap between the way that we are a democratic society and the way that institutions are organized. Like being part of the work environment and seeing ‘yeah we’re a democratic society but that person, what they say goes.’ And you know that’s something that has been discussed ad nauseam now is that people are looking at institutions in the United States and seeing that they’re not that democratic. You know, within a company and schools as well. I feel as if there are people who are starting to push back on that and one of the ways that they are doing that is with technology. (long pause)

Gary: So do you see doing this kind of planning again?

Kimberly: Well, actually, I’m going to continue with the immigration unit. We’re still going to try to do the immigration dinner with the immigrants and we’ll see how that goes. I’m actually going to continue to do what I did in

Spanish 4 with the individual projects in which they got to choose what they would study and the sharing and teaching among the classmates. I would like to add one more big unit, like the immigration unit maybe in the second semester in the AP class, because it was so memorable for them and was something that they really got into. I'll try to do that, so yeah, I'm still looking at doing it. I learned a lot from it and there are some things that I'd do differently – instead of such an open format, I'll try to bring things together once in a while to make sure they're all on the right track.

Greg: For me the bottom line is I need to meet my students this year and see it where it goes. I think I have a period of time in which I will do a unit that's co-planned with students. I don't know if it will look the same in terms of that particular topic that we did and having the museum. But the (student) feedback on that was undeniable – like the end of year it was 'don't you dare stop doing that museum - it was amazing' (laughter from Kim). Students who were unengaged for most of the year said 'that was a great experience I enjoyed that I learned a lot.'

Concluding Comments

In thinking about our closing discussion, a couple of important implications can be drawn from our article that appear to be relevant to the Agenda for Education in a Democracy (AED), especially in terms of preparing children for democratic life and in training teachers. First of all, both Greg and Kimberly have concerns about the way schooling currently takes place for the majority of students in this country and larger concerns about the erosion of democracy both in and out of schools. As Greg points out, lip service is frequently paid to the notion of preparing students to be citizens (although it seems more likely that a major goal of current educational policy is to reduce education to preparation for participation in the economy), yet relatively few classrooms are consistently organized in democratic ways. Kimberly also sees current systemic structures in education

as barriers to teaching students how to become democratic. My own public school experiences in teaming with teachers who co-planned the curriculum with students were with teachers who also believed that in order to fully prepare democratic citizens, students needed to witness and experience democratic principles in action. In short, teachers who decide to teach in more democratic ways tend to do so **consciously**, often in protest of what they consider to be reductive and standardized forms of schooling that limit the potential and disrespect the humanity of their students (Beane, 1997). As Kimberly and Greg point out, such teachers also take seriously the notion of knowing their students and their interests and respect those interests enough to include them in curricula. Teachers who teach democratically create educational environments that allow them to guide their students to understand and experience education as an interest-based, exploratory, and collaborative endeavor.

Our discussion suggests that moving to more democratic forms of curriculum planning is a process that involves rethinking dominant images of what the work of teachers and students involves. Kimberly and Greg spent considerable time discussing notions of “control” and “classroom management” and seem to conclude that engaging in Type-four Core planning causes those aspects of teaching to change. Most schools are conservative places where changes to the status quo are not always embraced, often making such changes risky for those brave enough to try. For example, as an untenured teacher, the notion of *when* Greg was going to be evaluated by his building level administrator was a critical factor in determining the timing of the Global Genocide and Reconciliation unit. He indicated that he didn’t want to be seen as having no control in his classroom as such a perception would jeopardize a positive teaching evaluation, which could potentially lead to not reaching tenure. Along the lines of tenure, Kimberly and Greg indicated that young teachers, unless under the mentorship of veteran teachers, should probably avoid co-planning the curriculum with their students until they become “comfortable” in the role of teacher. While I don’t want to go so far as to say that young teachers should not co-plan with their students until they get tenure, I would say that pragmatically, it would be

wise for them to first gain the support of the administration.

In referencing their own training as teachers, Kimberly and Greg suggested that democratic forms of teaching were not modeled. I would argue that the current accountability measures being placed upon schools of education by state boards and corresponding accrediting bodies leave little room for teacher training programs to implement democratic practices. As a teacher educator I know a few colleagues who model democratic forms of teaching, but I know far more who don't. As important as modeling what a classroom democracy can be, I wonder if demonstrating a willingness to challenge prescriptive and standards-based conceptions of education by incorporating democratic processes is more important in helping teacher candidates to understand the implications of democratic forms of planning curriculum. For instance, in over ten years of presenting student-teaching co-planning to both undergraduate and graduate students, relatively few of my students have considered it to be a realistic option. After hearing about curriculum integration, many of my graduate students, the majority of whom are practicing teachers, comment that 'this is great in theory, but it would never work in my building.' In thinking about most of my undergraduates, there seems to be reluctance on the part of teacher candidates to move away from the teacher-centered forms of education that they experienced as students. Even more influential to their own practice is the fact that when they become student teachers, very few candidates will see Type-Four core or other forms of curriculum integration in their assigned schools. The irony of all of this is that while the United States was founded as a democracy, there exists a cycle of non-democratic teaching that permeates our educational system from pre-school through graduate school.

One thing that is encouraging is the fact that Kimberly and Greg plan on continuing to use Type-Four Core planning in their teaching. It is our hope that a few of their colleagues follow their lead and begin to incorporate democracy into their own classrooms.

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Gary Weilbacher is an Associate Professor of curriculum and instruction at Illinois State University. He is also the coordinator for the middle level education program.

Kimberly Rojas is a Faculty Associate in the Foreign Language Department at Illinois State University's laboratory high school.

Greg Kocourek is a 7th grade geography teacher at Bloomington Junior High School in Bloomington, IL.