

**Evolution Toward Democratic Community:
A Teacher's Journey**

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(ABSTRACT)

This qualitative study followed the classroom practices of a second grade teacher across the course of a school year. Data collection methods used included interviews, fieldnotes, observations, various site artifacts and photographs. Informants were the classroom teacher, thirteen second grade students, the building principal, and several colleagues, family members and friends identified by the teacher.

The study used literature in the fields of critical pedagogy and democratic educational practice to interpret the teacher's work. Analysis suggested that the second grade class group evolved toward a sense of democratic community as the teacher: 1) provided the foundations of relationship, high expectations and belief in her students; 2) created classroom structures that supported the growth of moral intelligence amongst class members; and 3) extended opportunities for students to regularly contribute to and actively participate in class experiences.

Findings suggest that a sense of democratic community can not be quickly or easily realized. As this teacher sought to foster its development through building foundations, creating support structures and extending opportunities to her students, she experienced unpredictability, risk and struggle. Significantly, however, she perceived her daily struggles as opportunities to reflectively reconsider her teaching practices. As she continually assessed and refined her practices, she and her students grew as a mutually supportive community.