

"Creating Engaged Citizens: Civic Skills and Civic Education"

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A Definition of Engagement:

working with others, over time, to
get something done for mutual benefit

Parsing the definition...

1. working: work is hard, it takes effort, and the tasks are not easily accomplished.
2. with others: engagement is a collective effort; decisions are made with other people, not in isolation or by voting. Differing perspectives and desires of members are taken into account.
3. over time: tasks require a sustained effort necessitating multiple interactions.
4. get something done: engagement is active work, undertaken to make a change, to have an impact. It is not solely a cognitive, analytical or reflective process.
5. for mutual benefit: the group has a shared goal; the work is done for the benefit of the group or others outside the group, not exclusively for individual members.

A Continuum of Engagement: Individual to Collective Behaviors

Volunteering (One on one service or provision of assistance)	Community Service (A group provides a service)	Service Learning (Service, either individually or as a group, linked to the classroom curriculum)	Community/Civic Engagement (Work with others to improve a community but not explicitly through political venues i.e. nonprofits, churches etc.)	Political Engagement (Work with others through explicitly political means including electoral and non-electoral venues)
Individual ↔ Collective				

What we (think we) Know about Engagement

<u>Evidence:</u> What seems to matter (be correlated with adult engagement behaviors)	<u>Commonly used Explanatory Concepts:</u>	<u>Contexts:</u> Settings that seem to contribute to engagement
<p>Strong consistent evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income of you and your parents Education of you and your parents (historically true but now declining) Participation in extracurricular activities during high school* Discussion of politics (at home and school)* Simulations of government experiences* Student voice in school governance* Communication skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge Motivation/interest Values/morals Dispositions Civic Skills Networks/invitation Social capital/trust 	<p>Family</p> <p>School</p>
<p>Mixed or less robust evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteering (historically correlated with all types of engagement, increasingly correlated with community but not political engagement) Service learning* Formal classroom education (knowledge about government systems, U.S. history etc.)* 		<p>Collective Experiences (groups)</p>

Summarized from Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE 2003. *The Civic Mission of Schools* (*indicates a promising approach); Kirlin, Mary. 2003 *"CIRCLE Working Paper 06: The Role of Civic Skills in Fostering Civic Engagement"* and other research, most of which can be found at www.civicyouth.org or by contacting the author.

Major Disciplinary Explanations of What is Needed for Engagement

Explanatory Concepts	Education (K-12 civic education focus)	Political Science (political participation)	Psychology	Youth Development
Knowledge	*	*		
Motivation/interest		*	*	*
Values/morals		*	*	*
Dispositions	*		*	*
Civic Skills	*	*	*	*
Networks/invitation		*	*	
Social Capital/trust		*	*	

'Skill': a learned power of doing something competently.

Skills are:

1. Learned and mastered through repeated practice in diverse settings
2. Transferable to new settings as proficiency increases

A Typology of Civic Skills

Communicating:	Oral and written communication
Organizing:	Organizing tasks, acquiring resources
Critical Thinking:	Identifying and describing, analyzing and explaining, synthesizing, thinking critically and constructively and formulating positions on issues
Collective Decision Making:	Expressing your own opinion, understanding other's preferences, and working towards a decision (sometimes involving some individual compromise) for the collective or common good.

Developmental Nature of Civic Skills

Developmental Milestones	Related Civic Skills	Developmental Period	
Language acquisition Fine motor Early perspective taking	Oral communication Written communication Communication	Early Childhood 0-6 years	Skill Acquisition
Memory capacity Perspective taking	Critical thinking Organizing Collective decision making	Middle Childhood 6-12 years	
Enhanced memory capacity Freedom from family and social structures, time with peers	Critical thinking (concrete and formal operations) Organizing Collective Decision Making	Adolescence 12-20 years	Skill Practice and Mastery

Infusing Civic Skills into Your Setting

1. Be intentional about what you are trying to teach, pay as much attention to development of skills as you do to mastery of content.
2. Bring YOUR interests to the classroom and activity. Don't try to invent your passion, what are you involved in, what do you know about, how can you connect that to your students?
3. Activities must be consequential.
4. Be mindful of the differences between behaviors and beliefs or attitudes.
5. Understand that learning this way creates uncertainty; you will rarely know the exact path in advance. (This does not mean you are uncertain about the end learning objectives.)
6. Be attentive to the skill level of your students and the time they have, don't let them bite off more than is manageable.
7. Be opportunistic, use everything you can to reinforce engagement skill development.
8. Model the behavior.

Notes