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Educating Students to Become Citizens

Grant Reeher and Joseph Cammarano, two political scientists, have assembled an engaging and useful collection of essays in their edited volume, *Education for Citizenship: Ideas and Innovations in Political Learning.* Following Benjamin Barber's eloquent "Foreword," in which he explicates the vital linkage between civic education and democracy, Reeher and Cammarano specify in the "Introduction" some of the problems that are associated with teaching and instilling citizenship among students at the university-level. Reeher and Cammarano sympathize with critics who suggest that there is a crisis in our educational system as well as in political citizenship. The focus of their edited volume, though, is not what students should learn, but "the *ways* in which they should learn" (p. 2). According to the editors, the thirteen essays in their volume fall under four broad categories linking political education to citizenship: active citizen involvement through service learning and internships; classroom-based simulations and conversations; confronting and enlisting issues of diversity, pluralism, and interdisciplinary instruction; and the use of technology. By bringing together a variety of pedagogical perspectives, Reeher and Cammarano see their volume as taking up "the challenge of education for citizenship at a specific, concrete level" (p. 2). Taken as a whole, the essays provide a numerous "active learning" techniques that political scientists can replicate, both in and out of the classroom, so as to encourage and strengthen citizenship among their students (p. 3).

Reeher and Cammarano do a fine job linking together thematically the thirteen disparate essays in the "Introduction." As with many edited volumes, though, the individual essays are uneven, both in quality and in length. Several are quite good, and deserve specific mention. Of the three essays that document service learning projects, Richard Battistoni's, "Service Learning as Civic Learning: Lessons We Can Learn from Our Students," and Craig Rimmerman's, "Teaching American Politics through Service: Reflections on a Pedagogical Strategy," provide first-hand accounts of how to get students out of the classroom and into the community. Both authors are concerned theoretically about overly narrow definitions of citizenship and suggest ways of getting students to think more critically about the concept of citizenship along broader lines. Battistoni, for example, has devised a service learning program that sends students out into the community for an entire semester. In doing so, his program encourages students to challenge "our monolithic assumptions about the meaning and language of citizenship" (p. 33). Battistoni's service learning program is not tied to a particular political science course; it serves as its own course. This seems to be a more substantive and meaningful kind of service learning than those which are part of a specific course, such as Rimmerman's, which is a component of his "Introduction to American Politics" course. Rimmerman admits in his essay that, "it may well be that there is a flaw in the structure and nature of courses that require service to the extent that they fail to connect service appropriately to issues of democracy, politics, and citizenship. Some of my students probably resisted discussing issues of democracy, politics, and citizenship because in their minds their service activities had little relevance or connection to these broader issues" (p. 26). During the term, both Rimmerman and Battistoni require their students to keep journals, write essays, and discuss with each other their experiences working for various service agencies in the immediate community. Such a program, Battistoni argues, can serve as a "vehicle by which we educate for citizenship and reinvigorate our rapidly deteriorating public life" (p. 49).

One of the more creative attempts to promote citizenship education in the classroom is offered by Cammarano and Linda Fowler. In their essay, "Enhancing Citizenship through Active Learning: Simulations on the

Policy Process," Cammarano and Fowler detail how they merged the students of two large lecture-based courses (one on Congress and the other on the presidency) into a single Congressional budget simulation. Students were assigned specific roles to play during the simulation, and had several assignments tied to their role-playing activities. According to Cammarano and Fowler, the students found the "hands-on nature of the simulations made the connections between academic learning and real-world experience easier to see and to apply" (p. 118).

Several other essays in the volume offer innovative teaching methods. For example, John Freie argues in his essay, "Democratizing the Classroom: The Individual Learning Contract," that a democratic classroom, in which "the professor and the students are all engaged in a real, not simulated, practice of small-group democracy," can enhance civic responsibility and participation among students. Naeem Inayatullah ("Wading in the Deep: Supporting Emergent Anarchies"), taking a minimalist approach to maximizing student participation and responsibility for the subject matter, suggests that "sensing the difficulty of learning with any form, others in a classroom begins to prepare us to engage the enormous challenge of creating a critical citizenry with different others" (p. 188). Glen Halva-Neubauer ("Public Affairs Internships: Coming of Age") presents a excellent overview of Furman University's state and local politics immersion internship program, detailing the extensive resources that are necessary to make the program a continuing success.

The two essays on the uses of technology in the classroom (William Ball, "Using the Internet to Enhance Classroom and Citizenship Information" and Kimberley Canfield "The Internet as a Tool for Student Citizenship"), while practical and informative, will not be particularly stimulating, I imagine, to the more technologically sophisticated readers of this electronic journal. Ball and Canfield discuss their use in class of on-line discussion forums, listservs, web-based data banks, and multimedia resources found on the web.

Unfortunately, a few of the essays in the volume are disjointed and lack a clear purpose. Most notably, William Coplin's rambling essay, "Citizenship Courses as Life-Changing Experiences," describes a course he has been teaching (Public Affairs 101) for over twenty years. In the "Introduction," the editors refer to Coplin's course as an "innovative approach to service learning" (p. 9). Yet the only service learning component of the course for the students is a total of five hours of community service they must log for the entire semester. According to Coplin, the ungraded community service requirement of the course is intended to "awaken" students "to the community that surrounds the university" (p. 70). Coplin makes no mention of how this community service component (such as it is) is integrated into his public policy course. Not surprisingly, he has found that "40 percent [of the students] seem relatively unaffected by the experience" (p. 70). The essay goes on to outline a hodgepodge of assignments that supposedly help students develop their public policy skills, and lists a variety of in-class teaching methods Coplin has employed over the years. One of Coplin's more troubling pedagogical techniques, which Reeher and Cammarano call "unconventional" (p. 9), is to "shame and guilt" his students during his lectures, which somehow he thinks will impel his students to become better citizens. For example, Coplin often admonishes his students by telling them that, "if they devoted as much [time and money to the public good] as I do, the world would be much better," and frequently during the semester repeats the refrain, "The class is disgusting" (p. 78). While these might be examples of the kinds of pedagogical "risks" that more professors need to take, as Reeher and Cammarano contend in their "Introduction" (pp. 4-5), how Coplin's demeaning approach to teaching promotes citizenship through service learning remains unclear at best.

Although the editors see Education for Citizenship as a practical guidebook, they could have pushed the contributors to make their essays even more "concrete" (p. 3). While reading through the essays, I found myself wondering how I could incorporate some of the experiential assignments into my own courses. An appendix (or even references to specific web pages) with sample syllabi would have helped me to see how these political scientists actually integrated the citizenship components into their courses. (Only Mark Rupert ("Teaching Deliberation: Citizenship Education and Cross-Disciplinary Team Teaching") provides a web link to the on-line syllabus for his course.) As it stands, the scholar who wishes to include more citizenship-based projects into his or her classroom is left asking several nuts-and-bolts questions, such as: How much time in-class should be devoted to assignments such as simulations and service learning?- How should I go about making contacts with various citizen-based organizations outside of the university or college setting? What substantive criteria should I use to grade students' participation in simulations, service learning, and email discussion groups? What percentage of the final grade should be based on the citizenship-based assignments versus more traditional assignments?

Another unfortunate omission from the volume is

that none of the essays deals explicitly with racial, class, gender, and age differences found within many classroom settings. Not surprisingly, I have found that when I teach my Intro to American Politics course, my best in-class discussions concerning citizenship emerge when I have a wide cross-section of students. Conversely, I have found it more difficult to generate discussion about the various and sometimes conflicting aspects of American citizenship when the student body is largely homogenous. With increased diversity in a classroom, students are forced to confront alternative perceptions and conceptions of citizenship and what it means to be an American. Non-traditional students tend to have a very different sense of citizenship than your average eighteen- or nineteen-year-olds. African American, Latino, Native American Indian, Asian American, recent immigrant, international, female, and disabled students tend to view American citizenship in significantly different ways as well. An essay on different strategies that can be used to draw out these multiple perspectives would have enriched the volume's discussion of education for citizenship in the traditional classroom setting.

Finally, none of the authors suggest using an historical approach to encourage students to think more critically about what citizenship means in America (the contributors are political scientists, after all). Citizenship is a socially constructed concept. Teaching students how the concept has changed over time, how it has been used systematically to include and exclude certain groups of people, enables students to gain a appreciation of how capricious the concept of citizenship has been, and continues to be, in America.

These criticisms are not meant to take away from the usefulness of *Education for Citizenship*. Political scientists who are interested in developing their students into responsible citizens can do well by reading through this practical guide. Together, the essays offer political scientists a wide range of ways to integrate citizenship-based projects and activities into their courses or their departments curriculum. As such, Reeher and Cammarano should be commended for bringing together these timely perspectives into a single volume.

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