

Creating Good Citizens?

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Abstract

During a period of social change, it can be desirable to inspire hope by providing students with meaningful learning experiences such as service-learning projects or activist advocacy assignments. It has been observed that, “Activist approaches to community service-learning transcend the progressivist notions of civic engagement and responsibility and move towards tackling systemic social problems by encouraging students to explore the problems’ root causes as well as how their own actions can contribute to overcoming those social problems.” (Wuetherick, 2018, pp.113-14) This is not a new phenomenon. From the 1930s to the 1950s Biology 3 “Personal Hygiene and Public Health” was taught at Mount Allison University to any student pursuing an Arts, Science, Secretarial, Home Economic, Pre-Medicine or Pre-Nursing degree. It included a community public health survey assignment in the hopes that students would attain a “working knowledge” of personal and community hygiene and “...to stimulate [students] toward the practical and effective application of that knowledge to [their] own physical improvement and the betterment of [their] community’s health.” (Academic Calendar, Mount Allison University, 1951-52, p.71) Admirable goals for a society that was experiencing monumental change. However, when we design these types of assessments, attempting to make positive differences, how do we ensure we are creating ethical opportunities for students to achieve academically? By examining a historical case study of course assignments from the Mount Allison University archives, participants will consider shifting definitions of community betterment, and reflect on methods for interrogating personal biases and creating ethical learning experiences.