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The Erosion of Democracy in Our Schools

With the increasing push to fight a war in the name of democracy, it is incumbent on us as citizens to examine our own state of democracy.

As an educator it is becoming increasingly evident that we are experiencing an erosion of democracy in our school systems. I will offer three examples to make my point. First, I am in awe that our 'democratic' government stripped the budgetary decision making powers away from a group of publicly elected school trustees and in their place appointed a supervisor. The trustees are publicly elected and are entrusted with ensuring that the needs of our children are being met. When the government introduced a funding formula that even they agree does not work, the trustees did what any responsible citizen would expect them to do. They did what is best for our children; namely, they defied an unworkable funding formula.

The Toronto Board is one of the three boards that have had a supervisor imposed on them. The total cost to the Board for Paul Christie, his assistant, a communications consultant, and an auditor is approximately 500,000 dollars. Paul Christie, appointed by the government now has to make the decisions that all publicly elected trustees have to accept. Is this is democracy? No. It is an example of the erosion of democracy.

A second example of the erosion of democracy becomes evident when we examine the government's curricular documents. The documents titled the *Ontario*

Curriculum have resulted in the curriculum, what students learn in schools, being created centrally. Now, the government can boast that all students all across the province are learning the same thing. Anyone who has been in a several classes within a single school will quickly recognize how inaccurate of a myth this claim is. However, the government is desperately trying to make this a reality. If they do succeed, is this a desirable thing? Do we want a society where everyone is forced to learn the same things, regardless of their interests and needs? We are dealing with human beings, not computers that need to be programmed. Not giving students, parents, and teachers a say in what they learn by imposing a document that dictates what students will learn at every grade is undemocratic.

Third, another important aspect of democratic education revolves around social justice. By focusing on issues like gender equity, anti-racist education, and by developing a curriculum that leads to an amelioration of our society, then democracy will be revitalized. In an undemocratic fashion, yet consistent with the current administrations drive to erode democracy, they have taken these initiatives out of the current documents. *OSIS* and the *Common Curriculum*, the two documents in place before the *Ontario Curriculum* was introduced, recognized and made social justice an explicit part of the mandate. The new documents are interested in training students, rather than educating them about social justice.

In conclusion, before we criticize other countries for their undemocratic practices, let's revitalize democracy within our own borders, starting with our education system.

Students cannot simply be taught about democracy out of textbooks but must live according to the principles of democracy in our schools. Until students start to practice democracy in our schools, democracy will continue to erode. When democracy gets reintroduced in our schools we will experience its revitalization in society at large.

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