

Developmental Dialogue re: Madison, Wisconsin February 2011

Dear Teachers, Parents and Educators,

We are teachers from Children's Community School in Van Nuys, California. CCS is a small independent elementary school dedicated to John Dewey's philosophy that education for all of our youth is fundamental to maintaining a democracy. A group of us attended the NDSG conference on Feb. 18th to the 20th. Many people left the conference in Illinois on Sat. the 19th to join the protesters in Madison, Wisconsin, but some of us stayed behind to think of other ways to provide support to the teachers and children of Wisconsin. We wrote this curriculum framework to support teachers in talking to their elementary school students about what is happening in Madison and why it's important. We would love to hear from you if you try some of these ideas out in your classrooms. It would be wonderful for all of your ideas and suggestions to be shared with other teachers across the country.

In Solidarity,
Sarah Day, Robyn Lawrence, Angela Lloyd, Lindsey Young
(And thanks to Joan Bradbury for helping us bring our ideas to you.)
With much appreciation for the North Dakota Study Group,
www.ndsg.org

Civic Action Dialogue In Your Elementary School Classroom

The following is a curriculum framework for helping elementary school students connect to and understand what is taking place in Madison, WI. We hope teachers will use this as a starting place for creating an inquiry appropriate for their own students and classroom.

-Start a conversation about **basic rights**. Make a list. *What are your basic rights?*

(We have a basic right to a free and public education). Connect basic rights of children to basic rights of adults. *Are there rights that you think adults have that children don't have? Why might that be? Are there rights that children and adults share? Why might that be?*

-What do people do when our basic rights aren't met? Is there a time when one of your basic rights wasn't met or was denied? What did you feel? What did you do?

-Example of farm workers unionization; share story of Cesar Chavez. (Harvest of Hope) (Chavez' birthday is March 31.) Civil rights movement.(Ruby Bridges story, many others)

-**Unions** form to protect the rights of all workers. They are groups of people who unite for a common cause.

-Find classroom examples of how multiple voices are stronger than one (Aesop's Bundle of Sticks is a wonderful illustration of this concept).

- Experiment with materials – thread, raffia, and thin yarn... that as single strands each can be broken. *How can you make this thread stronger?* (Braiding is one way, making rope is another, forms of weaving are a third, and children may discover others.) (As an example, children can look at embroidery thread.)

Civic Action/ Developmental Dialogue re: Madison, Wisconsin (cont.)

-What actions can people take as a group to get or keep a basic right?

(Hopefully responses would include letter writing, listening, talking with people, peaceful public protests, and intentional civil disobedience.)

-What happens when protest turns violent? Is violent action ever ok?

- Ask students if they know someone in a union, especially a close family friend or relative. They could interview that person about their experience and invite them to talk to the class and answer questions about their experience with a union and being a member. Teachers may use their own resources as well.

-Strike- When a group of people unites to defend their basic rights by refusing to work until their demands are met.

In a **democracy** we have a voice and can negotiate issues. In Wisconsin, the families, teachers and public workers are protesting and demonstrating because they are not being given the opportunity to have a voice, a place at the discussion table.

- Specific to one school example (find an example that's relevant to your school).
 - Democracy is demonstrated in staff and classroom meetings when everyone comes together to make decisions that will impact the group. Issues can always be added to the agenda as they come up and time is made to hear everyone's voice.

Is it important to you if someone else's rights are being denied? (For teachers: How do you get your students to take interest in a problem that does not directly impact them?)

A possible in-school example for younger children:

-If another class' recess was taken away from them, but our class still got our recess time, how would you feel for the other class?

-Could it happen to you too??

*-What could you do to show whoever made the rule that you disagree with their choice and want to **negotiate**?*

In Wisconsin, the firefighters and the police officers are demonstrating, protesting alongside the teachers even though their basic rights have not been taken away. Across the country, (around the world) all ages and walks of life are writing letters, making posters, talking with each other, singing and drumming, sharing stories to support those in Wisconsin - saying, "we are with you". Our lives, the future of our families, schools and workplace is at stake. We are with you - we are listening.

*In Solidarity,
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