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Guest Commentary: Citizenship, Economics, and Morality

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THE INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Citizenship, Economics, and Morality

Thomas A. Lucey (Illinois State University) and Mary Beth Henning (Northern Illinois University)

IJPBL issued a call for manuscripts that described problem-based learning that examined intersections of citizenship, economics, and morality. While these areas represent deep areas of study within their own rights, interpreting their relationships provides fertile grounds for exploration. How we define our lives respectfully as members of a society that faces questions about the distribution of decreasing volumes of natural resources presents numerous problems worthy of consideration.

We commend Annie Whitlock for her article entitled “Elementary School Entrepreneurs,” because she explores economics and civic engagement with young children. We need more research like hers that examines social entrepreneurship with young citizens. Whitlock draws upon a long history of mini-society and kinder-economy simulations in exploring how social businesses can fill a need in society. Her article describes how to use a book, *One Hen*, which is readily available to elementary students to springboard into a project that helps students learn about microfinance.

The interconnected nature of ethics and economics as modes of thinking that reinforce social relationships offers a legitimate basis for examination (Minnameier, 2016). Everyone needs access to goods and services and respectful relationships within their community to experience a safe and secure lifestyle. Yet, as Arthur (2016) points out, the grounding for education about the distribution of goods and resources necessitates a perspective that is founded on critical social reasoning. Too much of a focus on competition and access to goods leads to a society rooted in manipulation and abuse. Too much focus on cooperation and safety renders a society vulnerable and defenseless. Both cooperation and competition are essential to social relationships.

Teaching about citizenship requires that students receive opportunities to examine this interaction. To what extent are citizens responsible to themselves and their communities? Blue's (2019) call for alternative approaches to financial education that value cultures interested in processes of wealth accumulation raise questions about the universality of finan-

cial education curricula. A compassionate approach, such as that advocated for by Lucey, Agnello, and Laney (2015) would appear to fit this need; however, this approach raises problems for those benefiting from conventional reasoning. How does a society that values the rights of all citizens resolve possible conflicts that may result?

Problem-based learning to explore the causes of these moral conundrums may provide a path for exploration. For example, Tawfik, Trueman, and Lorz's (2014) work examined the outcomes of a service experience related to the clean-up of a polluted lake. The objectives (How do we make these topics fun for students? How can we go beyond interest and actually help the environment? What benefit can we add to our local communities and engender a sense of ecology responsibility?) describe the intention of engaging students in an opportunity for bettering the environment. Yet, they lacked the intent to engage students in an investigation of the conditions that prompted the situation to occur and lead students in conversations about their civic roles in pursuing processes to prevent their recurrence.

Considering the social and moral dimensions of scientific and mathematical problem-based learning offers a possibility. For example, Gutstein's (2016) work with critical mathematics offers secondary students an opportunity to make social meaning of mathematical relationships by examining the injustices in their community. Empowering students to contemplate the different perspectives of the social meanings associated with scientific phenomenon represents a relevant problem-based learning consideration. Other topics worth examining would be rights to resource access such as health care or natural resources such as air and water.

We would encourage the problem-based learning community's exploration of these issues to provide a deep interpretation of the social relationships that inform our future. A conversation about these areas would seem to begin with defining questions. For example, what does it mean to be human in relationship with human society determining how resources should be distributed? How does the nature of hu-

man society's presence within a particular environment define its relationships to global resources? On what emotional basis should we found human rights and responsibilities to resources?

When focusing on the process of conversation, rather than the outcome, we learn about the motivations that guide perspectives informing the dialogue. Certainly all of these questions broach a variety of viewpoints and moralities. Perhaps a problem-based approach to examining these questions may focus on the conditions that bring possible solutions to the experience rather than emphasizing the solutions themselves.

We appreciate those who participated in the conversations that led to this work. Particular thanks goes to Earl Livingston, University of North Texas, for his efforts in the development and distribution of the call for manuscripts. Furthering these efforts necessitates a genuine openness to multiple possibilities, and we encourage the inclusion of many voices to foster a substantial dialogue.

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