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Academic Intelligence is not Enough! WICS: An Expanded Model for Effective Practice in School and in Later Life

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Abstract

Is there a psychological basis for teaching and learning in the context of a liberal education, and if so, what might such a psychological basis look like? Traditional teaching and assessment often emphasize remembering facts and, to some extent, analyzing ideas. Such skills are important, but they leave out of the aspects of thinking that are most important not only in liberal education, but in life, in general. In this article, I propose a theory called WICS, which is an acronym for wisdom, intelligence, and creativity, synthesized. The basic idea underlying this theory is that, through liberal education, students need to acquire creative skills and attitudes to generate new ideas about how to adapt flexibly to a rapidly changing world, analytical skills and attitudes to ascertain whether these new ideas are good ones, practical skills and attitudes to implement the new ideas and convince others of their value, and wisdom-based skills and attitudes in order to ensure that the new ideas help to achieve a common good through the infusion of positive ethical values.

Keywords

WICS, liberal education, effective practice

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WICS: An Expanded Model for Effective Practice in School and in Later Life

Robert J. Sternberg

Is there a psychological basis for teaching and learning in the context of a liberal education, and if so, what might such a psychological basis look like? Traditional teaching and assessment often emphasize remembering facts and, to some extent, analyzing ideas. Such skills are important, but they leave out of the aspects of thinking that are most important not only in liberal education, but in life, in general. In this article, I propose a theory called WICS, which is an acronym for *wisdom, intelligence, and creativity, synthesized*. The basic idea underlying this theory is that, through liberal education, students need to acquire creative skills and attitudes to generate new ideas about how to adapt flexibly to a rapidly changing world, analytical skills and attitudes to ascertain whether these new ideas are good ones, practical skills and attitudes to implement the new ideas and convince others of their value, and wisdom-based skills and attitudes in order to ensure that the new ideas help to achieve a common good through the infusion of positive ethical values.

Knowledge is important in this model because one cannot think creatively, analytically, practically, or wisely if one has no knowledge base to which to apply these thought processes. But knowledge taught for its own sake can become inert—that is, available but not usable when it is needed for real-world use. Many students entering college have come to think of schooling as largely the accretion of facts, so that a major goal of a liberal education may be in teaching students not only how to think, but also how to become lifelong learners who understand that knowledge is not just for accumulation, but also for use.

Creativity is viewed in this article as the generation of new and useful ideas. Intelligence is defined as the ability to achieve one's goals in life within one's sociocultural context. And

wisdom is defined as applying one's creativity and intelligence, as well as one's knowledge, to a common good by balancing one's own interests, other people's interests, and larger societal and cultural interests, over the long and short terms. These constructs can all be measured, and the article reviews some of the techniques we have used in assessment of both abilities and achievement. Because abilities are modifiable, it is important also to teach in ways that develop these abilities. The article reviews specific techniques that can be used to teach for creativity, intelligence, and wisdom too. For example, teaching for creativity involves helping students understand the importance of being willing to defy the crowd when necessary in order to propose ideas that others may not have thought of and initially may reject; teaching for intelligence involves developing analytical and practical thinking, so that when students hear an appeal in a political campaign or an advertisement to buy something, they can evaluate its logical merits; and teaching for wisdom means, in part, promoting dialogical thinking, that is, the kind of thinking whereby one understands and potentially incorporates other people's perspectives on problems and not just one's own. In the end, creativity, intelligence, and wisdom are not just about how one thinks, but also, about how one acts. Liberal education needs to teach students how to translate ideas into action so that these ideas have a positive effect not only on the students, but on the world at large.

Selected Readings

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