Only life educates: 
Mobilizing knowledge in communities and classrooms

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Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896-1934)
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Only life educates

Our only concern is that there exist within the very nature of the educational process, within its psychological essence, the demand that there be as intimate a contact, and as close an interaction, with life itself as might be wished for. Ultimately, only life educates…
(Vygotsky, 1926/1997b, p. 345)
Arizona’s restrictive context

• AZ policies represent an ideological trap that ensnares not only students into low-level work, but also constraints teachers, preventing them from offering students a more favorable and expansive pedagogy.

• The central feature of this trap is that it *curtails what counts as affordances for learning*, preventing teachers and students from building on the ample cultural resources in their environments.
More restrictive policies

- AZ has implemented or is proposing a series of anti-immigrant and anti-Latino measures that have produced great stress on many families.
- Changing demographics: “cultural generation gap”
- The four-hour block: reductionist pedagogy
- AZ language policies lack any research support & have not produced benefits for students
Curtailing access to resources

- First language development
- Access to L1 speakers
- Academic emphasis
- Family funds of knowledge
- New technologies
- Meaningful pedagogy
- Dynamic assessments
Educational Sovereignty

• The strength and power a social setting like a school can garner by developing strategic social networks to create “cultural spaces” that will enhance its autonomy, mediate ideological and programmatic constraints, and provide additive forms of schooling for its students.

• Four examples:
  
  ITELL Academy (García et al, 2011)
  Smart education systems (Simmons, 2009)
  La Clase Mágica (Vásquez, 2003)
  Social Justice Education Project (Cammarota & Romero, 2009)
The state’s official position re: SJEP

According to the State: "A school district or charter school in this state shall not include in the program of instruction any courses or classes that ... are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group."

- The program is seeking the overthrow of the US government
- It is divisive & designed for one ethnic group, rather than individuals
- It exempts other ethnic groups from the ban, but targets Mexican American students
- State will fine the District 10% of budget (about $15 million) if it insists on retaining the program.
Our only concern is that there exist within the very nature of the educational process, within its psychological essence, the demand that there be as intimate a contact, and as close an interaction, with life itself as might be wished for. Ultimately, only life educates, and the deeper that life, the real world, burrows into the school, the more dynamic and the more robust will be the educational process. That the school has been locked away and walled in as if by a tall fence from life itself has been its greatest failing. Education is just as meaningless outside the real world as is a fire without oxygen, or as is breathing in a vacuum. The teacher’s educational work, therefore, must be inevitably connected with his [or her] creative, social, and life work. (p. 345)
Partial References


