

Formal History Teaching and Lifeworld Literacies: Developing Transversal Skills as an Embodied Learning Outcomes in Historical Research Projects

Authors : Paul Flynn, Luke O'Donnell

Abstract : There is a pressing societal need for educators in formal and non-formal settings to develop pedagogical frameworks, programmes, and interventions that support the development of transversal skills for life beyond the classroom. These skills include communication, collaboration, interpersonal relationship building, problem-solving, and planning, and organizational skills; or lifeworld literacies encountered first hand. This is particularly true for young people aged between 15-18. This demographic represents both the future of society and those best positioned to take advantage of well-designed, structured educational supports within and across formal and non-formal settings. Secondary school history has been identified as an appropriate area of study which deftly develops many of those transversal skills so crucial to positive societal engagement. However, in the formal context, students often challenge history's relevance to their own lived experience and dismiss it as a study option. In response to such challenges, teachers will often design stimulating lessons which are often well-received. That said, some students continue to question modern-day connections, presenting a persistent and pervasive classroom distraction. The continuing decline in numbers opting to study second-level history indicates an erosion of what should be a critical opportunity to develop all-important lifeworld literacies within formal education. In contrast, students readily acknowledge relevance in non-formal settings where many participants meaningfully engage with history by way of student-focused activities. Furthermore, many do so without predesigned pedagogical aids which support transversal skills development as embodied learning outcomes. As this paper will present, there is a dearth of work pertaining to the circular subject of history and its embodied learning outcomes, including lifeworld literacies, in formal and non-formal settings. While frequently challenging to reconcile formal (often defined by strict curricula and examination processes), and non-formal engagement with history, opportunities do exist. In the Irish context, this is exemplified by a popular university outreach programme: breaking the SEAL. This programme supports second-level history students as they fulfill curriculum requirements in completing a research study report. This report is a student-led research project pulling on communication skills, collaboration with peers and teachers, interpersonal relationships, problem-solving, and planning and organizational skills. Completion of this process has been widely recognized as excellent preparation not only for higher education (third level) but work-life demands as well. Within a formal education setting, the RSR harnesses non-formal learning virtues and exposes students to limited aspects of independent learning that relate to a professional work setting –a lifeworld literacy. Breaking the SEAL provides opportunities for students to enhance their lifeworld literacy by engaging in an independent research and learning process within the protective security of the classroom and its teacher. This paper will highlight the critical role this programme plays in preparing participating students (n=315) for life after compulsory education and presents examples of how lifeworld literacies may be developed through a scaffolded process of historical research and reporting anchored in non-formal contexts.

Keywords : history, education, literacy, transversal skills

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