



## Democratic Learning

I believe there are four fundamental needs of children in Learning and in Life;

1. 'Everyone' needs to be loved unconditionally.
2. Every child needs to be seen and heard.
3. Every child needs to be accepted.
4. Every child wants to belong

I am an advocate for life long learning and encouraging the further development of children's knowledge and at an educational workshop recently I learned that a 'national future policy' is to include a 'literacy and numeracy strategy'.

I noticed the proposed national policy was primarily focused on the 'intellectual' aspect of children's development.

Regrettably, attention was not given to *all* areas of the child's development; such as emotional development, social, creative, spiritual and behavioral development. I would like to hear a 'strategy' highlighting the need to develop an understanding of 'mature' relationships'.

In our current society where 'policies before people' has become the acceptable 'norm', I imagine it may be unusual to hear the term 'unconditional love' in the context of Learning and Teaching.

I believe it's time to re-connect with individuals at a 'heart' level. 'Unconditional love' is the key to effective relationships *and* 'policy' development.

We cannot have a relationship with and system; when we view individuals as a 'system' or 'strategy' those individuals will feel like they have not been heard, seen or accepted and they will 'creatively' find a substitute way of being seen- these children may be labeled 'bold'.

I wonder if the metaphor for our 'literacy and numeracy' 'problems' is perhaps symbolic that our children and young people may feel that they 'Literally *don't count*' in a system where 'good results' and 'good' behavior are prioritized over the 'well being' of the child.

In a system that typically sees children as needing to be 'told' what to 'do', rather than working 'with' I can understand why they may feel like they literally 'don't count'.

Can I have a relationship with a system? No, I can have a relationship with an individual and when it comes to education, learning and life, I believe it is the relationship the teacher has within themselves that influences the effectiveness of the learning environment. The relationship between educator and student is determined by the educator's relationship with them self.

Educators and parents have a responsibility to model and reflect how they are when relating to children.

*Are you feeling irritable, impatient, perfectionism or passive around aggressive behaviors'?*

The current Education system teaches children that conformity is *all* that is tolerated. 'Good' behavior is accepted and bad behavior needs to be 'changed' and is viewed as problematic, rather than creative. We need to get 'behind' the behavior to understand it - only then will it subside. When children feel they are heard, unconditionally loved, accepted and belong, they will not *create* 'disruption' or challenging behaviors.

It is paramount that Educators and parents are supported in understanding that 'bad' or undisciplined behavior in the classroom and home is about the child and not about the adult.

ParentsPlace 15 Bremore Castle, Hamlet Lane, Balbriggan County Dublin

[www.parentsplace.ie](http://www.parentsplace.ie)

[info@parentsplace.ie](mailto:info@parentsplace.ie)

Phone: 086-6004340



Children by nature are 'well' behaved but will create 'undisciplined' behaviors to draw attention to unmet needs. I believe adults have a responsibility to understand that a child's 'difficult' behavior is about the child wanting 'someone' to notice the difficulties he/she is experiencing. Education and parenting needs to become a co-creational experience. The only way children will practice democracy is when adults model it. It is imperative we move away from the current traditional one-sided approach (the adult telling the child what to do). The level of maturity of teachers largely determines the well-being of those in whom they have charge. The teacher's relationship with him/herself is crucial to the development of mature student relationships.

*'Currently, how discipline is implemented can be determined and be dependent on the educator's interpretation and experience of discipline, inter-personal awareness and level of maturity. Current discipline = everything, including the feelings of students, must be sacrificed to the imperative of obedience'.*

If we want to raise our numeracy and literacy levels, the learning environment needs to embrace all aspects of the child's development. *'To help students become ethical people, as opposed to people who merely do what they are told, we cannot merely tell them what to do. Our responsibility is to help them figure out -for themselves and with each other'.*

Children need to be included in the decisions that affect them. I have great belief in the philosophy behind the [www.educatetogether.ie](http://www.educatetogether.ie) ethos; in my opinion it is the closest 'we' get to democratic learning. However, implementing any philosophy or ethos is easy in theory; practicing these beliefs will ultimately be determined by the following questions:

- Am I modeling unconditional love for myself and my students?
- Am I seeing the child or just their behavior?
- Am I accepting the child in spite of their behavior?
- Does the child feel like they belong?
- Am I involving the child in decision making? *i.e.: if you were teacher how would you teach this lesson?*

Democratic learning is about supporting educators, students, and parents in understanding self, by encouraging all aspects of self-expression.

*"Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, And though they are with you yet they belong not to you. You may give them your love but not your thoughts, For they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls, For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you." **Kahlil Gibran***

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