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Democracy in Middle Grades Education: Editorial Remarks

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As this decade wraps up amidst polarized political discourse and uncertainty, it seems fitting that this issue of *Middle Grades Review* be dedicated to an exploration of democracy in middle grades education.

We are honored to open the issue with an essay written by James Beane, one of the most influential scholars to explore the promise of democratic possibilities in schools. Beane has long informed the field of middle grades education, particularly through his compelling work on integrative curriculum. In “This is What Democracy Looks Like: Some Thoughts on Democratic Schools,” Beane invites us to imagine which schooling arrangements and practices embody a democratic culture, and he calls on readers to examine various points of resistance to attainment of that vision.

In the second essay of this issue, Kleine and Lunsman describe their intellectual journey through several models of and theories on teaching for democracy, including Beane’s work. “Conceptualizing Democracy as Preparation for Teaching for Democracy” details the authors’ consultation with the literature and their analysis of their own positions. Through this process, they construct a foundation for creating democratic curriculum experiences for teacher candidates in order to build a chain of influence reaching to the public school students taught by graduates of their program.

Luz M. Casquejo Johnston next offers readers a rare perspective, bridging Montessori education with the tenets of AMLE’s seminal *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010). Although this essay was not submitted specifically to this theme issue, we found it deeply relevant, as some

Montessori scholars assert that “...we wait too long to teach and allow children to engage in democracy...in contrast Montessori schooling teaches children to live and work inclusively” (Williams & Keith, 2000, p. 1). Drawing parallels between two intentionally designed learning environments for young adolescents, Casquejo Johnston illuminates how Montessori’s Erdkinder model is responsive to the nature of early adolescence while encouraging participatory democracy.

We also offer two practitioner perspectives in this issue. First, Hilburn, Oliver, Varnum, and Roseboro use a genealogy of displacement to frame a collaboration between students, educators, and community partners to recover and digitize news stories from *The Daily Record*, an African American owned newspaper that was attacked and burned in the late 1800s. In “Recovering Lost Local History: *The Daily Record* Project,” these authors provide the historical background, detail the project and its diverse participants, reflect on its suitability for young adolescents, and call on readers to develop a similar project by identifying moments in their own communities that fell short of democratic ideals.

Finally, in “Fostering Student Agency to build a Whole Child, Whole School, Whole Community Approach,” Pinter, Bloom, Broyhill, and Winter detail their experiences with democratic schooling as they explore the concept of student agency. These authors describe a laboratory middle school whose core values include building a democratic community that embraces social justice. They leverage teacher and student voices to illustrate how student agency functions as a democratic principle in their

setting, emphasizing the roles of collective leadership and personal identities in that endeavor.

We are grateful to the authors of each of these pieces for providing powerful visions of what democratic education in the middle grades could, and in some places does, look like. As a whole, these essays and practitioner perspectives provide a way for readers to conceive of and practice, as James Beane stated, "a public democracy, committed to human dignity, a common good, social justice, and equity."

References

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