

EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

A Simple Activity to Engage Educators, Community, or Students in Thinking About Civic Education: The Citizenship Brainstorm

Contributed by the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

This brainstorm activity has been used to introduce teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and students to the Civic Mission of Schools by having them think about the attributes of an informed, effective citizen. Teachers have used this activity at the beginning of a course, and have asked students to add to the lists of attributes throughout the course of the year. Campaign staff members have used the activity to open teacher professional development sessions and have debriefed lessons and activities by referencing the lists to point out civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions addressed.

EFFECTIVE CITIZENSHIP BRAINSTORM

Introduction

What is effective citizenship? What are the traits of an effective citizen in our democratic society? This activity provides a structure to explore civic capacities and begin discussions about effective civic education.

In this activity, participants brainstorm specific civic capacities in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions of effective citizenship. Participants work in small groups to first brainstorm an assigned category. Each group then rotates through the remaining categories, adding their own ideas. When groups rotate back to their original spot, they prioritize the specific traits according to what they think is most important.

This activity has been used effectively with teachers, administrators, students, and community members to explore and expand upon the purpose and outcomes of civic education.

Objectives:

Participants will :

- Identify and describe examples of effective citizens they know of through history or personal experience.
- Brainstorm elements of effective citizenship in the areas of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions.

- Prioritize, explain, and share opinions regarding the most important traits of effective citizenship in each of these areas.

Materials:

Easel pad, masking tape, and markers.

Four sheets of chart paper. Each titled with one of the following: Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, Action.

Procedure

A. Introduction to Activity – What is Effective Citizenship? (5 mins):

For adults –

Ask participants: We all agree that one of the goals of education is to help young people become effective citizens in our society. If this is one of the goals of education, let's think about what we view an "effective citizen" to be.

Tell participants that one way to go about this is to think about what effective citizens in our society:

Know...what kind of knowledge do effective citizens possess? Know how to do...what kinds of skills do effective citizens have? Think about and value...what kinds of attitudes do effective citizens have? Do...what are the behaviors of effective citizens? Elicit examples.

(Elicit a couple of examples for each to be sure everyone understands the way we are thinking about these terms.)

Explain that they are going to have a chance to think more about the Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, and Behaviors of effective citizenship and that their ideas about this will help guide the planning to enhance civic education in their school and community.

For youth –

Ask participants to think about people who they view as "effective citizens." Ask a few volunteers to explain why they consider those individuals to be effective citizens.

Using the participants' examples, explain that there seems to be certain knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions associated with effective citizenship. Explain that today they are going to take a closer look at the characteristics of effective citizenship.

B. Rotating Brainstorm – Defining Effective Citizenship (25 mins):

1. Divide participants into four groups.
2. Distribute a sheet of chart paper titled either KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, ATTITUDES, or ACTIONS to each group.
3. Give the groups 5-10 minutes to brainstorm.
4. Have the groups rotate clockwise to add ideas to each chart, giving them five minutes at each station. When the group strongly agrees with a trait already listed on a chart, they should place a check mark next to it.
5. When the groups have rotated back to their original charts, ask them to take a few minutes to circle what they believe to be the three most important traits, and to select a reporter who will explain the group's rationale for choosing those three traits.

C. Debrief (10 mins):

1. Ask each group reporter to explain the group's rationale for its top three priorities. Provide opportunities for large group discussion along the way.
2. After each group has reported, ask the large group:

How did this activity enhance your understanding of effective citizenship?

For educators:

What could we do to expand upon and improve the way we educate for effective citizenship?

For students:

What kinds of things go on in our school, both in and out of class, that promote the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions of effective citizenship? What kinds of things could be added? (both in and out of class)

For parents:

What kinds of things can parents do with their children to promote the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions of effective citizenship? What can parents do to support and promote civic education at schools?

For community members:

Why is civic education important? What can we do to support and promote civic education at schools?

It might be helpful to save the charts for future meetings, particularly to revisit the lists as CMS activities are discussed, planned, and assessed in terms of impact on students.

CRF staff has used this activity in professional development sessions with teachers to identify the civic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors addressed through specific lesson plans and methodologies. The charts have also been used to with students to reflect on service-learning experiences in terms of the civic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors they gained.

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