Active Agents of Change: towards a social justice-orientated conceptual framework for citizenship education.
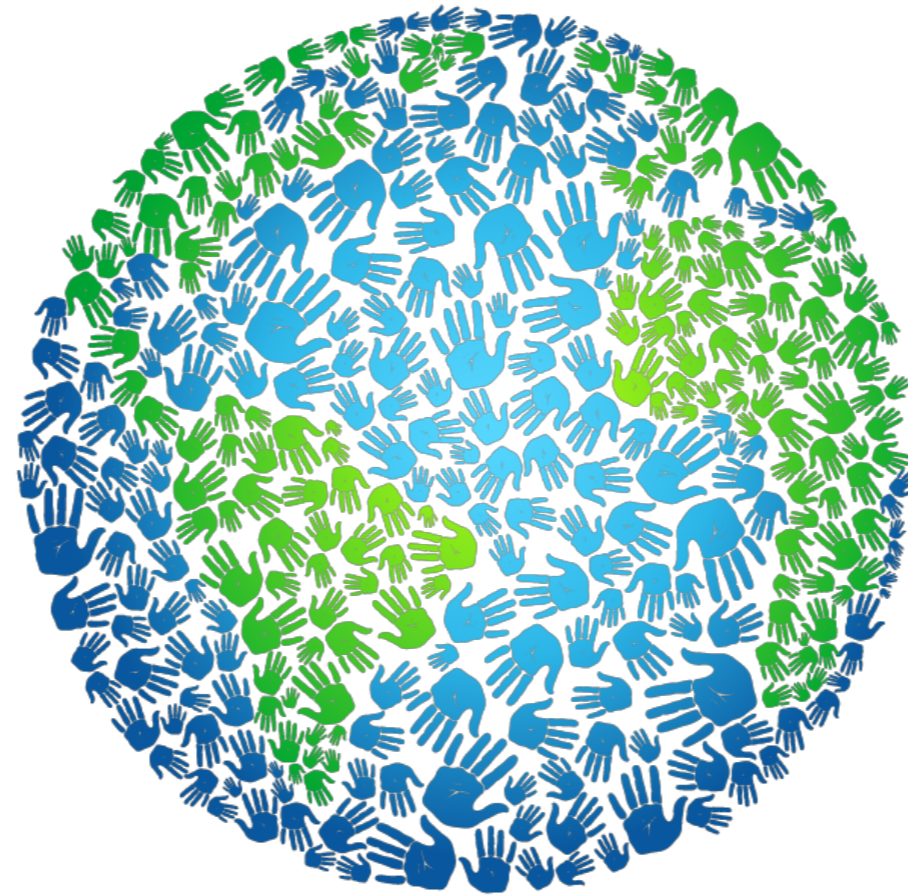

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What is the purpose of citizenship education?

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) conducted a two-year study of civics programmes in the United States (all with the specific goal of advancing democratic purposes of education).

They identified three types of citizenship education in schools:

- Citizenship education for personal responsibility;
- Citizenship education for democratic participation;
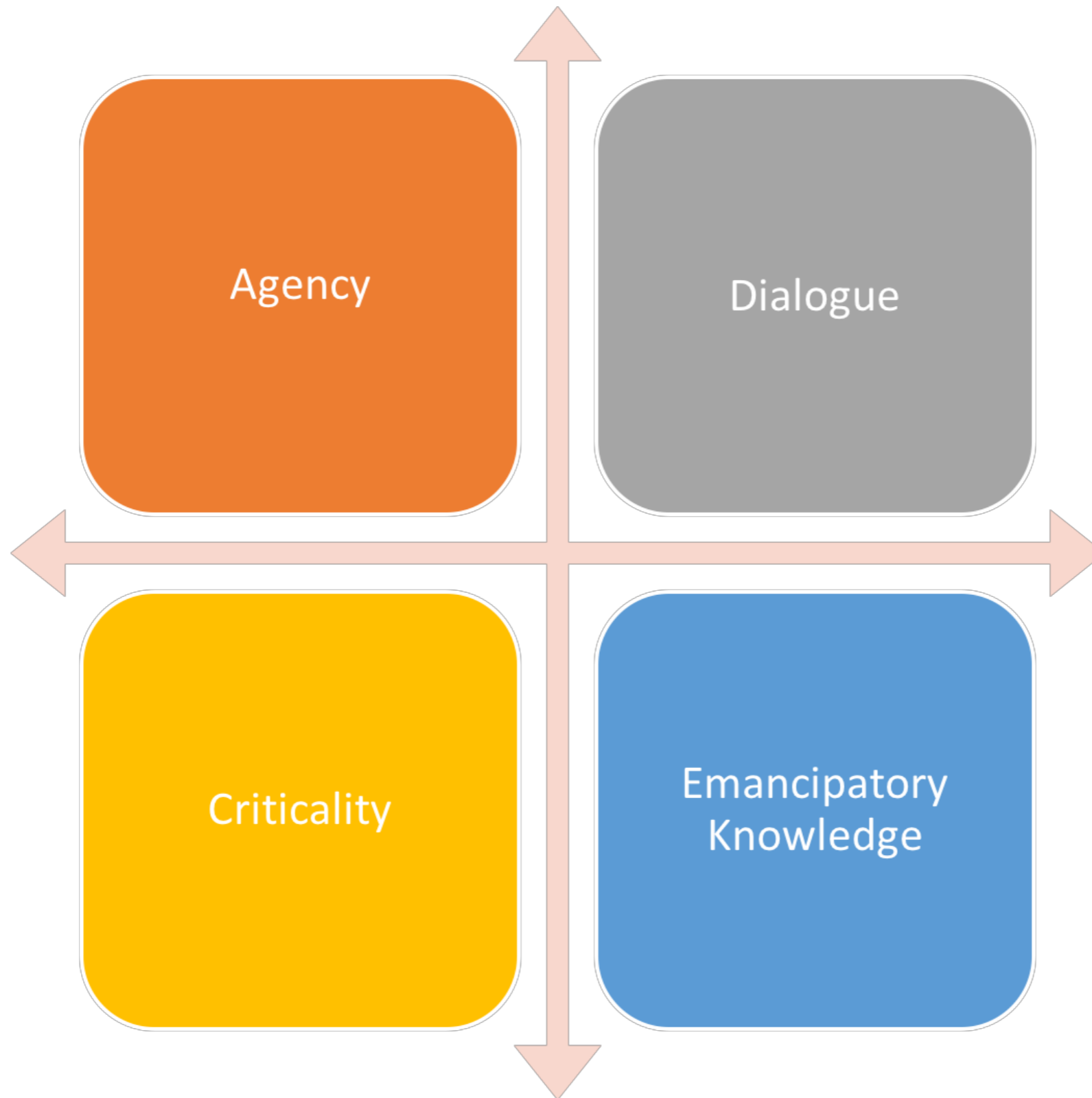- Citizenship education for social justice.

Social justice-orientated citizenship education - helping young people to develop the knowledge, passion, civic capabilities and social responsibility to work collectively to bring about change.

Moving beyond how things are to how things could be...

The State We're In

- Crick Report 1998 - social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy.

- Since the election of the coalition and Conservative governments in 2010, 2015 and 2017 there has been a shift in focus for citizenship education in England (Kisby, 2017).

- Moving away from political literacy and civic participation and towards financial literacy, volunteerism and character education (Kisby, 2017; Weinberg and Flinders, 2018).

- This shift puts the emphasis on 'good' character traits such as obedience, resilience, and hard work

- Focus on creating dutiful, passive, economic subjects rather than critical political active agents of change...

A Conceptual Framework for Social Justice-Orientated Citizenship Education

A Framework for Social Justice-Orientated Citizenship Education

This framework draws on elements of:

Critical citizenship education (DeJaeghere and Tudball, 2007)
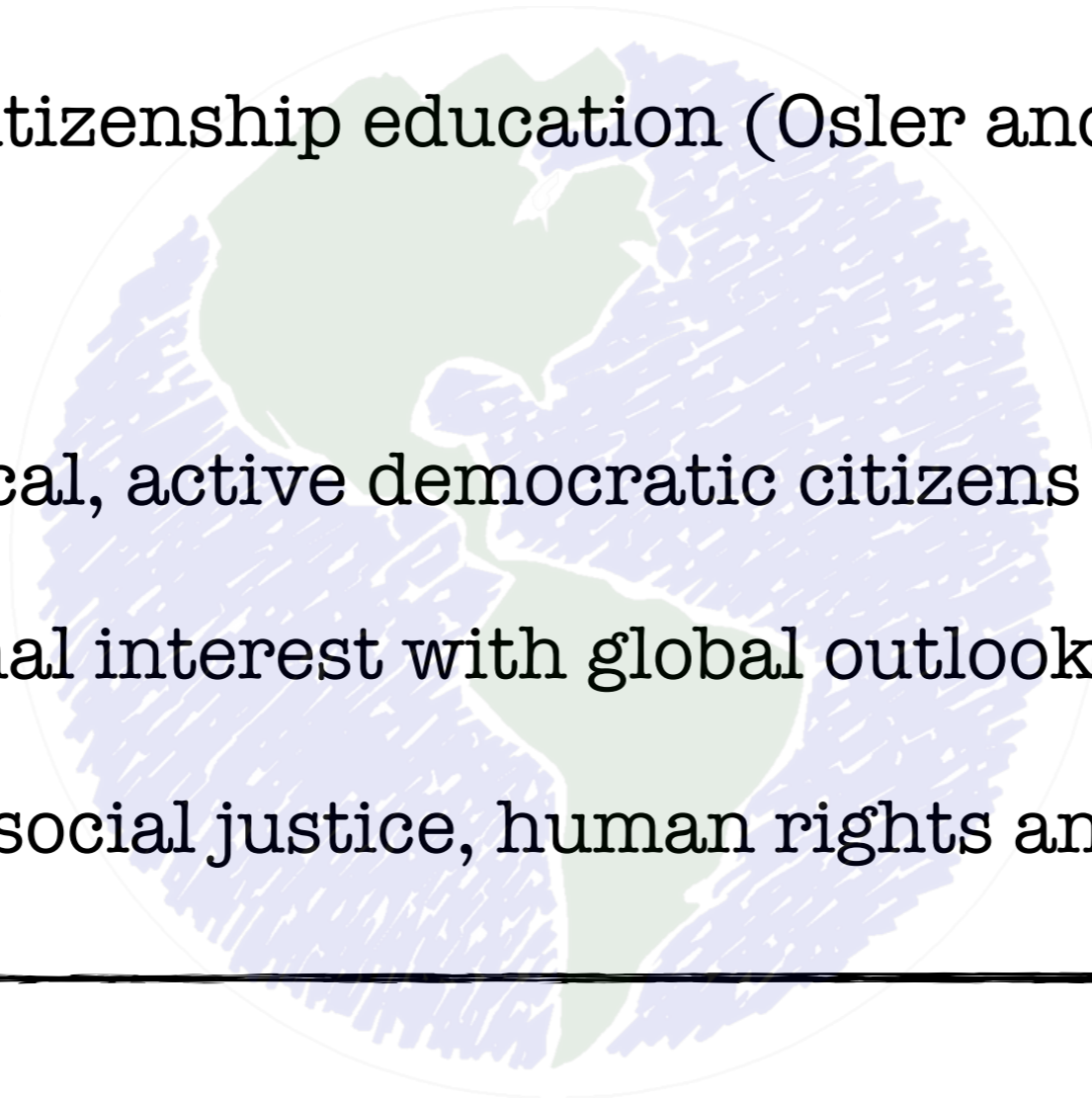
Global citizenship education (Hartung, 2017)

Cosmopolitan citizenship education (Osler and Starkey, 2003)

Common themes:

Developing critical, active democratic citizens

Local and national interest with global outlook

Commitment to social justice, human rights and the environment

Agency

- Young people must believe that they have the agency and power to bring about change as otherwise they'll see no reason to take action (Short, 2012).

- One of the most powerful ways to help develop agency is through community participation and social activism (Short, 2012; Kisby, 2017).

- Important component of social justice education because it enables young people to 'learn by doing'(McIntosh and Youniss, 2010).

- Grassroots campaigns: student-centered, - young people think about how a social problem affects their own lives and work collaboratively to design and implement a project that addresses it, for example, homelessness, food bank usage, recycling

- Student activism can foster civic engagement and develop agency by enabling participation in political processes (Torres-Harding et al., 2018).

Dialogue

🌍 Young people must be provided with dialogic spaces where articulacy and argument are allowed to flourish (Fisher, 2007; Alexander, 2011).

🌍 Effective dialogue for teaching citizenship education needs to be:

🌍 'Collective' - teacher and students - community of inquiry.

🌍 'Reciprocal' - participants listen to each other and react by sharing and challenging ideas and providing different viewpoints

🌍 'Supportive' as contributions are valued and respected by all participants.

🌍 'Purposeful' - with a goal to achieve a collective understanding.

🌍 Socio-political issues can increase the challenge and nature of dialogue in the classroom.

🌍 Dialogue is not about winning and losing but about ways of relating in which justice can be done to all who take part. (Biesta, 2013) - inclusive human experience.

Criticality

🌎 The digital revolution - social media, growth of blogging, online news/ fake news has drastically increased the amount of easily accessible online content, which one may not be able to trust.

🌎 Skills such as assessing the validity of arguments, inferring, judging the credibility of sources, challenging unstated assumptions and presenting reasoned and considered arguments (Fisher, 2008).

🌎 Critical thinking can act as a buffer against ideological indoctrination as it is a process which involves determining whether to accept a claim following careful assessment of the evidence provided.

🌎 Encourage young people to think critically about contemporary social issues so as to address such matters, as well as to protect and promote rights (Kisby, 2017).

Emancipatory Knowledge

🌍 Emancipatory knowledge aims to achieve a heightened sense of critical and political consciousness - empowerment through the belief that one can bring about social change (McLaren, 2014).

🌍 Moving beyond the way things are to the way things could be.

🌍 Must be relatable and relevant to young people's lives if it is to have an impact and long-term effect on their interest in politics (Leighton, 2012; Hartung, 2017).

🌍 Guided by a commitment to social justice and equity and addressing issues such as human rights violations and oppression.

🌍 Allows young people to see 'others as essentially similar to themselves and arrive at a sense of citizenship based on a consciousness of humanity rather than an allegiance to the state' (Osler and Starkey, 2003, p. 23).

🌍 Knowledge is not presented as universal truths but rather as problems for mutual inquiry (Shor, 1992).

Lights, Camera, Civic Action!

There is light in darkness, you just have to find it.

Bell Hooks