BOOK REVIEW:

We, the Students and Teachers: Teaching in the History and Social Studies Classrooms

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Maloy, R. W., & LaRoche, I. S. (2014). We, the students and teachers: Teaching democratically in the history and social studies classroom. SUNY Press.

In the book, We, the Students and Teachers: Teaching Democratically in the History and Social Studies Classroom, Maloy and LaRoche (2014) argue that the teaching of social studies is best served by employing democratic teaching methods in social studies classrooms, and that in doing so, students will be more prepared to engage in a deliberative democracy. The authors refer to democracy as “America’s most cherished concept” (p. 1) and propose a practical framework intended for use by social studies teachers to make their classroom more democratic and student centered allowing students to find their purpose through civic dialogue.

The book is centered on what the authors call, the “Seven C’s” (p. 210), which include, contrasting, conducting, collaborating, conversing, conferring, co-constructing, and connecting (p.210). A chapter is devoted to each ‘C’ to help provide background into the field of social studies education, democratic teaching strategies, and reflection for current or future social studies teachers. The authors wish the readers to see their book as a “Jazz Composition” (p. 1) which can be adaptable for many teachers and used in classrooms that have diverse demographics.

The authors of We, the Students and Teachers draw on their experience as teachers of future social studies teachers, and their own personal experience teaching social studies. They utilize qualitative data that they collected from pre-service teachers and teachers in the field; both provide insight into the perceptions of how the social studies are taught and why teachers teach the way that they do. They tackle two contentious arguments within the field of teaching and social studies education, including the debate between teaching history as a lone subject or as part of a broader social studies context, and the debate between teacher-centered vs. student-centered teaching; the author’s side with the latter position of each debate.

In an effort to mitigate the inequalities that are perpetuated through exceptionalist narratives in weakly framed academic content standards and text books, the authors provide various democratic/student-centered alternatives that teachers might use to be more representative of a broad and diverse culture. One compelling story of a teacher, an entertaining and skilled lecturer, who became concerned that all of the attention in his classes was focused on him. This motivated him to seek a democratic alternative to teaching that employs inquiry-based learning and a focus on the student.

Student voice is a major theme in We, the Students and Teachers. It is through listening to students that teachers cease to be the center of attention in a classroom, and the authors suggest that creating democracy within classes is key to allowing student voice to be present. The authors reflect that at times students may resist this change because they are conditioned throughout their educational life that schooling is memorizing and answering questions. However, it takes time to learn that learning is more multiple choice tests.
The authors recommend some democratic strategies including flipped classrooms, which give students the opportunity to access some curricular materials at home, and the added benefit of working collectively in class during the school day when entire classes meet. Using class time for students to use their voices, rather than teacher explanation, is a great way to model democracy and give students the opportunity to deliberate.

Deliberative democratic strategies allow students to collaborate and discuss through dialogue how problems can be solved and how to go about answering important questions. Creating a deliberative space in a classroom can open up the doors to learning that could not take place with a teacher-centered approach. The authors point to what is called “Slow Democracy” (p. 74) which “promotes deliberative decision making over quick solutions and majority-rule politics. Although people often seek rapid solutions to pressing issues, “deliberation implies that, ideally, we will not only talk together, we'll decide together” (P. 74). This strategy is key to dispelling the myth of binaries that exist in our political system, and creates additional options beyond just “a” and “b” (p. 79). The authors also suggest that traditional debate in social studies classrooms might leave many students behind, and that creating collaborative environments, focused on “dialogue-focused discussions,” (p. 121) students who might not always be involved will be included in a space for learning.

We, the Students and the Teachers, is not just another book about the importance of democratic learning or an argument to assuage teacher-centeredness, but it is a guidebook that offers practical advice that can be used by social studies teachers in diverse settings. The authors suggest that teachers observe other teachers while in college-level preparation programs to see the difference between dialogical and monological communication. They suggest that teachers record themselves and look for the way that they phrase statements and questions; suggestions that can only be helpful to new and experienced teachers alike. Democratic teaching and learning is not a new concept, especially in the social studies, but for pre-service teachers, and those in the field, the authors do a nice job of marrying theory and practice in a concise way that are both convincing and helpful. Unfortunately, all of the strategies suggested are complicated in a standards-based system, but the authors offer helpful suggestion in navigating this system.

In sum, We, the Students and Teachers, is a fresh take on an old idea and offers strategies that will edify the social studies teaching practice toward inclusivity and democratic engagement. The authors write, “We believe teachers make learning more democratic by giving students opportunities to examine and propose solutions to meaningful problems, by providing students with relevant resources for learning, and by offering students consistent feedback that holds them accountable for their decisions and actions” (p. 8) By offering students the opportunity to deliberate, and by listening to students, social studies teachers can connect students to civic action and service learning, and avoid the harmful assumption that all students are literate in traditional forms of civic studies.
I think that *We, the Students and Teachers: Teaching Democratically in the History and Social Studies Classroom* are great because they are so attention holding. I mean you know how people describe *We, the Students and Teachers: Teaching Democratically in the History and Social Studies Classroom* by Robert W. Maloy, Irene S. LaRoche good books by saying they can't stop reading them, well, I really. It is yet again another different look at an authors view. I know it seems like I am just highly suggesting every single one but I really am, these are very good books. To download and get a free *We, the Students and Teachers: Teaching Democratically in the History and Social Studies Classroom* or read online for free, please [click the link button](#).