

Chapter 9

Citizen Education and Technology

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ABSTRACT

Technology plays a central role in current citizen education. Technology also impacts the underlying concept of citizenship since it now has to consider the digital society. This chapter examines the elements of citizen education and the factors needed to be in place for technology to facilitate citizen education. While technology affords access to information more efficiently than ever before, it also requires additional skills. For technology to play out its role effectively, educators need to design instruction for citizen curriculum that offers technology-enhanced interactive learning and socially rich learning environments. Several examples of good practice of incorporating technology into citizen education conclude the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

As the sense of community and citizenship has expanded to encompass both physical and virtual mutual spaces and agreed-upon identities, the need for citizen education has also increased. Individuals need to access, evaluate, and use increasing amounts of information for individual and group sustenance and improvement. As early as 1974, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommended:

Member States should promote, at every stage of education, an active civic training which will enable every person to gain knowledge of the method of operation and the work of public institutions,

whether local, national or international; and to participate in the cultural life of the community and in public affairs. Wherever possible, this participation should increasingly link education and action to solve problems at the local, national and international levels (p. 1).

Technology has served as a catalyst for such information transformation, and can also be used to educate citizens for civic knowledge and participation. For example, government agencies increasingly include e-government initiatives that use information technology tools and systems to provide better public services and transform relations with citizens and businesses. Scientists are employing crowdsourcing techniques to solve

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6046-5.ch009

societal programs. Political activism, facilitated by social media, crosses international borders, as witnessed in the phenomenon of Arab Spring. For technology to play its role in citizen education, several factors need to be in place.

DEFINITIONS

Citizens

A citizen may be strictly defined as a person who is a legally recognized subject of a state or nation, who has the rights and protection of that government. Heater (1990) defines a citizen as “a person furnished with knowledge of public affairs, instilled with attitudes of civic virtue and equipped with skills to participate in the public arena” (p. 336). The first definition perceives people more passively, while the second definition implies active engagement. These definitions impact associated concepts.

Explicit attention needs to be made to address emerging citizens of Society 3.0. Ronald van de Hoff (2013) explained:

They are the people we call global citizens: people of the new world. These Society 3.0 citizens cannot and will not deal with the thinking of the establishment anymore. They want to add value in their work and life in a significantly different way, namely by creating value instead of growth. (p. 163)

Van de Hoff's premise is that Society 3.0 citizens organize themselves into social networks that are largely virtual rather than join old organizations.

Similarly, Baumann (2012) contended that today's youth, as digital natives, have a different citizen identity from previous generations. Rather than seeing citizenship as a duty, contemporary youth see it as a self-actualizing activity through social expression in self-defined loosely-coupled

networks. Peer-generated knowledge leads to peer action, blurring the line between consumer and producer. The main communication media are digital in nature, and content is largely interactive. Baumann asserted that such civic interaction exposes youth to different perspectives on issues, and can lead to action based on mutual interests.

Citizen Education

The term “citizenship” education sometimes has a narrow meaning: to prepare a non-citizen (e.g., an immigrant) to become a citizen of a county. Echoing the second definition of a citizen, Fien et al. (2010) asserted that citizen (or citizenship) education teaches the skills to enable citizen participation: a willingness to investigate community issues; the ability to recognize and analyze socio-economic, political and ecological factors that need to be addressed in order to solve community issues; and the ability and willingness to act to help the community to have a sustainable future. Block (2011) studied citizenship as a communicative achievement in global spaces, and affirmed the idea of citizenship as a way that people position themselves in participatory events.

The second perspective also extends the concept of the citizen to that of a member of a community, beyond that of a state or nation. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (Schulz et al., 2008) defined community as:

A group of people who share something in common (for example, history, values, loyalties, a common goal). In this framework, community membership includes membership based on externally defined criteria relating to the function of the community (such as attending a school as a student) and membership defined by individuals' own belief of their membership (such as through identification with “like-minded” people regarding a political or social issue) (p. 15)

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