


Creating Better Citizens? Investigating U.S. Marine Corps Basic Training




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Abstract

Yonkman and Bridgeland (2009) and Nesbit (2011) have each offered studies in recent years in which military veterans reported possessing skills and values that facilitate civic engagement. I investigated these claims by exploring basic training in one branch of the United States (U.S.) military, the Marine Corps. I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 10 enlisted Marine Corps veterans and 7 drill instructors to ascertain their perceptions regarding the didactic aspirations and pedagogies of their service's basic training related to skills and values development. I utilized a civic capacities model developed by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) and Kirlin (2003) to examine whether Marines' entry training could be classified as civic in character. According to this study/s participants, Marine Corps Basic Training did teach skills and values that qualify as civic dispositions. I also explored several pedagogical strategies utilized by the Marines, such as learning communities, role modeling, narrative pedagogy and the use of a capstone exercise, which could be applied by civic educators. Topics for future research of the sort undertaken here include both national and international comparative studies of entry-level military training, the effects of combat on veterans' civic dispositions and whether and how community involvement can aid in veterans' transitions to civilian life.

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