



How to Effectively Shape the Next Generation Citizens

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Abstract

As educators we have not yet mastered the perfect curriculum for cultivating active citizenship. According to the International Civic Education Study (ICEA), which tested students from 24 democratic countries, the United States' students ranked 6th in overall understanding of democratic structures. However, the report goes on to conclude that, despite the impressive ranking of students understanding of processes and structures, students' knowledge is superficial and fact-based (Ross, 2001, p. 394).

In our education system students are continuously presented with a limited perspective of history consisting of a laundry list of facts, a how-to for citizenship, and a limited array of skills. Facts are a part of history education; they are needed to establish historical foundations. Yet it is crucial to help students make sense out of facts and learn how to evaluate them; so how would education have to change to include this? In exploring civic literacy in the elementary classroom, we turned to a group of diverse young adults with active civic engagement, in hopes of uncovering common threads in their educational experiences. Through a series of interviews, eight civic-minded individuals were asked to contemplate their years of schooling, especially their elementary years; reflecting back on the curriculum presented and how it affected them throughout their education and lives. Their thoughts feeling and experiences provide a portrait of the construction of a civic-minded individual.

Kuhn's three stages of epistemological development are used to explore this convoluted issue of considering the optimal civic literacy content for the elementary classroom. The study discovers a dialectic relationship between various key components which applied in conjunction with each other, requires education to redesign what is viewed as "essential" knowledge" and to consider alternative ways of viewing oneself and others.