

2008

## Finding Our Voice: One School's Commitment to Community

Dianne C. Suiter  
*Central Academy, Ohio, Principal*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/jec>

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Suiter, Dianne C. (2008) "Finding Our Voice: One School's Commitment to Community," *Journal of Educational Controversy*. Vol. 3 : No. 1 , Article 20.

Available at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol3/iss1/20>

This Special Section 1 is brought to you for free and open access by the Peer-reviewed Journals at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Educational Controversy by an authorized editor of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact [westerncedar@wvu.edu](mailto:westerncedar@wvu.edu).

## ARTICLE

### **Finding Our Voice: One School's Commitment to Community**

Dianne C. Suiter, Ph.D.

Principal, Central Academy, Ohio

[View video of the Central Academy Town Meeting](#) (or [click here](#) for a Mac version of the video).

John Goodlad's body of work speaks clearly to the responsibility of schools and those who implement the work of schools to accomplish a two-part mission: to both introduce students to "the organized bodies of knowledge that discipline and enrich our lives as citizens, workers, parents, and individual human beings" (1979, p.ix), as well as to "enculturat[e] the young in a social and political democracy" (1979, p.ix). At our small school in the Midwest, founded on Goodlad's writing and work, we begin this process the moment a student walks through our doors.

We do this in many ways throughout our days together, both in how we structure our academics as well as in how we carry out the general work of the school. One of these ways is through helping introduce students to a process of what we refer to as "finding our voice." We see our sense of voice as that intrinsic barometer that causes us to speak up when we think something is or isn't taking place for the good of the community as a whole, or an individual within it.

On a wall outside the office of our school, student-made letters proudly proclaim: "We Find Our Voice. Dr. Suiter Gets Letters!" Beneath this student sign with equal pride, I stick letters that I receive from students throughout the year. Frequently, I also stick up a copy of my reply to those letters. Occasionally, the letters and replies result in more letters and replies as other students add their voices to the issues being discussed.

When Gabby wanted someone to repair the latches on the door of one of the restrooms that are situated between her Late Primary room and an Early Primary classroom, she used her voice and put it in writing.

Dear Dr. Suiter,

I think the girls should have a lock in the bathroom stalls between Mrs. Brubaker's and Mrs. Amburgey's [classrooms], because two of the classes keep walking in on each other. They don't mean to but because we don't have a lock it's hard.

I think no one would like to be walked in on.

Sincerely,  
Gabby

Gabby handed me the letter as she arrived at school that morning. As soon as all of the students had arrived for the day, I passed the information along to our custodian, who had been unaware of the situation. By ten o'clock that morning, men from our warehouse stopped by in response to his call, and installed a latch on the bathroom door. I was able to write the following response to Gabby and take it to her before her lunch that day:

Dear Gabby,

I just wanted you to know how much we all appreciate your letter. Because you took on the responsibility to get something fixed by writing me a letter, you have made things better for all

of the girls in your class and Mrs. Amburgey's class.

Until I received your letter, neither Mr. Schenck nor I knew that there was a problem. You not only got my attention, and Mr. Schenck's attention, but you got the district's attention. The two men who came to fix your stalls were from the school district.

Speaking up to make things better for others can be important. Thank you for taking the time to let us know.

Sincerely,  
Dianne Suiter

Pretty powerful work for a nine-year-old! Of course, not all of the letters are about matters as impacting as locks on the stalls. But all of them are important to the students who write them.

When thirteen-year-old Ian became frustrated about our recess policy, he voiced his opinion in a letter also.

Dear Dr. Suiter,

I do not think it's fair that Intermediate students don't get to play with footballs during recess. Because after the whole time I've been here no one has gotten hurt playing with a football. I just wanted to write this note to you just saying that it's not fair.

From,  
Ian

Our school is a small, public, urban school in the Midwest. Our student body is diverse: Roughly 65% of our students receive free or reduced lunches and breakfasts, the remaining 35% come from families with all kinds of socio-economic situations, ranging from grandparents raising grandchildren and single-parent families confronting an increasingly inflated economy on hard-won hourly wages, to parents who are doctors or attorneys. About 35% of our students are of color, with about half of these students being African American, and half bi-racial. (This percentage is interesting in that our town has approximately 15% people of color.) Another sizable group (although more difficult to quantify) are urban Appalachian families, frequently struggling with low or no wages.

Our classes are multi-aged, with students of approximately two year's difference (sometimes a bit more) working together. We are divided into three levels with the following approximate ages: Early Primary (ages five to eight), Late Primary (ages eight to 10), and Intermediate (ages 10 – 12).

Students stay with the same teacher for two years, once as a "younger" or "rookie," and again as an "older" or "pro." We also take great pains each spring, as our staff works collaboratively to place our older students in new classes for the next year, to make certain that classes are heterogeneously grouped – looking carefully at creating a social mixture of gender, race, special needs students, ability levels, and social constructs.

While most visitors immediately notice our multi-aged groupings and the lack of academic and structural grades, those who look closer see an equally strong commitment to preparing our students to be active participants in a democracy.

We are a closely-knit community as a school; in fact students, teachers and parents frequently use the phrase, "We're a family," in describing our school to others. Our school song even begins with that

phrase. With philosophy and practices that uphold a no-competition stance, our students and staff begin quickly after joining us to strive to help and care about each other at a remarkable level. And, as in any family or close community, we not only work together in agreement, but also learn to work together in disagreement at times.

The fact that we are a very diverse school community, gives all of us the opportunity to learn with and from each other, both as adults and children, on a daily basis – to grow in appreciation for each person's innate abilities and contributions to the whole. We offer an experience to become committed to the democratic ideal that brings all kinds of people together – living and working in community.

With educational conversations currently bogged down across our country in the minutia of standardized test results and how to “lower the achievement gap” found in these test results, adding dimension and depth that focus on the need to sustain and nurture a generation of well informed and productive citizens has become critical not only to the survival of schools like ours, but also to the survival of a thriving and productive democracy in our country. Indeed, as a nation we seem to have forgotten one of our chief responsibilities, the “obligation in a democracy to empower the young to become members of the public, to participate, and play articulate roles in the public space” (Greene, 1985, p.4).

Instead, educators increasingly find themselves becoming technicians trained to deliver state and nationally determined curricular objectives in an attempt to create student “products” who can quickly recall and dispense an alarming quantity of memorized information, which by its very nature must be delivered at an equally alarming pace to afford the necessary coverage of material. Heaven help the eight- or nine-year-old student who is not able to perform and deliver this information at a set time on a set date, for that will clearly indicate not only that student's total lack of ability, but also the teacher's and school's inability to perform at an effective or excellent level.

Apple and Beane (1995), however, challenge educators to focus in an entirely different direction, which they see as inviting “young people to shed the passive role of knowledge consumers and assume the active role of ‘meaning makers’” (p.16). They see this process as involving two goals:

One is to create democratic structures and processes by which life in the school is carried out.  
The other is to create a curriculum that will give young people democratic experiences (Apple & Beane, p.9)

Learning to find one's voice and, in doing so, to become an active meaning maker and member of a democracy, primarily takes place in three settings at our school, each of which is interwoven with the others on a larger loom.

We first structure our classrooms in ways that encourage and gently push all students to make decisions about their own work as well as that of the classroom community. We also structure our school to encourage students to use their voices in making school-wide decisions. And, finally, we offer opportunities and help to guide students into issues beyond the school walls, helping them to experience first hand both the power and the responsibility of being a citizen.

## **Finding Our Voice in the Classroom**

As we plan the structure and activities within our classrooms, we try to do so in ways that will encourage and nurture student choice and activism, thereby giving our students a chance to experience and learn it from within, as a part of the way we work together. This kind of intrinsic, gut-level

understanding of how to be a member of a community, then, becomes a habit – both in mind and heart (Meier, 1995).

While each of our students has individual goals developed with her teacher quarterly, all but our youngest students work from learning contracts, which indicate work needing to be accomplished in specific periods of time, ranging from a week to two or more weeks. Some of the work on these contracts is teacher-defined; other work leaves more room for the student to bring individual interests and choices to the assignments. Importantly, the selection of work and order in which it is to be accomplished is left to the students.

We work in large blocks of time each day, with approximately half the day devoted to language arts and the other half of the day to math. Our social studies is interwoven into our language arts block, and our science weaves nicely into our math blocks. Of course, in reality, many activities and projects integrate into both of these time blocks, helping to create a far better reality base for our learning. We frequently comment that the only time thinking and learning come in neatly segregated and labeled categories is in a school classroom. The real world is alive with integration and an energizing messiness of connections. Thus, as often as possible, student and class projects integrate with real-life situations and use of academic skills.

Students not only have the empowerment and responsibility to select their work order and, in some cases, how this work will be accomplished, but also if they would like to work alone or with others. Students frequently choose to work in small groups of two or three, with lively conversations about how to accomplish the task, and a great deal of learning from each other in this process. Classroom supplies are organized throughout the room, readily available to all students whenever needed, thereby eliminating student dependency on adults.

Since, in addition to being heterogeneously mixed, our classrooms are also fully included (meaning that we have no special pull-out classes for students needing specific assistance), when one of our teachers with expertise in assisting special needs students with IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) comes into a classroom, she frequently works with students of all levels of ability. Anyone needing help at that point with any work is welcome to seek her assistance or join a small group lesson that she is giving.

I particularly enjoy seeing our students who are district-identified as gifted going to get help at times from these teachers. They learn an important lesson in democracy and community: Everyone has specific gifts, we each have something to offer, and we all need assistance at times. It is also heart-warming to watch as students who learn some specific skill easily move automatically to help another student when needed – helping one of our sight- or hearing-impaired students, or another student who is still struggling with parts of that skill. All of our students have moments when they can offer help. Several of our special needs students are excellent at offering assistance, particularly to younger students.

Another way that we mindfully address the issue of finding one's voice is through a circle meeting in each classroom. Each day, students gather with the adults in the room (in addition to the classroom teacher, this may include a teacher aide, a visiting teacher for special instruction, myself, or occasionally a visiting parent). We sit in a circle so that everyone is equal and we all are equally included visually with each other. Some classes gather on the floor, others circle their chairs.

The rules of the circle are simple: You must actively listen (no side-bar conversations or comments allowed). We go around the circle one at a time to speak and no one may jump turns. When your turn arrives you may choose to speak or pass. All are expected to show respect to others (no eye-rolling or

other nonverbal cues of disrespect or disagreement). And the rules apply to all – even the adults!

Sometimes the conversation in these circles is simply a time to reflect on class work and interactions – to share concerns or what we call appreciations of others. Sometimes it is to address specific situations or behaviors that are a concern. Frequently, this latter circle is called by the teacher, but it is not unusual for students to ask for a circle to be called also.

When the circle is called to address a specific behavior or social conflict, we frequently use a protocol that calls for each student in the conflict (usually this ends up being two specific students) to speak uninterruptedly to tell what they perceived happened. Once they have done so, they may not add to the story later. Each of the two students has one opportunity to do this, with no interruptions or arguing from anyone. Then we begin to go around the circle with the focus from this point forward being on problem-solving. Everyone focuses on ideas for how the problem might be solved – no more additions to the stories at this point. When enough possible solutions have been suggested, and everyone has had an opportunity to speak, the two students involved in the altercation are asked if they can pick one of the suggested options as a means for resolving the conflict. This almost always solves the problem, with the entire group feeling as though they helped in that solution. Equally as important, students feel accountable to each other – not just to adults.

## **Finding Our Voice in the School**

When I first came to the school, many of the teachers shared with me that school assemblies could be a challenge. In particular, some of our Intermediate students, entering into an increasingly social stage when impressing peers is exceedingly important, had difficulties behaving while seated in the bleachers. The structure of bleacher seating, on the other hand, also made it more difficult for teachers to keep an eye on students and support them in their behaviors. So we decided to have the Intermediate students sit on the floor of the gym. Since our youngest and smallest students sit in the middle and front of the floor, we put the Intermediate students on the two sides of the gym floor. Then, with the gym floor full, and in order for the remaining students to be able to see well, we have the Late Primary students sit in the bleachers, behind the Early Primary students. This meant that only four classes of students used the bleachers, and recognized it as a privilege, thereby cutting down substantially on the numbers of students crowded into that part of the gym.

This arrangement seemed to work well, but by the end of the following year of school, several of the Intermediate students felt unhappy with sitting on the floor. At the same time, several small groups of Intermediate students began to consistently arrive and depart from assemblies with purposefully loud voices and difficult attitudes. Other students, seeing their behavior, would also begin to follow suit, frustrating teachers and other students.

When my frustrations bubbled over at the end of one of the assemblies, I asked the Intermediates to remain seated while the Late Primary students, who had been consistently very well behaved, modeled how they left the gym to return to class. Of course the Late Primary students felt tremendously empowered and very proudly modeled excellent behaviors as they left the gym. When the Intermediate students left, they also modeled excellent behavior. Mission accomplished. I had clearly made my point. But in my frustration, I had failed to realize that I was making the point at the expense of the Intermediate students, many of whom had an equally good record for following our agreements on arriving and leaving gatherings.

Thinking about it as I helped to clear the gym chairs and equipment after the assembly, I realized the mistake I had made and thought about what I should do to try to correct my error in judgment.

Students, however, often have a way of keeping us honest. By the end of the day, I had received a letter from one of the Intermediate classes. Respectfully worded, it laid out their frustrations with the seating arrangements and asked that I come to talk with them about the situation.

Dear Dr. Suiter,

A lot of kids think that the Intermediate should sit on the bleachers. The little kids are smaller and can sit longer in any position. Plus, we are the oldest kids in the school, so we should be the ones to sit in the bleachers.

We think that we can prove that we can sit in the bleachers quietly. Please give us a chance.

Sincerely,  
(almost all of the students in that class signed their name)

I was thrilled. The letter immediately opened up the conversation, and helped to bring the matter clearly to the center of consideration by both students and adults. It also gave me an immediate structure to apologize for my lack of judgment. (An important lesson to be learned in any democracy is that we will *all* make mistakes at times – kids and adults – and we must then learn how to correct the mistakes and make things right.)

I met with the students the next day. Sitting in our circle, we began our dialogue. I opened with congratulating them on their letter, praising its honesty and respectful tone, and then followed that with an apology for my own lack of judgment. They had made some valid points in their letter, chief among them the fact that, as the oldest in the school, they deserved a chance to prove themselves.

We went around the circle with each student having the opportunity to state their feelings about the matter at hand. When it came my turn to speak in the circle, I agreed that there should be some recognition of their being the oldest, and therefore the leaders in the school. But I pointed out that there were still some Intermediate students who were having a hard time following our agreed upon code of behaviors for assemblies. I asked them how we could handle that difficulty.

No one disagreed with my observations about some of the Intermediate students. They all recognized that simple fact, including a couple of the guilty who, for the most part, readily volunteered the bad choices they had made when it was their turn to speak.

When the time came to end our conversation (we usually agree upon a time limit before beginning one of our circles), we were pretty much in agreement that we all had made good points, but we were still unable to come up with a solution. I challenged them to keep thinking and let me know if they had any other ideas to help solve the problem.

By the next day, word arrived as three very excited students stopped me in the hall to say they had an idea. At the meeting that day, the same three students suggested that we use the school folding chairs for our Intermediate students, reasoning that they would still be seated on the gym floor, but in more comfort, and within good “eye shot” of their teachers.

It sounded like a great idea, but I expressed concern with asking our school’s only custodian to set up and put away over ninety chairs each time we had an assembly. The students agreed that didn’t seem quite fair. Another student suggested that the Intermediate students bring their own classroom chairs with them to the gym. A reasonable solution. But, I pointed out, since their classrooms were the furthest from the gym, there was a very good possibility that the noise of all Intermediate students moving through the halls with their chairs could disturb other classrooms. At the conclusion of this

discussion, we agreed that we were closer to a decision, but still hadn't come up with a completely workable solution.

Several days passed as several teachers and I found ourselves trying to solve the problem, amicably arguing the various pros and cons of suggestions. About a week later, another group of Intermediate students flagged me down, to tell me proudly that they had worked out a plan.

Once again we met in our circle in a classroom, and the students laid out their plan. Each of our four Intermediate classrooms should appoint several students to be their classroom "chair setters." Then, shortly before each assembly, these chair setters would come to the gym and set up just enough chairs for their classmates and teacher. After the assembly, they would also stay a few minutes to put the chairs away.

This sounded more than workable to all of us. The only question I had left was what we should do in the event that a student did not respect our behavioral agreements for assemblies. As we went around the circle, many suggestions came up. We finally agreed that if a student did not behave, the teacher should ask that student to come and sit on the floor in front of him or her for the remainder of the assembly. At the next assembly, the student should be given the opportunity to try sitting in a chair again.

We have basically used this plan (as well as some minor modifications of it) at all of our school assemblies since then. Perhaps even more important than the plan itself, is the fact that it was the product of student voice, and agreed upon, not through voting (with accompanying winners and losers), but through consensus as a whole. Some of the students who helped write the original letter gathered signatures for it, or came up with some of the ideas, still speak with pride about the incident, even though they are now in high school. It clearly helped them clarify the power of their own ideas and voice in a community.

## **Finding Our Voices in the Community**

Once students have found their voices in the classroom and school, it never ceases to amaze me how quickly and at what young ages they learn to speak their feelings about community happenings outside the school. An incident that began as a lesson in government for our Late Primary students is an excellent example.

The state curriculum calls for our fourth-grade students to know the three branches of government as well as the local, state, and national levels of government. But simply memorizing these facts carries no meaning or relevance for students, so our teachers try as much as possible to tie information into the real world. While studying local government, our students began to follow our own city council, learning about local issues and deciding how they felt about these issues. One local issue about whether to open the city swimming pool for the summer in spite of shrinking funds gathered great interest.

While following the local political actions and debates, a series of controversies broke out within our city council, resulting in some very heated arguments between Council members. At about the same time, for various reasons, two of the City Council members resigned. Making the situation even more interesting, one of the two resigning members was the only African-American on the council.

A class discussion arose over what would happen next, resulting in some hands-on research in the workings of local government. When the students discovered that it was up to the remaining City

Council members to appoint two new members, interest heated up.

Sixteen local citizens applied for the two positions. As such, each candidate's brief biography and picture were put into the local Sunday newspaper. The teacher, seeing this as an excellent opportunity to take learning to the real world, got copies of the paper and brought them into class. She then divided the class into mini-city councils, charging each mini-council to come to agreement on which two candidates they would pick and why. A great deal of reading and debate ensued as each group worked to come to consensus.

Several days later, the City Council announced that they would interview each candidate on the local cable TV channel, and the students eagerly asked if they could watch the interviews. Class discussion determined that it might be possible to pick one candidate based on the biographies alone, but with the additional information gathered from the interviews, they might decide to back a different candidate.

The teacher marveled at how engrossed the students were in the interviews. Sixteen interviews, after all, can be a lot of adult talk for eight- to 10-year-olds. But instead of tuning out, the students stuck with it, some of them even watching the interviews from home.

Partially through this viewing and discussion of the interviews, another classroom discussion arose around equity. With the resignation of the two council members, there was no longer any representation of Blacks on the city council. When one of the students pointed this out, the teacher posed the question, "Do you think someone should be selected based on the fact that they are Black?"

Once again, very young students astounded us with their insights and thoughtfulness. The ultimate agreement from the class was that if all things were equal, then a Black candidate should definitely be picked in order to balance and represent the people of color in the community. What was more, several of the girls in the classroom pointed out that it was also important to have a woman on the council for the same reason.

At the completion of the interviews, the classroom mini-councils reconvened to come to their decisions. Each of the mini-councils selected at least one candidate who was Black. And each of them also gave very definite reasons for the people they had selected based upon the interviews and biographical information.

When the City Council announced their selections, the two new members were both white males. The students came to school amazed, angry, and wanting to do something. Another classroom discussion led to a decision to write to the City Council and express their opinions and rationale. Since our students begin to learn and use Power-Point in Late Primary, several students asked to put their ideas into a Power-Point presentation. Work began immediately as a small group volunteered to put the program together.

As the group produced material, it was reviewed and critiqued by the class as a whole. An excellent discussion developed about what wording to use to express how they felt about the Council's decision. The teacher cautioned them that while it was very important to express their feelings, it was also important to do so in a manner that would help to ensure that the Council members would not get defensively angry and stop listening.

After a great deal of debate and thought, the students came up with, "our mini-councils were disappointed because African-Americans were not represented on the council." I particularly liked this term *disappointed* for its respectfulness, as well as for its power. (How bad does an adult feel if a group of eight- to 10-year-olds tells you that they're disappointed in you?!)

Just as the Power-Point was being finalized, yet another chapter in our local government unfolded when the Mayor also resigned. This opened even more discussion about conflicts and disagreements, and what and how they can be handled. Since many of us as adults spend a good deal of time avoiding conflicts, this was a particularly powerful lesson for young students, and an important one to learn about how to be a citizen. More than once I wished that some adults could sit, unobserved, and listen to what the students had to say as they worked through this issue.

To their credit, the Council selected a Black woman to fill the position of Mayor. Since she had been one of the top candidates for several of the mini-councils, the students were quite pleased. They quickly revised their Power Point, leaving in the part about their disappointment and why, but adding an addendum congratulating the City Council members for selecting the black woman, giving the Council a better representation of the community, and concluding with, "We hope the new council members are good at their job and agree and disagree with respect."

When the students sent the Power-Point to each of the City Council members, they received very favorable responses from each Council member. Additionally, three of the Council members came individually to meet with the students.

For those who might ask how do you justify taking this kind of time on one subject, several anecdotes that happened after this project may best respond:

About a full month after all of this unfolded, I decided to put it into a short article for parents. As I sat trying to write it all down, I became confused with a few of the details. (After all, a lot had happened for one small city!) So I went to the classroom to ask the teacher to help fill in a few details about the events and their order. When I arrived at the classroom, the teacher was teaching a small group lesson with five students, while the other students worked on their individual learning contracts.

Looking up to see me, Sam immediately came over to show me his work. I talked with him for a few minutes about his work and then explained that I had come down to ask Mrs. Brubaker some questions for the parent article I was writing about their city council project.

Sam immediately volunteered to help me in place of Mrs. Brubaker. I asked him one of the easier questions about who had resigned. He immediately began recounting names and the sequences of events. Overhearing our conversation, several other students began to join in. I ended up sitting back, taking notes and marveling at the degree to which the students knew names as well as governmental structures and processes. The fluidity and depth of their opinions about the various events as they recounted them were even more impressive. While everyone in our small town knew some of the overall happenings, I would have been surprised to find many adults who could have recounted the details to the degree these students did.

When talking with parents over the next couple of months, I was also surprised at the degree to which the parents recounted the impact this project had on their children. Students were asking parents to please find the broadcast times of the City Council meetings on our local cable channel, and checking the newspaper for further events.

Clearly, this unexpected project, originating from teacher-guided curriculum, but further developed through student interest, had influenced student understanding of not only the subject matter, but also the degree to which these students saw themselves as active members of our local community specifically, and democracy in general.

## John Goodlad's Dual Challenge

John Goodlad's challenge to both introduce knowledge to and enculturate our students in a "social and political democracy" (1979, p. ix) has grown even more critically important given the national trends in education for the past fifteen years. Learning that is separate and cut off from the rich flow of reality not only risks losing students through boredom or the age-old question, "Why do I have to learn this?," but it also risks retention and translation of skills outside the narrow boundaries of the text in which the skill was presented and learned.

In *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching*, Goodlad, Soder and Sirotnik (1990) stress that the most often assumed goals for schools involve "promoting intellectual processes through encounters with knowledge" (p.21). But he also cautions that

knowledge too often is translated into inert bits and pieces – in a sense, the garbage left behind in the human dialogue rather than the stuff of dialogue itself. ...[We] fail to realize that embedded in the subject fields of the school curriculum are the ordered ways created by humankind for structuring experience ... [and] the richer one's repertoire for interpreting human experience, the greater the prospect for living a rich life (p.21).

The current push for state and nationally dictated curricula and standards, rather than helping us to improve student understanding and preparation for becoming active citizens, is frequently having just the opposite effect. Public judgments about school, teacher, and student quality of learning and teaching based solely upon standardized tests frequently send teachers and schools head-first into the throes of what they see as improved preparation for these tests. What often results are students who, while they may be able to answer the "bits and pieces" of the standardized test questions at a higher rate, have not had the opportunity to experience and wrestle with processes to increase understanding of what it means to be human and to bring our knowledge of that experience into our interactions in a society with other humans.

George Wood (2005) has suggested that perhaps the best way to renew our vision for schools is to view our students as citizens, thus

... open[ing] up our vision to a whole new set of skills and abilities that are required of them. The list is almost endless – critical thinking, information gathering and processing, debate and listening, a sense of the common good, service, the ability to see the world through the eyes of others, and a sense of civic courage or the ability to act in the public interest even when the costs are high, to name but a few. It is a list of attributes that requires schooling that models these skills (p.xxiii).

Nearly one hundred years ago, Dewey (1916) challenged that in order for us to nurture and grow our democratic way of life, schools must present lived opportunities to develop an understanding of what a democracy is. Our public schools remain the strongest and most logical places in which to help our next generation learn the meaning of a democracy and how to best lead productive lives contributing not only to their own well being but also to that of others – not in a series of memorized *blips*, but at a head and heart level throughout each day.

Schools and educators who strive to do this, even in the face of oppositional outside forces, realize the importance of finding one's voice in this process. And, as Deborah Meier (2000) has pointed out, "There will always be tensions; but if the decisive, authoritative voice always comes from anonymous outsiders, then kids cannot learn what it takes to develop their own voice" (p.24).

At Central Academy we take this challenge seriously.

## References

Apple, M. & Beane, J. (1995). *Democratic Schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: Macmillan.

Goodlad, J. I.(1979). *What schools are for*. Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Goodlad, J. I., Soder, R. and Sirotnik, K.A. (Eds.; 1990). *The moral dimensions of teaching*. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Jossey-Bass.

Greene, M. (1985). The role of education in democracy. *Educational Horizons*, 63.

Meier, D. (1995). *The power of their ideas: Lessons from a small school in Harlem*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Meier, D. (2000). *Will standards save public education?* Boston: Beacon Press.

Wood, G. (2005). *Time to learn: How to create high schools that serve all students*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Press.