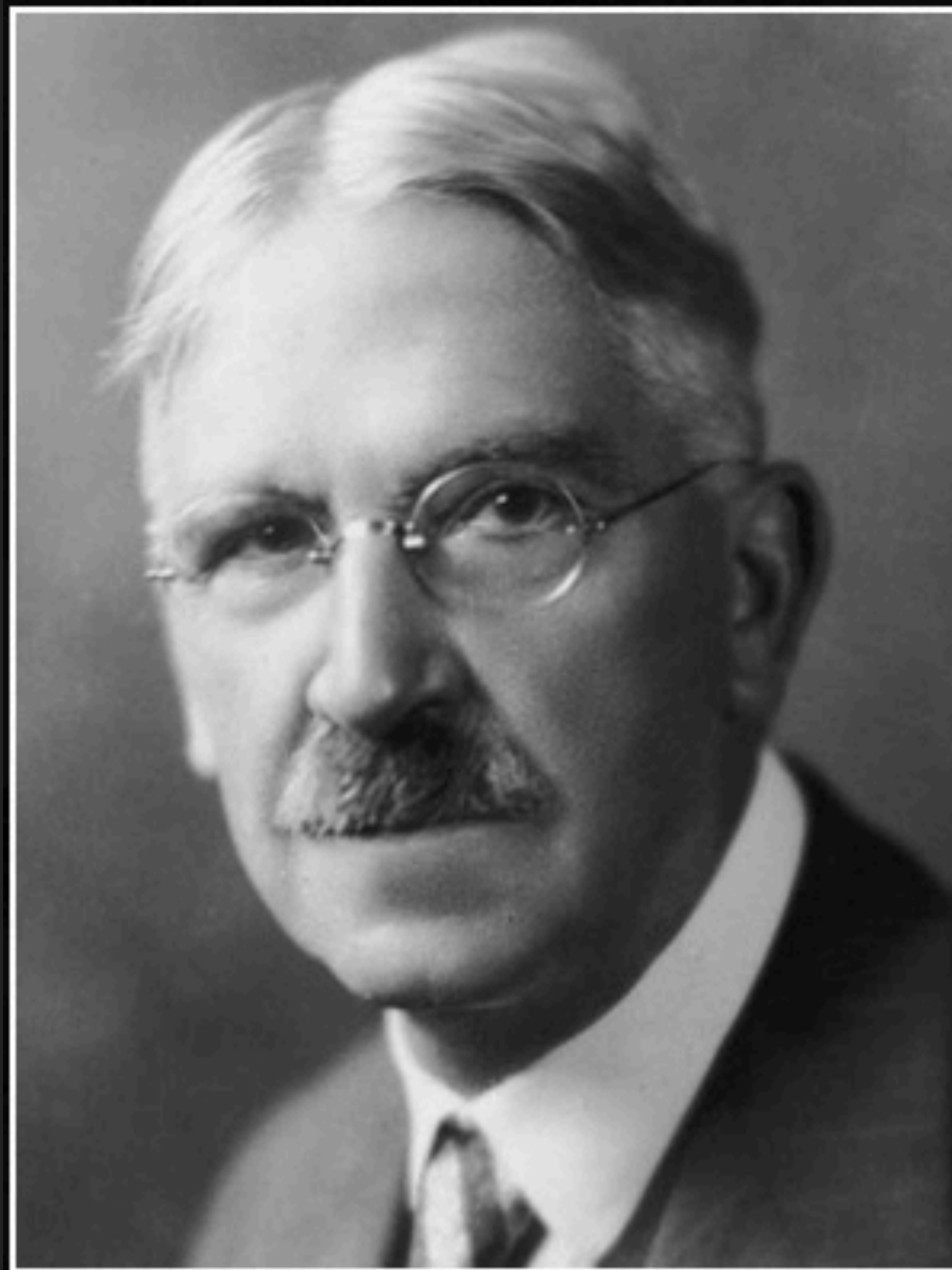# EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY

IMPLEMENTING A CLASSROOM DEMOCRACY IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM SPACE
BY: JUSTIN CAMPBELL

Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.

— John Dewey —

Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.

— Paulo Freire —

AZ QUOTES

CONTEXT

▸ My teachable's are History and English and I teach in Intermediate/Senior Division

▸ My assignment occurred in a Grade 10 de-streamed history CHC2D/CHC2P and a Grade 12 Literacy course OLC4O in an online

▸ In implementing a classroom democracy, I utilized a variety of forms of feedback and a wide range of practices, from digital exit cards to gauge student engagement and interests to providing multiple avenues for interclass feedback and discussion in student work

▸ 3 methods of feedback delivery and engagement.

▸ 1. Student to Teacher

▸ 2. Student to Student

▸ 3. Teacher to Student .

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. HOW CAN A CLASSROOM DEMOCRACY APPROACH BASED AROUND FEEDBACK HELP MAXIMIZE STUDENT GROWTH AND SUCCESS?

2. HOW CAN THIS BE DONE WHILE AT THE SAME TIME MAXIMIZING TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS IN TEACHING SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS COURSES?

RATIONAL: THE ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CAN END UP FEELING A LOT LIKE THIS!

RATIONAL

▸ In the online classroom space students can feel isolated or disconnected from the learning process and from one another

▸ The feedback process which is integral to the teaching and learning process can therein be hampered due to distance and learning can feel disengaging and isolating

▸ To ensure proper feedback and development of an engaged community of online learners I hoped to utilize different forms of feedback across multiple platforms and methods to help make students as important to the learning process as me

▸ In this way lessons and learning even in a asynchronous class such as in my literacy course can be engaging and the students can be an active part of the process of learning by helping to guide content and modes of instruction
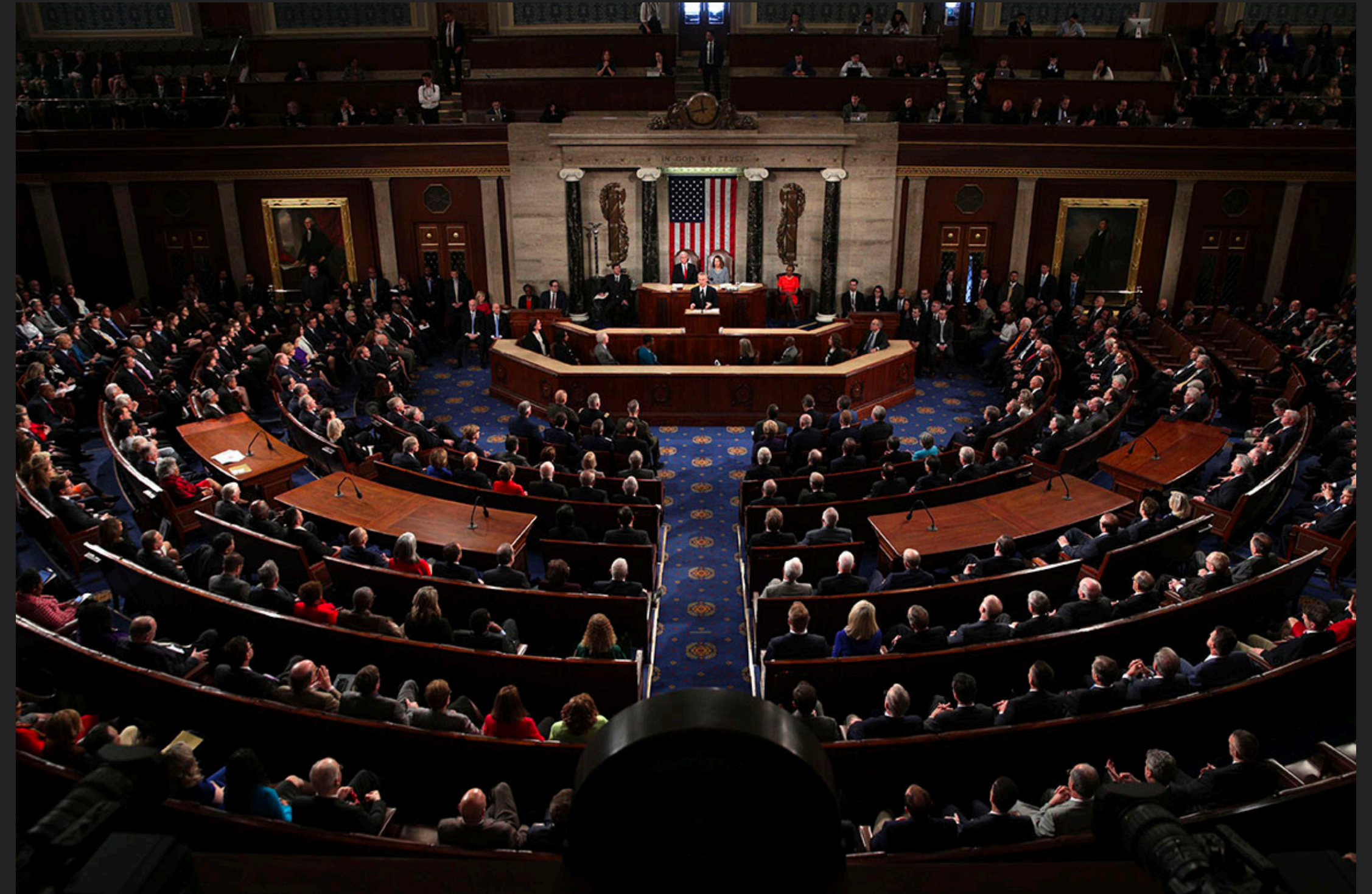
RATIONAL CONTINUED

▸ One of the most fascinating things I found surrounding this topic was the complete lack of research surrounding the topic of classroom democratic practice and the online space.

▸ While the application of classroom democracy and its pro's con's and various methods have birthed a wide body of research the application of this concept in the online space is remarkably absent.

▸ Thus In trying to study this model and its application I think that what I was trying to do was actually quite novel as in my searches I was unable to find an extensive study on this concept in tandem with the online space itself

METHODS CHC2D/CHC2P

▸ In implementing a classroom democracy style based on feedback I aimed to utilize a few different methods of feedback to help mold class content and engagement

▸ While the unit I was teaching being World War 1 is quite rigid due to the necessity of incorporating Canadian Military history I utilized a form to tailor this historical coverage to their interests and to focus materials on the elements of this history that they personally found engaging.

▸ Along with these forms such as voting I aimed to allow students to give feedback and work together by incorporated peer to peer, as well as continuous teacher student feedback for myself and others through dialogue as well as through google forms.

Primary Source analysis and peer to peer feedback

Mandatory work: Analyze one of the primary sources and focus on using two key concepts in your answer: Cause and Consequence and Evidence. Use your knowledge of the economic history and political theories which were rising to prominence at this time.

Primary source analysis: 200 words *

Long answer text

PEER TO PEER FEEDBACK EXAMPLE

▸ For example one of the ways I would institute classroom democracy in this example was through peer to peer feedback

▸ As you can see here I would get students to anonymously submit their work to a form where I would post it on the discussion board anonymously

▸ So students would work to correct each others and learn not just from teacher feedback but from students across the class and give an opportunity to acknowledge each others accomplishments and learning

▸ In this way students could learn to disagree respectfully and express differing points on view in a respectful manner and learn from one another as well as from me.

METHODS OLC4O

‣ Multiple feedback delivery strategies through discussion answers to various Google forms

‣ Exit cards for classes

‣ Formative questions designed to check, understand, and stimulate discussion are posted for students to respond to. They then provide feedback to their peers' responses, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

‣ Another key component for this class was using a democratic vote for Content tailoring: For example, asking a class where they saw a particular text before and the type of content they found most engaging within a given subsection of our required classwork

‣ In practice for my delivery of the literacy course or OLC4O and our coverage of infographic texts, I first asked where they had seen said subject matter they found most interesting to engage with. Next, I asked if the delivery of said questions needed to be easier, a little harder, or were just right.

‣ In doing so, I modelled our classroom democratically around the curriculum so students were able to receive feedback and give me and each other feedback through their discussion post work. In doing so, they were learning on their own terms, which helped them increase their literacy for the things that they needed, such as reading articles about their favourite musicians or interrogating the infographics they see on their social media every day.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS VICTORIES AND ISSUES

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS: VICTORIES CHC2D/P

▸ Now comes the question: did this actually help to yield any positive results and help to maximize teacher and student effectiveness in the online learning environment?

▸ I believe that it was a success due to

▸ 1. performance of students and increases in quality of work and responses

▸ 2. participation across class activities and discussions as well as student work

▸ While these findings could also be attributed to increased trust in me as a teacher over time student comments and feedback to me were increasingly more positive. I attribute this not just to personality but to the effective usage of the method I incorporated to teach the students I had.

▸ I believe that by utilizing student choice and various methods of feedback across the divide I not only became a more effective teacher and made a larger impression, but many students performed exceptionally well due to continuous and respectful feedback practices throughout the course

▸ My AT in fact remarked at the above average performance of the students in the online environment and the polish with which they formed their work

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS: VICTORIES OLC40

▸ I believe that this was also a success with regards to the literacy course.

▸ By allowing student choice and working with their feedback students across each lesson student responses were Increasingly lengthier and most importantly more impassioned and nuanced.

▸ For example, by incorporating student choice in analyzing an article surrounding a recent study which showed a sizeable minority believed Taylor Swift was colluding with Joe Biden to help him win the election I received sizeable responses from students who on average would only contribute the bare minimum for previous class materials

▸ Moreover, the use of feedback and classroom democratic practice in the online environment saw an overall increase on average of 20% overall due to tailoring my material to their interests

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS DOWNSIDES TO CLASSROOM DEMOCRACY

▶ The problem with the democratic classroom model in the online world, like in the in-person classroom space, can be paralleled with the problems with actual democratic practice in the political sphere.

▶ Representative democracy only functions based on the amount of representation presented to the powers that be. Much like Canadian election figures, which for the last ten years averaged 63.08%, in gauging feedback and creating a democratic classroom space, you have to keep in mind that a large chunk of the total voting base won't vote or won't care to engage in it.

▶ However, despite these limitations, engaging in a democratic form of pedagogical practice allows students to be active participants in the classroom and to provide feedback to you. As an instructor, you can gauge and reconfigure your practice according to the needs and demands of your constituent body and see improved results as well as continuously improve your practice.

▶ Not only this, but by allowing for a democratic exchange regarding content, you can increase engagement and see benefits in how many students engage with a class even in the limitations of an online classroom.

AUTHENTICITY AND CROSSOVER

▸ In concluding my findings, I feel as if while my attempt was successful to introduce the concept of classroom democracy into the online space, which I found to be quite positive and beneficial to student learning I feel as if the authenticity of my findings may be slightly skewed due to an other few factors.

▸ Again, in classroom democracy, like normal democracies, participation is limited by those who choose to go to the ballot box, just like in any class or election. While the results were fruitful, this may have been just because a group of keen students aligned with those who participated, making the results slightly skewed.

▸ While this opportunity to mould content and increase engagement may have been traceable due to how I set this study up, this could have just aligned with students who were keen to participate in the first place. Moreover, more engagement could have come out of comfort or interest in the topic regardless of whether they chose it or not on a given day. This may have come from a stroke of pedagogical luck in which side-tracked conversations lead to more engagement in the classroom chat due to an off-topic or exciting conversation that may be tangentially related but not critical to class content.

NEXT STEPS

▸ While this approach worked in this environment and with these classes, its implementation was limited by both time and learning space. I was limited to only three weeks of classroom teaching, which gave me little time to implement it effectively unless I bombarded students daily with continuous voting practices, which can take away from class time.

▸ While this sort of activity and democratic input work well online and in smaller doses, implementing them in a physical classroom would be more challenging and radically different in practice.

▸ I will continue with this approach, as despite the increased work and time needed to approach this in a class focused only in a physical classroom where computers and platforms for fair voting are far more rare and time-consuming, I believe that this approach genuinely helps to maximize the effectiveness of teachers and student learning in any space.

▸ This fact is also corroborated by research investigated while I was on prac

CORROBORATION OF RESEARCH

▸ While a classroom democracy is valuable, especially in the online space, in the physical space these challenges become amplified.

▸ This is "Because conventionally educated students have so little experience of any freedom in school, so little practice with democratic discussion or with assuming authority on their own, they will often mistake democratic, positive freedom practices for negative freedom only. Students may thus see the teacher who asks for democratic input as weak or unprepared, and they may attempt to evade, rather than make, their opportunities" (Morrison, 55)

▸ While the approach may have its draw backs, it all in all is worthwhile as it turns students and their approach to education from a gamified and factory model approach, to one which can increase student comfort and genuine participation.

▸ " [a host of researchers] identified that teachers who are democratic stimulate instead of using [a pressure, they win cooperation" instead of demanding it, they guide instead of dominating, help instead of punishing, etc." (Kwitonda, 4)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

▸ Kwitonda, J. C. (2017). Foundational aspects of classroom relations: associations between teachers' immediacy behaviours, classroom democracy, class identification and learning. *Learning Environments Research*, *20*(3), 383–401. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-017-9231-3

▸ Morrison, K. A. (2008). Democratic Classrooms: Promises and Challenges of Student Voice and Choice, Part One. *Educational Horizons*, *87*(1), 50–60.