

Review Essay

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Citizenship Across the Curriculum

Smith, M. B., Nowacek, R. S., & Bernstein, J. L. (Eds.)
Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010

In their edited volume, *Citizenship Across the Curriculum* (2010), Smith, Nowacek, and Bernstein present an important contribution to the literature on civically engaged pedagogy. The book is organized around nine interdisciplinary essays by 2005-2006 Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) Fellows. The editors describe the CASTL cohort as “evangelists of the importance of the scholarship of teaching and learning” (p. 3), and this book is clearly a direct product of interactions that began there. An introduction by the editors, who are themselves contributing authors among their Carnegie colleagues, and conclusion chapters by prolific writers on civic engagement David Scobey and Edward Zlotkowski bookend these nine essays. The usefulness of this volume is encouraging, particularly with regard to faculty and graduate students seeking entrée into an ongoing national conversation (indeed, a scholarly community) about educating citizens as a goal of higher learning. The book could be used to help new academic administrators gain an understanding of engaged pedagogy. Deans, chairs, and other academic leaders seeking to encourage faculty to reconceptualize their pedagogy to go beyond the basic transfer of disciplinary content may find this book well worth recommending. Of course, given these audiences, those in university teaching centers also stand to benefit from applying this book toward their missions.

The book presents readers with an array of ideas and reflections based on pedagogical experiments incorporating notions of citizenship into college-level courses. Within that effort, the editors’ design is marked by three distinguishing elements. The first of these is that they avoid either compiling a technocratic how-to manual for teaching citizenship in the various disciplines represented or constructing a manifesto arguing why educating citizens via higher education is worthwhile. In fact, by page two, the editors have already stated, “This book was written with the assumption that colleges and universities need to do more to prepare students for lives as engaged citizens and that every discipline in the curriculum can contribute to this goal.” Given this starting place, the editors arrange narrative and reflection pieces to capture instances of nexus among pedagogical philosophy, perspectives on the role of citizenship in higher education, and practical course experiences. The result is remarkably, well, engaging.

Second, the editors pull these essays from among representative faculty members in natural science, social science, and humanities disciplines, as well as from an array of institutional types (i.e., public, private, comprehensive universities, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, religious, secular, international, etc.). In doing so, they ensure that the book appeals to a wide audience, but, more importantly for the reader, they also reinforce the cross-disciplinary nature of the scholarly conversation and community focused on issues of civic engagement and engaged pedagogy. This information may seem obvious to veterans of the field, but its importance cannot be overstated for those exploring it for the first time. In one deft maneuver, this book encourages both the math professor and the English professor, neither of whom may have believed there was room for citizenship education in their narrow disciplines, and it also suggests where each may look for useful collegueship for that work across campus.

One of the more insightful and exciting effects of enlisting the participation of representatives from such a variety of disciplines is the different perspectives expressed regarding what citizenship means, particularly in the contexts of their course goals. Jeffrey Bernstein discusses citizenship in terms of political enfranchisement, and this idea heavily influences his pedagogy as evinced in the story he shares about the progression of his course. In short, his is a more conventional notion of citizenship education, not so far removed from the mid-twentieth century notion of the teaching of civics. By contrast, in the very next chapter Rona Tamiko Halualani defines citizenship in at least three ways: “an active and participatory group of individuals who draw connections between themselves and their surrounding society; an experience in and through a community to help it solve a problem and address a significant issue; or a positionality that requires the formation of incisive questions and demands regard for the sociopolitical shifts within a community” (p. 37). Collectively, the editors assert that the many different perspectives included in this volume complement each other.

Finally, the structure of the nine reflective essay chapters is unique in that each concludes with a three-part section entitled “Dialogue.” In it, two fellow authors briefly comment upon the essay at hand, and the author of the chapter responds to those comments. What this device appears to accomplish is to bring the reader into some of the conversations had by these nine CASTL fellows, as a fly on the wall. It orients readers in a way that may well help prepare them to join similar conversations, whether in their own departments, colleges, and universities, or within national and international communities of scholars.

The most valuable parts of these mini-conversations can be found in the commentators’ translations of key arguments and themes into their own

words, sometimes tied to academic discipline, which then requires the author to consider the matter from an alternative lens and acknowledge its value. In places, this results in a sort of walking-in-another's-shoes phenomenon among the authors, and the device of these “dialogue” sections provides a window into a few of the collegial learning opportunities afforded by cross-disciplinary conversations on pedagogy. What results on the page often reflects the example of David Geelan’s response to comments on his essay, which begins, “The notion of ‘professional incompetence’ that Rebecca [Nowacek] introduces is a very nice way of framing many of the concerns that have driven my attempts to understand and develop my science teacher education practices over the years” (p. 162). That sort of statement both suggests that the concept shared will be useful to the author in future discussions, and it exemplifies to the reader how conversation across disciplines can yield valuable new ideas.

As I have said, the introductory chapter does an admirable job of setting the scene for the conversation of citizenship education and pedagogy. In the final chapters, Scobey and Zlotkowski situate the nine essays within the larger context of scholarship and practice in terms of the American academy as it has evolved. These elements are very strong. My main criticism of the book is that it never quite fulfills the promise of its well-considered “dialogue” sections. The comments on each essay are quite brief and too often superficial. It would be unjust to say that they are entirely exercises in mutual congratulation, but there is little evidence of scholarly criticism or philosophical disagreement among the authors.

While the “dialogue” device disappoints in some ways, the merits of this book far outweigh. It should serve as an excellent introduction piece for faculty exploring citizenship education for the first time, as well as for fellows in university teaching center programs. It would even do well as recommended reading for new academic administrators and would-be supporters of engaged pedagogies. As the editors and authors suggest, there is an almost religious commitment within the community of proponents of engaged pedagogy and other forms of engaged scholarship. In dubbing themselves evangelicals, the editors recall an important element of what some argue is a growing academic movement. Ultimately, this volume offers an academic version of a good sermon. It shares demonstrative stories and instructive interpretations of their meaning, and it leaves the reader impressed with a sense of direction.

Author

Andrew Louder is a Ph.D. student in higher education at the University of Maryland, College Park. His research interests center on organization and decision-making in universities and faculty issues. He has been involved with research on civic and community engagement, early career faculty experiences, academic freedom, and women in STEM fields.