

Sizerian Analysis

Jamie Sheehan
Dr. Mahoney
EDFN 211
February 10, 2018

Introduction

Throughout *The Students Are Watching*, the Sizers make the reader envision themselves in the situations they are describing. There are several examples throughout the book that brought me back to my schooling experiences as a student and made me view it in a different way, from the perspective of the educator. Throughout the reading, I understood how the student was feeling because that is all I know, since I have been a student my entire life. The Sizers allowed me to look beyond what I thought I knew and believed, and made me question how I deal with moral, educational, and personal dilemmas in the workplace as a future educator.

Grappling

The chapter *Grappling* presents many ways to handle a problem, how one would deal or overcome such an issue. The Sizers argue that content connects to human values through curriculum. They are suggesting that the content presented is not linear, it is multi-dimensional and encompasses more than just the facts of what is known to be true. Content is directly related to ideologies, politics, values and issues in everyday life. I believe the teacher is responsible for making the curriculum applicable to real life. The Sizers say that “wise schools use these places for grappling, not only for matters normally expected in (say) a science or history class” but are brought into the classroom at the discretion of the teacher (25). Teachers and students need to grapple with what is presented and apply it to situations outside of the school.

“When will I use this?”

Classes use textbooks to aid the learning of material, but the teacher must bring relevance to the content. Students often say, ‘I’m never going to use this in real life, why are we learning this?’, which causes disinterest from the students. The important point the Sizers are trying to make is that “each student’s habit of confronting, and thus deepening, his or her understanding of values” comes with time (25). The students need to learn how to take their knowledge and make sense of what is being presented. Often students memorize content because they believe it is ‘neutral’, ‘non-controversial’, and ‘irrelevant’, but what they do not see is that the teacher is trying to push them to apply the content. It is hard to understand why we spend years learning the history of wars, how to solve a polynomial, or why Shakespeare is relevant to one’s life today. The vast content that is presented to students throughout their schooling is to help mold them into well-rounded citizens. It is to make them competent in all areas and handle situations that life will eventually throw at them. More educators and schools need to show that they believe in their students and that they are not just trying to pass them through.

Teachers have a much more complex job than many other professions. Teachers are held to a certain standard and must embodied beliefs and dispositions that make them qualified to educate young minds. Many teachers say that the best way of knowing how to teach is through experience. College courses can only prepare a teacher for so much; the greater half of knowing how to teach comes by doing. When the Sizers say that “teachers can and must handle these dual purposes of schooling”, that being teaching curriculum and making children more confident, it should not be done “by throwing their hands up in despair or finding a way to blame college teachers or politicians or even the children’s parents, but by reveling in the complexity and the purpose which makes their craft so much more important than those of so many other people” (47). This is suggesting that

aside from presenting content, teachers must be role models, parents, a friend and a confidant to their students.

Bluffing

A teacher wears many different 'hats' while at work. Those hats are all the different roles they are fulfilling at one time. It is important to remember that the teacher was once a student and to understand the perspectives of their students. The chapter *Bluffing* shows perspectives from both the student and the teacher being unprepared and how they both dealt with their similar situations. When teachers are not prepared, what are they supposed to do? I believe if I am unprepared for a lesson, bluffing to my students is an unrealistic standard that I will be setting. Mistakes happen, and although a teacher should be well prepared in their content area, there will be times when life gets in the way and affects my preparedness for work. Myself and the student are not that much different. If I expect the students to be honest with me and raise their hand if they did not do the assigned task for class, then it is my responsibility to let the students know that the lesson for today was not prepared to its fullest potential. It could be argued that teachers should just bluff in this situation and do not show the student that they are weak. I believe if a teacher wants honesty from their students, they must be honest with their students, even if it makes them look 'bad'. The reality is that teachers were once students too, feeling the same emotional and personal stress that comes along with school.

Us teachers need to remember that the reason a student bluffs their preparedness is because they fear being wrong. Students would rather pretend they did their work than admit that they did not understand the content, did not have time to finish it or that their home life did not allow them the time to do their work. I need to encourage wrong answers in my class because as humans, we learn best from our mistakes. By bluffing, pretending they know the information, students and teachers are still showing effort that they care. They care enough to pretend to be engaged. As a teacher who will inevitably have students who will not complete their work, it is important to know the individual student. Knowing what is normal of a student, and what is expected from them will help me decide how to handle the situation. A standard of what is expected in my class will be set from the beginning. It is important to establish the tone of the class because if the students have a realistic idea of what is expected of them, and the consequences that come from their lack of effort, hopefully that will instill incentive in them to want to uphold those standards.

School System

Giving the incentive to want to reach their fullest potential is crucial when you are a teacher. When thinking of the environment that schools promote, they are a place where there are "attempts to help children to develop their minds" in "both intensely personal and intensely social places" (46). The school "needs to be a place of honesty and precision" because teachers are collaborating to make the students thoughtful citizens (47). To encourage honesty is better than setting an unrealistic standard that makes students fear being wrong causing them to bluff. If the students see mistakes from the teacher they will understand it is okay to fail every now and then and to grow from their experience.

Instilling fear into students to meet the requirements, instead of having open communication of the stance of the class, is not the most beneficial. Most schools are overcrowded and require teachers to have over a hundred students, moving at a fast pace, which allows little time for accuracy and time-consuming work. The Sizars suggest that "the problem is that we have not been willing to arrange things so that Dick could do his work in a fuller and more time-consuming and effective way" (115). This is the reality that I remember all too well. I remember being lost in the content, but we had to keep going with the lesson even though most of the class did not understand. The school system is designed to keep everything on a tight time schedule because of standardized testing at the end of the school year. As a student, you see the teachers struggle trying to teach content that is not understood because of the lack of time. If there was no pressure of standardized tests and the focus was more on knowledge instead of memorization, would the school system be more effective?

tive?

Cramming Content

I believe if the pressures of standardized testing were not relevant in schools, then teachers could take more time to explain key concepts instead of moving on to get every piece of material covered. Something that the school could arrange differently is the number of students that each teacher has throughout the school year. Along with the issue of standardized pressures, the teachers simply do not have enough time one on one with each student, and as a result many students slip through the cracks. Students may show knowledge on homework but that is only surface information that the teacher is seeing. If the teacher had less students they would be able to see the where students are struggling more easily and spend more time on concepts that need to be reiterated to be fully understood.

The students' feelings are not always considered because of the requirements the teacher is expected to meet. The students do see the panic in the teacher and as a result, they are fearful. They see that if their teacher just had two more days to go over a concept they would feel confident. Instead, the teacher moves on and the students are left fearful and discouraged. Dick could do his best to understand where the issues lie in his classroom. If the issue is that he has too many students to develop thorough lessons, then he could try to balance what is taught in class and what the homework is. The homework can be used as a tool to have the students come to class with some prior knowledge about what the lesson is on the day, instead of having them come in knowing nothing. It is the planning ahead that will be most effective. Seeing where the class is struggling and accommodate those needs, not pushing forward and creating a domino effect of a lack of not understanding.

Being prepared with future content handy will allow the students who understand concepts to work independently or in groups while the teacher works with the other students that are struggling. Assigning the same work to the struggling students for homework will give them time to look over content and then teach the lesson to everyone the next class. This is a way of maximizing the time in the class, while moving at different speeds for different students. A good teacher "understands the fears with which each student is dealing, and how great a tolerance each one has for threats" (114). The key is to not give generic advice, but rather "the specific version which can only come from the student's own facts, and from knowing each child well" (114). Effort is the best thing a teacher can put forth. Not saying there is not time for anything, but going out of their way to accommodate for everyone to the best of their ability. Work with the system instead of against it.

From the perspective of the teacher that I did not see before, I feel that *The Students Are Watching* brought my attention to a lot of areas of the school that I never considered before. Because of this book, I feel that it is important to analyze and regularly check my progress as an educator. Not only should I be focused on what progress the students are making, but I need to monitor mine as well. Progressing in my teaching abilities is important because with more failures and more experiences, I will become better equipped to handle difficult moral, educational, and personal dilemmas.