A Summary and Opinion on “Safety and Excellence”

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Abstract

This paper looks at a summary of John Merrow’s article “Safety and Excellence” and includes a summary as well as my opinion on Merrow’s thoughts. This article is a great resource for students looking at teaching or anyone working with kids. It is important for teachers and learners to understand the importance of physical, emotion, and intellectual safety within the learning environment. The opinionated part of this paper is strictly Ali Kowalenko’s thoughts and the impact Merrow’s words had on me and the lessons I drew from it as I enter classrooms this semester.

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A Summary of: Safety and Excellence

John Merrow help readers understand the difference between good schools and excellent schools in his article, “Safety and Excellence”. The article takes three different definitions of safety and uses them as the main argument. Physical, emotional, and intellectual safety are the three forms of safety that need to be implemented in schools in order to create an excellent, and safe space. The article begins by breaking down the importance of physical safety, in other words the easiest to understand form of safety. Merrow states that “most public schools are physically safe places to be” (Merrow, 2004, pg. 19) and this can be easy to understand when looking at the different types of lockdown procedures and safety tactics taken by schools. It is the zero-tolerance policy that has caused schools to become more dangerous. Merrow argues that these suspensions are causing emotionally dangerous situations for the schools therefore not remaining an excellent school. Emotional safety is Merrow’s second form of safety that he argues creates an excellent school. Too many children are told to “get tough” (Merrow, 2004, pg. 24) and it is the influence coming from the adults that are creating an attitude amongst children that leave them scared to ask for help. “Adults have a duty” (Merrow, 2004. Pg. 25), this statement indicates that adults need to be aware of the surroundings and although they may not be able to stop the teasing they need to create an environment where children feel safe and loved by the community around them. Merrow suggests having the teachers and students work together to create rules within the schools so the children feel a sense of responsibility and aim to protect their school. Lastly, intellectual safety is the last staple in an excellent school. Children need to be encouraged to do well in school, without creating a competitive environment. It is this trinity that creates an excellent school and where children will succeed.

Ali’s Opinion on: Safety and Excellence

This article shares the same views that I have when it comes to the question of safety in schools. Too many educators are perfectly fine with having a school that qualifies as “good” rather than pursuing excellence. Merrow breaks the definition of safety down into three sub-definitions. Physical, emotional, and educational safety. All three of these qualities of safety need to be checked off for a school to be considered excellent. As a student-educator my goal is to enter into a school and help make it excellent. I need to create an environment in the classroom that is physically safe, emotionally safe, and intellectually safe.

Growing up I was homeschooled after my mom realized that the school I was attending was not excellent. She believed that she could create an excellent education for her kids on her own and throughout elementary I would attest that she did a fantastic job. My mom created an environment where I could learn safely. We could play outside, ask questions, and we were encouraged to struggle and find the answers. When I went to school in grade 7 it was a shock. I was faced with experiences that I was not used to and was not fully prepared to face the amount of kids in my grade and the amount of free time that we had. Safety seemed less talked about when I was in junior high. I would argue that physical safety could have even been questioned. We played games in physical education that led to kids being sent to the hospital in an ambulance. The genders were split in our gym class however there was competition amongst the girls that was unhealthy and easily argued unsafe.

Emotional safety was something that I did not fully understand because it is not something I have fully experienced. “Get tough” was the motto in my family and school. Merrow helped me understand the importance of emotional safety and makes me want to create an environment in my classroom where kids feel welcome to talk to me about anything that is going on. Going back to the school I attended in junior high, all the students wore uniforms. We all had a few options but basically we all wore the same thing. The principal of the school was very strict when it came to things like tucking in our shirts. There were days that the back of my shirt would be untucked and I would receive detention and if it happened again the principal would use duct tape around my waist. This punishment made me stick out in the crowd and make me feel stupid. Merrow would likely cringe if he heard this story. I will use this experience to create a space in my classroom where kids feel so safe.

Intellectual safety was another sub-definition that I thank Merrow for breaking down. I am so thankful for his perspective on failing and creating a space that allows students to ask for help. Society expects people to be the best and there is no room for failure. Children need to feel the room for failure, they need to ask questions and we need to create a space where children feel safe to have that opportunity.

All in all, there is something to be said about Merrow’s article and that would be that schools need to not be alright with just being considered a “good” school and need to pursue being an excellent school. Teachers need to look at this responsibility and treasure it. I want to create a classroom where kids can leave at the end of the year and feel like they were each encouraged to create safe environments wherever they go.

References

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