


Chapter 2

Our World, Our Fight: Teaching Advocacy and Activism as a Pivotal Practice for Talented Youth

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ABSTRACT

Teaching advocacy and activism is a pivotal practice for talented youth. Advocacy is broadly defined as championing a cause, from self-advocacy and community/local issues to sociopolitical and global awareness contexts. Activism is the shared struggle for the “inalienable right of all people to human be—to be liberated from any project of violence that treats... persons...less than fully human” (Valdez et al.). This chapter first builds the background in the three characteristics of pivotal practices: authentic, cognitive, and holistic. Each of these characteristics has a pivotal practice in play section, providing the reader with an exemplar of grassroots activism or advocacy using relevant examples that readers can connect with from history, collective peace movements, Dolores Huerta, and Ella Baker. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion and a present-day case study about this pivotal practice through an intersectional lens, and how teaching advocacy and activism impacts and is impacted by identity and agency.

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INTRODUCTION

Advocacy is broadly defined as making a case for a particular cause. Much like the Social Studies curriculum telescopes from the neighborhood, community, and town, to state, country, and international realms, advocacy exists on a continuum from self-advocacy, community, and local issues, to sociopolitical, humanitarian, and global awareness contexts. Transitioning from advocacy—championing a cause—to activism, this chapter uses Valdez et al.’s (2018) definition of activism as a framework. Key to this definition is a *struggle for* rather *than resistance against*, working towards equity and humanity rather than pushing back on singular laws, policies, or government officials. Also inherent in the *struggle* word choice is the end goal, what is attained through the struggle towards a shared purpose is the ability to feel human, or in Valdez et al.’s words, *human be*. Activism is the shared struggle for the “inalienable right of all people to *human be*—to be liberated from any project of violence that treats persons as property, persons as things, persons as disposable, or persons as in any other way less than fully human” (Valdez et al., 2018, p. 247). This chapter discusses the pivotal practice of the intentional teaching of advocacy and activism to talented youth.

Editors Nyberg and Manzone (2023) outline characteristics of pivotal practices for talented youth that distinguish these instructional tools from strategies. Pivotal practices are authentic, cognitive, and holistic. Authentic practices are sustained over time by emphasizing pedagogical knowledge across disciplines and instructional contexts and promoting problem-solving. Cognitive practices incorporate students’ metacognitive development and promote inquiry, critical thinking, and creative thinking (Nyberg & Manzone, 2023). Holistic practices incorporate students’ funds of knowledge and social and emotional learning and promote individuality and agency in talented learners.

An essential principle of equity literacy—what helps to create impact in equity efforts while minimizing performative gestures—is intentionally centering and prioritizing the needs of historically marginalized youth and communities (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Teaching advocacy and activism embodies each aspect of a pivotal practice, while also following the equity principle of centering and prioritizing liberation: *human be*. To assist with this evolving process, throughout this chapter, we aim to assist educators proposing to begin or continue their advocacy practices for talented students and social activism. We say evolving because issues, events, and modalities are changing, and may require varying solutions to accommodate the times. Our objective is to help with authentic discourse, active analysis, and solution-building with our talented students and their families.

In this chapter, we first engage in background building, guiding the reader in understanding and enacting evidenced-based teaching that centers equity, advocacy,

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