

# Teaching Democracy: What Schools Need to Do

Mr. Kahne and Mr. Westheimer studied 10 educational programs whose objective — to develop democratic citizens — is largely ignored by school reform policy. Schools can fulfill this mission, they discovered, through specific strategies that promote civic commitments, capacities, and connections.

BY JOSEPH KAHNE AND JOEL WESTHEIMER

**W**HICH OF THE following headlines never appeared in a daily newspaper?

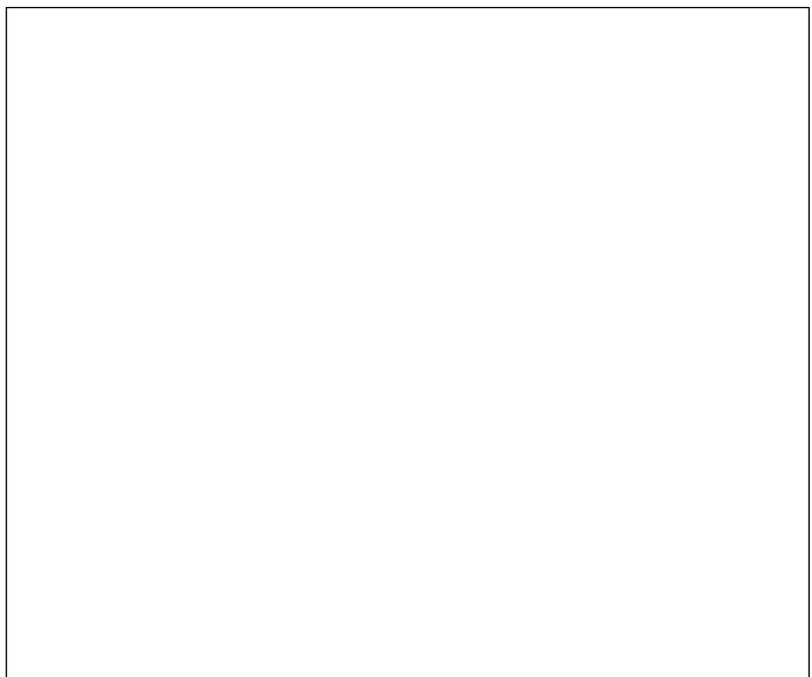
- a. **Capital City Students Show No Gain in Reading, Math — Governor Threatens Takeover**
- b. **Middletown Schools to Be Taken Over by State for Failure to Develop Democratic Citizens**

If you answered *b*, you not only answered correctly, your response also reflected an important challenge facing our democracy today. While we say that we value a democratic society, the very institutions expected to prepare democratic citizens — our schools — have moved far from this central mission. There is now frequent talk of “state takeovers” of schools that fail to raise test scores in math or reading, but it is unimaginable that any school would face such an action because it failed to prepare its graduates for democratic citizenship.

The headlines we read are about test scores, basic skills, and the role schools play in preparing students for jobs in the Information Age. The vast bulk of school resources are

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going to literacy, mathematics, science, and vocational education. In 2003, for example, federal expenditures by the Department of Education on civic education totaled less than half of one percent of the overall department budget.<sup>1</sup>

And when it comes to assessment, civic goals get very little attention. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act mandates yearly testing in math, reading, and, beginning in 2005, science. Social studies and civic education, the areas of the curriculum most tied to the democratic mission of schools, share no such requirements. Similarly, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is often referred to as the “Nation’s Report Card,” measures performance in math and reading annually — but administers a civics assessment only about once every 10 years. Clearly, math, reading, and science are important, but, from the standpoint of supporting a democratic society, academic subject matter, when disconnected from its social relevance, is insufficient. The same can be said of colleges and universities. Their commitments to democratic priorities are more rhetorical than substantive.

We are concerned here with what is *not* being discussed in the newspapers. We are concerned that the great school debates of our time give short shrift to a fundamental principle that, for more than two centuries, informed efforts to advance the notion of public schooling. This article addresses an important gap in our education agenda: preparing students to be effective democratic citizens.

For the past three years, we studied 10 educational programs, funded by the Surdna Foundation, that were unusual in that they put the challenge of educating for democratic citizenship at the center of their efforts.<sup>2</sup> We studied 10th-graders evaluating a juvenile detention center, ninth-graders studying the feasibility of curbside recycling, and 11th-graders reporting to the public on the availability of affordable housing in their community. We examined programs that exposed university students to community development projects in Silicon Valley, brought theology majors to a reservation to study the history of Native American experience, and led students interested in social movements on an intensive journey through historical sites of the civil rights movement. We visited an adult education program with a 70-year history of working for social and economic change through education and democratic action. All in all, we interviewed dozens of instructors and students, administered more than 500 surveys, observed pedagogical practices, and examined portfolios of student work.

These programs share an emphasis on helping students to identify and act on issues of importance to themselves

and to society. The words of a high school teacher from one program echo those of many others we interviewed: “My goal is to empower students to rectify problems, to come up with solutions, and to join with other people so that they can become truly active citizens.”

By studying these programs and their impact, we have been able to learn a great deal about how such goals can be attained. The programs we studied approached the development of democratic citizens in different ways and worked with varied populations, but common curricular components emerged from our analysis. Unfortunately, neither these goals nor these curricular components are getting much attention in most current school reform efforts. We believe that, if schools are to fulfill their historic ideal of laying the foundation for a democratic society, these goals and curricular components must be given much more attention.

## WHY TEACH DEMOCRACY?

Targeting what people don’t know about how our government works has become a favorite pastime not only of Jay Leno but also of educators and politicians: a study by the National Constitution Center found that only 38% of respondents could name all three branches of government, while a separate poll conducted two years earlier found that 59% of all Americans could name the Three Stooges.<sup>3</sup> Yet even if Leno discovered an impressive show of factual knowledge among the nation’s young people, democracy would still face significant hurdles.

The numbers that chronicle declining civic engagement are becoming increasingly familiar. Twenty-five percent fewer citizens go to the polls today than in 1960, and the largest declines are among young people. Political participation, such as working for a political party, is at a 40-year low. Broadly speaking, as Robert Putnam demonstrates, “Americans are playing virtually every aspect of the civic game less frequently than we did two decades ago.”<sup>4</sup>

It’s not that citizens are incapable of keeping up with current affairs or of acting on their views. When the Coca-Cola Company announced it was changing the recipe of its signature soft drink, its Atlanta headquarters received 40,000 letters of protest and fielded 5,000 phone calls per day for months.<sup>5</sup> More than 24 million young Americans cast votes to elect an “American Idol.”<sup>6</sup> The problem instead is that citizens (and particularly young citizens) are often disengaged from politics.

Young people need to be taught to make democracy work, to engage civically, socially, and politically. At the same time that lobbyists are spending hundreds of mil-

lions of dollars, many ordinary citizens are passive and apathetic when it comes to major issues that affect their lives. If policies regarding the environment, taxes, military spending, and health care — to name just a few — are to reflect public sentiments rather than the interests of well-financed lobbyists, they require the attention of ordinary citizens. Improving society requires making democracy work. And making democracy work requires that schools take this goal seriously: to educate and nurture engaged and informed democratic citizens.

### WHAT IS A DEMOCRATIC CITIZEN?

While most may agree that civic participation is in decline, when we get specific about what democracy requires and about what kinds of school curricula will best promote it, much of the consensus falls away. For some, a commitment to democracy is a promise to protect liberal notions of freedom, while for others democracy is primarily about equality. For some, civil society is the key, while for others, free markets are the great hope for a democratic society. For some, good citizens in a democracy volunteer, while for others, they take active parts in political processes by voting, protesting, and working on political campaigns.

These multiple visions of citizenship are not always in conflict. A citizen who volunteers can also be a good neighbor and work to change unjust laws, for example. But when it comes to decisions about curriculum, these goals do not necessarily go together; activities that address the goals of one vision of citizenship do not necessarily address goals related to another vision. So before we report on ways in which the successful programs we studied developed democratic citizens, we need to clarify what we mean by a democratic citizen.

A strikingly large number of school-based programs embrace a vision of citizenship devoid of politics. This is particularly true of the community service and character education initiatives that have garnered so much recent attention. These programs aim to promote service and good character, but not democracy. They share an orientation toward developing individual character traits (honesty, integrity, self-discipline, hard work), volunteerism, and charity and away from teaching about social movements, social transformation, and systemic change. The Character Counts! Coalition, for example, advocates teaching students to “treat others with respect . . . deal peacefully with anger . . . be considerate of the feelings of others . . . follow the Golden Rule . . . use good manners,” and so on. It wants students not to “threaten, hit, or hurt anyone [or use] bad language.”<sup>7</sup> Other programs hope to develop com-

passionate citizens by engaging students in volunteer activities. As illustrated by the Points of Light Foundation, these programs hope to “help solve serious social problems” by “engag[ing] more people more effectively in volunteer service.”<sup>8</sup> These programs privilege individual acts of compassion and kindness over collective efforts to improve policies and institutions.

The emphasis placed on service and character is also reflected in college-based service learning programs. In a recent analysis by HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development) of 599 college programs, researchers found that 50% involved direct service, including tutoring, serving food, clothes collections, and blood drives. Another 42% provided technical assistance, such as computer training and leadership classes. A mere 1% involved political advocacy, such as building tenant councils, drafting legislation, and so on.<sup>9</sup>

*More than good deeds.* While programs that emphasize service and character may be valuable for supporting the development of good community members, they are inadequate for the challenges of educating a democratic citizenry.

First, emphasizing individual character and behavior obscures the need for collective and often public-sector initiatives. Volunteers can help the elderly cope with daily difficulties, but it took Social Security to reduce the proportion of senior citizens living in poverty from one in two (the highest rate of poverty for any demographic group) to fewer than one in eight.<sup>10</sup>

Second, an emphasis on individual character distracts attention from economic and political obstacles to remedying social ills. For example, programs that rely on character training to bolster democracy do not encourage participants to explore whether people are poor because of personal “character flaws” or because there are far fewer jobs that pay living wages than there are people to fill them.<sup>11</sup> To the extent that these character development programs detract from other important democratic priorities, they hinder rather than make possible democratic participation and change. For example, emphasizing loyalty, patriotism, or obedience (common components of character education as well) can lead to antidemocratic forms of civic education if it constrains the kind of critical reflection, dialogue, and action that are essential in a democratic society. Indeed, government leaders in a totalitarian regime would be as delighted as leaders in a democracy if their young citizens learned the lessons put forward by many of the proponents of these citizenship programs: don’t do drugs, show up at school every day, show up at work on time, say the pledge of allegiance, give blood,

help others during a flood, recycle, pick up litter, clean up a park, treat elders with respect, and so on. Chinese leader Hu Jintao and George W. Bush might both argue that these

are desirable traits for people living in a community. But they are not about democratic citizenship.

Third, volunteerism is often put forward as a way of

## EDUCATORS' ROUNDTABLE on *Democracy and Civic Engagement*

*Seven thoughtful educators from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives offer short responses to the question "What should teachers and schools do to educate good citizens?"*

# The Good Citizen and the Common School

BY ROGER SODER

**T**O SPEAK of the good citizen without locating that goodness within some kind of political regime is to land us in a muddle. A recent state education mandate defines the education of good citizens in terms of "honesty, courage, respect, and responsibility." But these sentiments are as appropriate to a military state such as ancient Sparta as they are to a democracy.

To speak of the good citizen in a democracy asks for much more. We need to speak of liberty — how to promote it, how to balance it with order, and how to defend it. We need to understand, with de Tocqueville, that "those who prize liberty only instrumentally for the externals it brings — ease, comfort, riches — are not destined to keep it long." And we need to understand that we must be educated in liberty. Such education, James Madison averred, "is the best security against crafty & dangerous encroachments on the public liberty." Without that security, he warned, popular government "is but a Prologue to a Farce, or Tragedy, or, perhaps, both."

Good citizens in a democracy need to have patience, tolerance for ambiguity, and an aversion to either/or "solutions." They must understand the tension between individual and group and how to satisfy individual needs while helping meet the needs of the larger community. They must keep the idealistic desire to improve within the bounds of reason and prudence, avoiding intemperate actions that are destructive of the very democracy that provides succor for improvement in the first place.

Moreover, good citizens must deal with those who would delude them. If in Colonial times the concern was over the "old deluder, Satan," we in our times need to worry about our own deluders, those demagogues who would have it that we can do anything to anyone anywhere, without mandate and without consequence. Good citizens in a democracy will be wary of such blandish-

ments. They will consider the probabilities of long-term consequences, faint and far off as those might be, and weigh these against the supposed short-term advantages.

Where are the rudiments of good citizenship to be learned? To some extent these are learned in the home, in street-corner societies, in churches, and from television and the Internet. But in a democracy, with demands for good citizenship placed on all alike, only the common schools can provide to all the education that all need.

If these claims make sense, then educators everywhere will have to take on serious and prolonged work. Curricula moving far beyond the usual structure of American government will have to be developed. Room in the school day must be found to address the new curricula. The schools themselves must be structured in ways that reinforce the exercise of liberty, the understanding of the tension between liberty and order, and participation in civil discourse.

Such work has implications for assessment. How, beyond analyzing bubble-sheet data, are we to know how well we are doing in preparing people to be good citizens in a democracy?

Finally, there are implications for how teachers are to be educated. All teachers must know the components of good citizenship if they are to teach and model such citizenship. But such knowledge is difficult to obtain. Even the best formal teacher preparation programs cannot devote enough time to the consideration of these matters. We must turn to those in the liberal arts to provide the basic foundations of understanding of what it means to teach the young to be good citizens.

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avoiding politics and policy. As Harry Boyte notes, “Volunteers usually disavow concern with larger policy questions, seeing service as an *alternative* to politics” (emphasis

in original).<sup>12</sup> Research bears out these concerns. A study commissioned by the National Association of Secretaries of State, for example, found that less than 32% of eligible

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# Creating the ‘Space’ for Civic Dialogue

BY TIMOTHY J. STANLEY

**D**EMOCRACY CANNOT survive unless people come together in dialogue to develop shared projects despite their differences and without unduly imposing their conceptions of the good life on others. Without dialogue, shared projects can become unilateral impositions. After all, the past is littered with efforts that started with the noblest of intentions — only to end in tyranny.

The problem is that not everyone enters democratic spaces under the same conditions. In Canada and the United States, public memory (the widespread historical representations of movies, TV shows, newspapers, popular fiction, public monuments, and school textbooks) makes it appear as if certain people belong in certain spaces while others do not. These same representations seem to explain the intentions of those who appear to belong, while making it seem as if the intentions of those who seem not to belong are at best unpredictable. Addressing this inequality is one of the main challenges facing democratic education.

As a “white” man, I can walk through most neighborhoods in most Canadian or U.S. cities without having my right to do so questioned. Public memory helps me do this by continually representing such spaces as having been made by and for those like me. Countless movies and TV shows celebrate the occupation of the land by people of European origins, like me. Our national pasts are recounted from the same perspectives. Meanwhile, the mass media effectively exclude the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of others. Even though indigenous peoples occupied the land for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans, few people of European origins today even remember the names indigenous people use to refer to themselves. Public monuments tend not to record indigenous peoples’ heroes or commemorate their sacrifices. Public memory only sporadically records the ways in which cultural, institutional, and physical spaces have been made what they

are today by the racist exploitation and exclusion of those whose ancestors came from Africa, Asia, or the Americas.

The same is generally true for mandated school curricula. Textbooks today may be more multicultural than in the past; they may discuss African slavery or note the contributions of Chinese railroad workers. But they are still crafted on frameworks that focus on the experiences of people who came from Europe, and they celebrate Europeans and their accomplishments. Even their chronologies flow from east to west, following the frontier of European resettlement. And there are few curricular spaces left for studying the histories of anyone else. Today in Ontario, for example, the official curriculum does not require students to learn anything of Asian, African, or Latin American history.

Most people consume public memory uncritically, assuming that its representations are simply the Truth about the past. They are unaware that its narratives are at best incomplete, are always told from particular points of view, and are often open to considerable dispute. Yet those who do not fit into these narratives, whose presence and motivations are not accounted for by them, are in constant danger of being silenced or excluded, their right to be in democratic spaces called into question. Meanwhile, the actual histories that people live, their complex interconnections with others, are obscured and eventually forgotten.

The result is that few Canadians or Americans know enough about the people around them to enter into dialogue with them. In this context, educating for democracy not only makes visible the different conditions under which people enter democratic spaces, it also needs to make genuine dialogue possible by fostering spaces in which people’s lived histories can be safely told.

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voters between the ages of 18 and 24 voted in the 1996 Presidential election but that a whopping 94% of those between the ages of 15 and 24 believed that “the most important thing I can do as a citizen is to help others.”<sup>13</sup> In a very real sense, then, young people seem to be “learning” that democratic citizenship does not require government, politics, or even collective endeavors. The vision promoted is one of citizenship without politics or collective action — a commitment to individual service, but not to democracy.

*The democratic citizen.* Certainly, honesty, responsibility for one’s actions, and a willingness to help out voluntarily are valuable character traits for good neighbors and

citizens, but these traits are not inherently about democracy. If democracy is to be effective at improving society, people need to exert power over issues that affect their lives. Although citizens can and should volunteer to help out when help is needed, these activities will not ensure that government policies and practices are effective or that they reflect public preferences. A democratic citizen’s effectiveness is buttressed by the skills needed for civic engagement (e.g., how to work in a group, speak in public, forge coalitions among varied interests, and protest or petition for change). Opportunities to connect academic knowledge to analysis of social issues are also essential for informed decision making. In addition, knowledge of dem-

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# Leading Students Toward Citizenship

BY TERRI CAMAJANI AND INGRID SEYER-OCHI



**W**E BELIEVE that a good citizen actively organizes with other people to address causes of injustice and suffering. A good citizen understands the complexities of social, political, and economic issues and sees how they are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. A good citizen questions accepted definitions of problems. Good citizens are activists who are empowered to focus on things that they care about in their own lives and who can either identify or build the potential avenues needed to truly change them.

Just as English education is not about grammar — except as a vehicle for clarity in writing and thought — democracy education is not solely about how a bill becomes a law; it is also about how students can understand that process and then put it into action to change the world around them. In the same way that far too many English classes focus on diagrams of sentences, too many government classes focus solely on diagrams showing the classic separation of powers, the branches of government, and how a bill becomes a law. Of course, it is important to understand how the mechanisms of our democracy work. When the analysis stops there, we become deeply concerned. Students will only be truly empowered by their understandings of democracy when they can move beyond the diagrams and apply their knowledge in the real world of political action and social change.

It is tempting to believe that teachers, working together with common purpose, can turn students into em-

power and active citizens. However, we know that it is not possible for teachers and students to learn, understand, focus, organize, and then right wrongs. When society tells teachers that it is our responsibility to pursue these lofty goals with our students, we are all missing the larger picture. Are there real opportunities for students to change what’s wrong in the world? Can they do it if teachers join them? It is not likely.

Society must stop pinning its hopes and aspirations for social change primarily on schools. Schools alone have never been and will never be able to cure the broader ills of the social, political, and economic system. Society must acknowledge that real opportunities do not exist for all. Then we must decide collectively that all of us will work to build those opportunities. Until we see increased interest, accompanying public dialogue, massive reorientation of values and priorities, and a resultant groundswell of public action, we will not be particularly hopeful that changes in the distribution of opportunities at all levels will occur.

What, then, should teachers and students do to help educate good citizens? The answer may be simply to encourage and challenge society to start functioning as a true democracy. Schools — and our youths — will follow.

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ocratic processes, of particular issues, and of how to attain and analyze information is crucial. Democratic citizens are, for example, able to examine the structural causes of social problems and seek solutions, work that might be informed by their knowledge of social movements and various strategies for change. Finally, democratic values of tolerance, respect for individual and group identities, and concern for the greater good are all fundamentally important. Since conceptions of that greater good will differ, citizens must be able to communicate with and learn from those who hold different perspectives and, at the same time, know how to effectively promote their own goals in contentious political arenas.<sup>14</sup>

Is this too tall an order? We don't think so. Is it possible for education programs to develop citizens prepared to strengthen our democracy? Absolutely. Programs with goals such as these are not as common as community service and character education programs, but where they exist they have demonstrated impressive results.

### **BEYOND SERVICE AND CHARACTER: PROGRAMS THAT TEACH DEMOCRACY**

To illustrate models for teaching democracy that move beyond service associated with citizenship, we showcase three of the programs we studied. The first is part of a high school government course, the second is a college-level program, and the third is an adult education program. Each program employs curricular strategies that make especially vivid the role schools, colleges, and universities can play in teaching democracy.

1. *The Frederick County Youth Service League*. The Frederick County Youth Service League is part of a high school government course that places students in internships in local county offices, where they undertake substantive, semester-long projects. It was organized with support from the Close-Up Foundation. One group we observed investigated the feasibility of curbside recycling in the county by conducting phone interviews, examining maps of the city's population density, and analyzing projected housing growth and environmental impacts. Another group identified jobs that prisoners incarcerated for less than 90 days could perform and analyzed the cost and efficacy of similar programs in other localities. Other students identified strategies to increase immunization rates for children, and still others examined the availability of adequate affordable housing in their county. In all of these projects, the students took on responsibilities that required interpersonal, work-related, and analytic skills. These experiences also provided an up-close look at the ways in which govern-

ment organizations interact with the public and with private businesses in formulating policies that affect the community.

2. *The Overground Railroad*. Students and faculty members from six colleges came together over the summer to learn in intensive and experiential ways about the civil rights movement and its implications for citizenship today.<sup>15</sup> For three weeks students in the Overground Railroad Project traveled throughout the South, visiting historic sites of the civil rights and abolitionist movements and meeting with those who played a role in the history of these movements and with others engaged in similar efforts today. They saw films about civil rights, read related academic literature, and discussed and analyzed their experiences. The students talked with Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, a civil rights leader, about events in Birmingham in the 1960s and his role in the movement. They spoke with a sanitation worker in Memphis who participated in the strike in 1968 and with Judge Sugarman, a lawyer who had worked on the sanitation workers' case. They traveled to Selma to meet with a woman who had been part of the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge and with a former leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. When they returned to their respective campuses in the fall, they initiated projects that were informed by the ideas and strategies they studied.

3. *The Highlander Democracy Schools Initiative*. A third project we studied worked with adults who were already active in their communities. Drawing on the Highlander Center's long history of community education and change,<sup>16</sup> the Democracy Schools Initiative was created to help rural communities in Appalachia devise grassroots strategies about how to "revitalize democracy in all areas of people's lives: family, community, government, and economy." Presented over a series of four weekend retreats, the curriculum mixed training for political analysis and action with opportunities to meet others doing similar work. For example, one weekend included sharing the work going on in each participant's community, strategic planning for effecting change, brainstorming on resources and skills required, and learning from guest presenters and panelists about community change strategies.

### **WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT HOW TO TEACH DEMOCRACY IN SCHOOLS**

Using before-and-after surveys and systematic analysis of observations, interviews, and portfolios of student work, we were able to track changes in students' commitment  
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## Teaching Democracy

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to and capacity for democratic participation. In a survey designed to measure commitment to civic involvement, we documented statistically significant increases in students' ability and desire to understand and act on pressing social needs, in their willingness to devote time to addressing these needs, and in their confidence in being able to act on their beliefs as a result of their participation in these programs.<sup>17</sup>

Student interviews reinforced the survey findings. For example, James, a lifelong resident of Montgomery County, West Virginia, reported that his participation in Highlander's Democracy School "influenced how I view my responsibility as a citizen and as a person in the community." And Stephanie, a college student, explained that, after her intensive Overground Railroad experience, she could not go back to turning a blind eye to civil rights and moral obligations. "I know I can't save the whole world," she told us, "but when I see something go wrong, I need to say something. I just can't keep my mouth shut, because this experience has changed me."

Perhaps most interesting were the programs in which the students started without any particular commitment to community involvement. Indeed, many in the Frederick County Youth Service League told us that they had previously had little interest in community affairs and had been quite skeptical of local government and related commu-

nity institutions. As a result of their experiences, however, their perspectives changed markedly. Indeed, during the interviews following their participation in the program, we asked students to identify a community problem. More than 50% surprised us by stating "lack of involvement in the community." As one student told us, "I think if more people were aware of what has happened in the government, we wouldn't have as many problems, because they would understand that people do have an impact."

How did the programs accomplish these goals? What curricular features seem most promising? In what follows, we discuss answers to these questions that emerged from our research.<sup>18</sup>

### WHY WE WANT 'C' STUDENTS: CIVIC COMMITMENT, CAPACITY, AND CONNECTION

Pedagogical and curricular strategies for supporting the development of democratic citizens are numerous and range from leadership courses, to courses in U.S. history, to such experiences as participation in a Model United Nations.<sup>19</sup> As we looked for common features of the successful programs we studied, however, three broad priorities emerged: promoting democratic *commitments*, *capacities*, and *connections* to others with similar goals. Below, we describe these priorities and some of the ways they were pursued. (See Figure 1 for a schematic presentation of the relation of these features to civic education.)

**Commitment.** "It's boring." "We don't care about it."

FIGURE 1. Three Broad Priorities of Successful Programs			
	Commitment	Capacity	Connection
What Students Ask	Why should I be committed to actively engaging issues in my community and beyond?	How can I engage issues?	Who is going to engage issues with me?
Teaching Democracy	For example: show students that society needs improving and provide positive experiences seeking solutions.	For example: engage students in real-world projects; teach civic skills and provide knowledge through workshops and simulations so students can be effective civic actors.	For example: provide a supportive community of peers and connections to role models.
Results	I am committed to civic engagement.	I have the skills, knowledge, and networks I need to act effectively for change in my community and beyond.	I know and admire people who have made a difference in the past and feel connected to those who want to make a difference now, and I want to work with them.

These are the kinds of responses we heard when we asked a focus group of high school seniors in a traditional government class what they felt about government and politics.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that the fraction of citizens who reported caring about current political affairs had declined from about 25% between 1960 and 1976 to only 5% by 2000.<sup>21</sup> This context helps explain why all the successful programs we examined emphasized developing students' commitments to actively engaging social issues and working for change. In pursuing this goal, they often employed two strategies: they helped students identify social problems in need of attention, and they provided motivating experiences in working for change.

1. *Show students that society needs improving by examining social problems and controversial issues.* It is common for educators to talk about preparing students to be informed citizens, capable of active participation in our democratic system. It is much less common for them to help students understand why they should bother. This omission is costly. Again and again in our student interviews, we heard that exposure to and discussion of instances of injustice motivated students to act. As a student in the Overground Railroad Project told us, "Once you see the issues, you feel compelled to do something and not just be part of the system." Another student reported, "We have this information, and we all feel like we have to go and do something. I feel a big responsibility placed on me."

The lesson may seem obvious, but it is not reflected in many programs that seek to teach democratic civic engagement: a clear and compelling sense that things need changing motivates and informs commitments to participate.

Knowing what needs changing, however, is not always straightforward. Many educators are understandably hesitant to expose students to such troubling problems as poverty, race or gender discrimination, and environmental degradation. There is a tendency to avoid burdening students with these weighty problems — and to avoid controversial issues that might bring concerned parents and others to the principal's door. Unfortunately, such hesitancy is likely to deter students from active engagement with community issues by concealing from them the gravity of the problems and their compelling nature.

Although care is certainly warranted when discussing controversial issues, our study revealed that keeping social issues out of the classroom is not wise. The sense that something is wrong is *compelling*, especially to adolescents who are already developing their own critiques of the world. Addressing social and political issues in classroom contexts recognizes their importance and at the same time helps

make connections between critique, analysis, and action.<sup>22</sup> Students begin to see the value not only in studying these problems but also in doing something to try to address them. As the progressive educator Harold Rugg observed:

To guarantee maximum understanding, the very foundation of education must be the study of the actual problems and controversial issues of our people. . . . The avoidance of controversy is a travesty of both knowledge and democracy. To keep issues out of the school, therefore, is to keep thought out of it; it is to keep life out of it.<sup>23</sup>

Why would we expect students to commit to involvement if there are no problems in need of attention? In all of the programs we studied, teachers embraced controversial social and political issues — indeed, they sought them out — with the same commitment and gusto that other educators have shown in avoiding them. Whether we were looking at a college-level program or a K-12 curriculum, we consistently saw significant effort to expose students to compelling social problems and to overcome what John Dewey warned is the "divorce between . . . knowledge and social action."<sup>24</sup>

2. *Provide positive experiences in civic participation.* It's hard to be committed to something you've never experienced. This simple truism has significant implications for educators, but many who espouse commitments to developing active citizens for a democracy neglect this basic reality. Schools provide opportunities "to know" but few opportunities "to do" — an unfortunate oversight when it comes to fostering civic commitment.

We found that positive experiences in civic participation strengthened students' commitments. The Youth Service League students, for example, consistently emphasized the impact of their experiences both on the community and on themselves. As one student explained about a curbside recycling project, "I thought it was just going to be another project. You know, we do some research, it gets written down, and we leave and it gets put on the shelf somewhere. But this is going to be a real thing. It's really going to happen." Another student from the same project told us, "I didn't realize this was going to be as big as what it is. I mean, we've been in the newspaper four times."

Perhaps most important from the standpoint of commitment to civic involvement, students linked their positive experiences to their desire for continued participation. For example, one student noted, "I didn't realize we could have as much influence as we did. One person can really make a change in the community." When we asked him whether this experience changed the way he thought



## Civics Education in America

BY ROD PAIGE

**C**IVICS AND American history education are vital to the health of our republic. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. . . . They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty."

Last January, we celebrated the one-year anniversary of the No Child Left Behind Act, which ushered in a new era of accountability for educating all of our nation's students. While the focus of this historic legislation is on the basic elements of reading, writing, math, and science, the connection to learning civics should be clear. Without those core learning abilities, American children cannot adequately learn about the great history of our nation. Indeed, the problems that No Child Left Behind is seeking to correct are probably to blame for the lack of history and civics performance to a significant degree.

The most recent data we have on the current status of civics knowledge in the United States is discouraging, to say the least. Some might even say that we have reached a crisis in this country with regard to civics education. I would agree. Consider the following:

- The results of the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics examination showed that one-third of fourth-graders could not explain the meaning of "I pledge allegiance to the flag" on a multiple-choice test. A majority of fourth-graders could not answer why "citizens elect people to make laws for them" in a democracy.

- The NAEP 2001 U.S. History Report Card also shows a similar lack of proficiency. Again fourth-, eighth-, and 12th-graders were tested, and the results showed that 89% of high school seniors, 84% of eighth-graders, and 82% of fourth-graders scored below "proficient" levels.

Let me tell you what the Bush Administration is do-

ing to address this crisis. The U.S. Department of Education's Teaching American History program will provide nearly \$100 million in fiscal-year 2003 to promote the teaching of American history as a separate academic subject in elementary and secondary schools. This program makes competitive awards to local school districts that establish partnerships with postsecondary institutions, nonprofit history or humanities organizations, libraries, or museums. These partnerships support professional development for teachers of American history.

The second major activity supported by the department is the Civic Education Program, which provides a \$16.9-million grant to the nonprofit Center for Civic Education. The Center operates the We the People Program, which consists of two projects: The Citizen and the Constitution and Project Citizen.

Last September, President Bush announced that the National Archives and Records Administration, in collaboration with National History Day, the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the USA Freedom Corps, will give students and teachers across the country access to national treasures of American history through the Our Documents initiative. At that same Rose Garden ceremony, President Bush called for a We the People White House Forum on American History, Civics, and Service, which was held last May at the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

At this exceptional time in our nation's history, we can and will do everything possible to ensure civic literacy for all of our schoolchildren. For I am reminded again of the words of our third President, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

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about being a citizen, he replied that his project showed him that all citizens "have a responsibility to voice their opinion by either writing letters or talking to people who control the county, state, or federal government." Other students expressed similar satisfaction from what they accomplished as well as the intent to remain engaged in civic

affairs in the future.

While most programs in our study prompted similar gains in students' commitment to civic engagement through experiences in the community, this outcome was not guaranteed. Indeed, in one of the other programs we studied, the students encountered obstacles that led to statistical-

ly significant decreases, rather than increases, in commitments to future civic involvement. These decreases were reflected in both our survey data and our interviews with students. This student's response about her experiences was typical: "We were trying to get anyone to listen to us, but we kept running into all this red tape that said, 'No, you can't do that' or 'Oh, you want to do that, well you'll have to go to that office over there.' I just kind of got the

impression that nobody really wanted to do anything about it."

For this group of students, the sense of frustration was widespread. In response to interview and in-class reflection questions, the students answered, "If you go out into the community and try to do good, someone will pull you down." Others said, "Basically, they were wasting our time and theirs too," and "It's hard to get anyone to listen to

## EDUCATORS' ROUNDTABLE on *Democracy and Civic Engagement*

### Hope for a Better Future

BY KIM WESTHEIMER

**D**ESPITE THE presence of 100 high school students, the large room was nearly silent. One young person had gained the students' attention and addressed the group. "I don't see much hope," he said. "I see people on the news saying gay marriage isn't appropriate, but [the reality TV show] 'Married by America' is. I used to think that being an adult would make things better, but I don't anymore." This transgender student was speaking to his peers at a conference for Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), school-based extracurricular clubs. He described being taunted, pushed, and derided by classmates. He reflected on his strength to withstand these attacks, his vulnerability, his disappointment in the school's failure to protect him, and his lack of hope for a better future.

Hope for a better future was a recurring theme in six regional conferences for GSAs recently sponsored by the Massachusetts Departments of Education and Public Health and the Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. Over 500 students attended the conferences, which were broadly organized around the theme of civic engagement.

Civic engagement seems like such a lofty theme when seen through the eyes of students who do not see themselves as having power in their schools or in the larger community. Their lack of hope seems linked to strong misgivings about the people who have power. At the conferences, students were asked what comes to mind when they hear the word "politics." Most conjured up negative images: corruption, money, lies, and funky, straight, white men. With some prodding, a few offered such responses as "democracy" and "way to make change." In

their more immediate world, some students' mistrust of adults appeared to be reinforced by adults who callously ignore blatant school-based harassment. Several students saw their GSAs as welcome oases that provided support but did not alter the surrounding hostile school climate.

In light of the realities expressed by GSA members, what kind of education do they need to become good citizens? These students seem to be saying that they need to feel that adults care about their well-being regardless of their identities. They need to see a history that reflects who they are. They need to see that not all people in power (or in front of their classrooms) are straight or white. They need to see that there are straight and white people who are their allies.

In these conferences, students had a chance to speak with politicians who might not fit their stereotypes, including Liz Malia, a white lesbian state representative; Jarrett Barrios, a gay Cuban American state senator; and U.S. Rep. James McGovern (D-Mass.), a straight white man. In a dialogue with politicians, one student recognized that she had benefited from learning about slavery and the civil rights movement and asked, "Is there a way schools can be mandated to teach about gay and lesbian history?" Other young people expressed their desire to support openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT) teachers. Students of all sexual orientations had numerous questions about how Liz and Jarrett had responded to homophobic politicians and constituents. These questions were a reminder that students were looking for strategies to improve their schools as well as proven methods to counteract antigay bigotry.

In addition to speaking with politicians, the students spent considerable time getting to know one another and learning from one another. They heard from student groups that were proud of their accomplishments. They had conversations about things that mattered in their

you.” Although experience may be a powerful teacher, when working in the often frustrating area of social change, careful planning and attention are needed to avoid producing a sense of discouragement or hopelessness. While students will always encounter challenges and barriers, it appears crucial to structure opportunities so that students can maintain a sense of hope through the realization of short-term successes and ample opportunities to reflect



lives, exchanged phone numbers, and created an art project that captured the energy of the day. Some even volunteered to sing a few songs for the group — ranging from a song by Christina Aguilera to a selection from the musical episode of “Buffy the Vampire Slayer.”

Did students leave these conferences feeling prepared to be more active citizens? Some said they would persuade their teachers to teach about GLBT issues, some were going to pressure their administrators to respond more appropriately to antigay harassment, and others planned to host social events to foster both learning and fun involving GSAs and other student groups.

Those of us who organized the conferences were reminded of the simple fact that, if students are going to be engaged in their schools and communities, they need to feel hope. That hope is nurtured when students learn about the contributions of people with whom they identify. Hope is nurtured when students have social and educational spaces where diversity is welcomed and celebrated. Hope is nurtured when students learn from and appreciate one another.

At the end of one conference, a GSA advisor noted that a gay, African American 12th-grader had been active in these regional conferences for four years. “Each time he leaves,” she said, “he stands about three inches taller.” That’s where hope lies.

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collectively on discouraging experiences.<sup>25</sup>

**Capacity.** It is hard to see yourself as a carpenter if you don’t know how to design a cabinet or a bookshelf and lack the woodworking skills to translate a design into a product. Effective citizenship in a democracy is no different. Teaching students to see themselves as participants in civic affairs and enabling them to engage civic and political issues effectively will require helping them develop capacities and skills that make such an identity meaningful. Yet recent studies show an alarming dearth of knowledge and skill with regard to civic participation among youths and young adults. For example, 35% of high school seniors tested below the basic level on the NAEP civics test, with another 39% at the basic level and only 4% at the advanced level.<sup>26</sup> If students are to see themselves as capable of civic participation, then they will need to develop the skills and knowledge that make that possible. The programs we studied understood this, though they pursued these goals in different ways. Some had their students plunge into real-world projects, while others taught skills through workshops and simulations.

1. *Engage students in real-world projects.* Programs like the Frederick County Youth Service League taught strategies for community change through projects that required students to develop such skills as speaking in public, using visual aids, facilitating meetings, conducting research, canvassing a community, and designing surveys. Each group of students, working closely with the teacher and the field site supervisor, culminated its project with a presentation to the County Board of Supervisors. Each group got tips on how to make its brief presentations interesting, on how to use presentation software, and on how to ensure that the primary message was communicated. As the students developed these skills, they increasingly viewed their own participation in civic affairs as more plausible and appropriate. In this sense, each student’s identity as an engaged, democratic citizen followed his or her capacity to be one.

2. *Teach skills and provide knowledge through workshops and simulations.* Rather than engage students in actual projects of civic importance, other programs successfully developed students’ civic knowledge and skills through workshops, simulations, and classroom instruction. For example, many of the programs connected preparation and motivation for civic and political engagement with traditional content (e.g., how a bill becomes a law) as well as with content knowledge linked to particular issues. As William Galston points out in this issue (page 32-33), such knowledge provides important support for effective participation.

Skill development also received substantial attention.



## From Knowledge, to Service, To Citizenship

BY SHAHARA AHMAD-LLEWELLYN

**T**HE PHRASE “E Pluribus Unum” — out of many, one — brilliantly distills what it means to be a good citizen. I learned at an early age that this Latin phrase, our nation’s original motto, referred to the welding of 13 colonies into one nation. But over the years, “E Pluribus Unum” has also served as a reminder to me that, even with our nation’s great diversity, there is still one aspect that we all share: the title “citizen,” a meaningful role that truly unites us as Americans.

Yet all too often, young people fail to understand the true meaning of citizenship. They grow up ambivalent, thinking they are entitled to certain rights, thinking that it’s all “about them.” They fail to grasp that they are, as individuals, part of a greater whole, part of a community. And as *citizens* of that community, they need to fulfill the great responsibilities that go along with the title.

So how does one create competent and responsible citizens in the face of widespread apathy? How do educators spark the flames of the spirit of citizenship that are smoldering in America’s youths?

It starts with instilling civic competence in a child’s early years. Just as lessons are taught in reading, writing, and arithmetic, so too should we teach our children the vital lessons of democracy, responsibility, and service — three concepts fundamental to understanding responsible citizenry. These vital lessons should be a part of every student’s curriculum.

Each and every day, starting in kindergarten, teachers should demonstrate, in words and in actions, the concepts of citizenship. Whether it is voting on which book the teacher will read at story time, developing a student Bill of Rights, or collecting cans of food for the poor, simple lessons in civics will foster attitudes that are necessary for children to participate as effective, responsible citizens.

As young people move on to middle and high school, teachers should increase students’ understanding of politics, government, and how our democracy works. Teachers must encourage students to express their opinions and

participate in decision-making activities. Stated simply, they must help their students become active citizens. Civic education should take shape in active class participation, in student government, in debate teams, and in service clubs.

Teachers also need to integrate service learning and civics education by reaching beyond their classrooms into the community. By combining community service and academic lessons, service learning enables students to apply their classroom knowledge to real-life problems. In addition, service learning gives students a sense of competency, enhances personal growth, and instills citizenship in a way that no other program can.

The ultimate responsibility of all citizens comes when one turns 18 years old. When I was young, voting was a rite of passage. Today, an entire generation of young citizens feels disconnected from government and has opted out of the political process. This is unacceptable.

It is imperative to the future of our democracy that, beginning at a very young age, students work on cultivating lifelong citizenship and voting habits. It is up to educators, all educators, from kindergarten through college, to teach young people that every vote counts. The decisions are too important to be left up to others. Students must know that exercising their right to vote is the way to change things in a democracy and is the greatest responsibility of a good citizen.

Today, more than ever, citizenship should play a vital part in every student’s education. The values and principles learned from such an education are essential to sustaining the future of our democracy. They unite us as Americans. And out of many, we become one.

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During a three-day workshop, the Highlander Democracy Schools Initiative taught students strategies for effecting change in their home communities. Groups of workshop participants chose imaginary scenarios. For example, imagine that you just found out that your school is eliminating its breakfast and free or reduced-price lunch program. Or imagine that you just found out that banks are not lending money to anyone who wants to buy a house in your part of town. What would you do?

The Highlander program also taught skills directly and then applied what students had learned to discussions of

actual problems in their home communities. In interviews, participants in the Highlander program and in other similar programs stressed the importance of learning practical skills, something that, as one student put it, “I can take away and tomorrow hit the ground running with it.” In other words, the skills, knowledge, and strategies for change that participants acquired enabled them to develop meaningful civic identities by employing these new capacities to actually make a difference.

**Connection.** Ask someone active in his or her community to describe a powerful experience working for change, and you will probably get a story heavily infused with a sense of camaraderie, collaboration, and connection to others doing similar work. Students need to know that civic engagement is not an individual, private endeavor. Indeed, if we say that the goal for civic educators is to “teach every student good citizenship,” we risk implying that “good and effective” citizenship is derived exclusively from personal attributes rather than enabled and shaped through interactions and connections among individuals within a community.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have long recognized that an individual’s values and commitments are not predetermined human characteristics but rather the products of family, community, and the social setting.<sup>28</sup> Cultivating commitments to democratic citizenship requires associating with others who recognize and reinforce the importance of these priorities.

These connections are especially important in a culture that does little to reinforce the value of civic participation. Consider that for most school-age children, the number of trips to the mall is exponentially higher than those to the voting booth, to community meetings, and so on. Despite the importance of connections to others who deem civic participation exciting and valuable, few educational programs make developing a supportive community an ex-

PLICIT CURRICULAR GOAL. The programs we studied, however, consciously developed communities of support and fostered connections with role models who could exemplify a life filled with civic engagement.

1. *Communities of support.* Each of the 10 programs we studied — both those based in schools and those situated elsewhere — took seriously the notion that teaching civic

engagement requires the creation of a “social milieu” that reinforces values and behaviors consistent with active civic involvement. Students need to be a part of social communities that have the strength to survive the prevailing cul-

tural emphasis on individualism and personal gain. A student from Highlander described the connection she felt working with others who believe in the same things she did. “Without Highlander,” she observed, “I probably would have been back in a corporate job that wouldn’t let me create change in my community in the ways that are so important to me.” Another Highlander participant made clear the sense of identity he derives from being a part of a community of civic actors: “I cannot separate Highlander from who I am, and I cannot tell you when it made an impact or how because it is so integrated with who I have become.”

Like sports teams and religious groups, communities of civic actors bring people together around a common sense of purpose. Instead of winning a pennant, these communities focus on advancing democratic citizenship and achieving specific social goals — securing more funding for HIV research, protecting the environment, and so on. Even for those already engaged in efforts to bring about change, the value of community membership can have clear practical significance as well. “I know that folks with a lot of technical expertise are a telephone call away,” one participant explained. “If I get into trouble, there is a whole network that can come running, and I’ve made that call. But even if I had never had to, that would still be the most important thing to know: that I was not alone.”

2. *Connections to compelling role models.* Many programs emphasize exposure to compelling role models to help students develop a vision for a life filled with civic commitments. Some of the programs we studied teamed students with accomplished civic actors; some invited role models to speak to the class; others had highly accomplished civic actors facilitate the entire curriculum. Each personality offered a connection to history and served as an example of the possibility of creating and the responsi-

*Students need to know  
that civic engagement is not  
an individual, private endeavor.*

bility to work toward a better society.

As part of their Overground Railroad Project, for example, students heard a talk by Rev. Teresa Jones, who recalled personal experiences of intimidation and violence during the early 1960s, when she was helping to register black voters in hostile southern counties. Interviews with and surveys of participants in the Overground Railroad indicated that students drew substantial strength from these kinds of encounters — strength that helped them imagine choices that often conflicted dramatically with the norms and priorities of their peers. One student recognized that, when Rev. Jones helped to organize the voter registration drive, she was not much older than the students themselves. He observed that these “teenagers were willing to put their life on the line so that I could sit here and hold a conversation with you.” Or as a different student explained, “What’s been most important is meeting people who really dedicated their lives. It’s not a sideline thing, on weekends or something. This is their life. That means a lot to me, because I often get discouraged or think that after college I’ll have to go into the real world and get a suit and what have you.”

Indeed, since one of the main tasks for students in high school and college is to figure out who they want to become and how they hope to engage in their communities, exposure to inspiring role models can be quite powerful.

Just as it is natural to introduce aspiring students to architects or scientists or social workers, if our goal is for all students to become engaged democratic citizens, then we need to expose them to role models of civic engagement. As another student explained, “I’m in this point in time where I’m trying to figure out what to do with my life, and it’s good to see role models like that.”

While the value of such exposure may not be surprising, it is interesting that several students emphasized that exposure to “ordinary” rather than “famous” individuals often had the greatest impact. In contrast to the ubiquitous school programs that hold up Martin Luther King, Jr., as a hero to be respected (but not necessarily emulated), these programs offered role models who appeared to be ordinary people — not unlike the students. Encountering such people spurred students to imagine themselves as civic actors formulating and pursuing their own civic goals. When Rev. Jones ended her presentation about what happened in the 1960s, she added, “That’s what we did when we were in college. Now it’s your turn.” Her message was clear: her stories were not to be dismissed as entertaining irrelevancies but rather valued as examples of what is possible when citizens commit to act together. Many programs we observed used connection to the past to show students the possibilities for the future. “Now it’s your turn” was an appeal these students took seriously.

## THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHING DEMOCRACY

If we believe that democratic processes — slow and imperfect as they are — are our best hope for securing a just and dynamic future, then schools have a role to play. Unfortunately, while superintendents and school mission statements mention such priorities, that mention is frequently as far as it goes. Policy makers and district leaders are focused on academic priorities — particularly those measured by high-stakes exams.<sup>29</sup> Is it important to learn math, history, English, and science? Yes. Is this focus enough to sustain a democratic society? No.

Having studied 10 programs that effectively promote democratic goals, we find ourselves confronting a relatively straightforward conclusion: bolstering our efforts to teach the academic disciplines — whether pursued through high-stakes exams or well-crafted curriculum frameworks — will, on its own, be insufficient to further the goals of teaching democracy. Indeed, Gandhi, when asked what made him saddest in life, replied, “The hard heart of the world’s most educated.” Academic study does not guarantee our humanity, and it will not sustain our democracy. If we care about educating democratic citizens, we must

enlarge and enrich both our educational priorities and our practices.

Fortunately, there are other options. The approaches we witnessed, while they varied to match their particular contexts, shared a focus on civic commitments, capacities, and connections and often pursued these goals in similar ways. The programs pursued the development of civic *commitments* by exposing students to problems in society and by creating opportunities for students to have positive experiences while working toward solutions. Students' civic *capacities* were developed by providing specific opportunities for them to learn skills and acquire the knowledge they needed in order to participate in democratic deliberation and action. And civic *connections* were pursued through the creation of supportive communities and exposure to role models. In these ways, students developed a sense of the history of social change, of who they might become, and of how they might fit into contemporary efforts to improve society. By developing commitments, capacities, and connections, each of these programs helped teach democracy.

Many more schools could follow their lead. For exam-

ple, schools could make a systematic effort to expose students to five compelling civic role models a year. Similarly, it would not be hard to integrate into the curriculum discussions of social problems, current events, and controversial issues that students find compelling. Links could be incorporated into curriculum frameworks in science, social studies, and English, for example.<sup>30</sup> Moving in this direction would help expose the fallacy of a zero-sum or an either/or relationship between academic and democratic purposes. Democratic and academic goals can be pursued simultaneously. There are also many existing course curricula that are suitable for large-scale implementation that use community projects, simulations, and related approaches to integrate academic and democratic priorities. Specifically, the Constitutional Rights Foundation's City-Works curriculum and the Center for Civic Education's We the People curriculum have both demonstrated their effectiveness in relation to civic goals.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, as Deborah Meier makes clear in this issue, schools can themselves reflect democratic practice in the service of advancing democratic sensibilities among students and the entire school community.

There are, in addition, many extracurricular opportunities to advance civic commitments, capacities, and connections. As Kenneth Holdsmen has written, "In many schools and school districts, student leaders may influence or actually decide the theme and location of the senior prom, but they are wholly left out of the deliberations about the school's budget, improvement and safety plans, and the curricular and extracurricular offerings."<sup>32</sup>

Democracy won't run on autopilot. Fortunately, we already know how to do much that needs to be done. What we currently lack is an adequate educational commitment to democracy. What we need to make democracy work are educators committed to developing students' civic commitments, capacities, and connections and educational policy makers who will support their efforts.

1. U.S. Department of Education Budget, available at [www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/Budget04/04app.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/Budget04/04app.pdf).
2. This article is one of a set of articles reporting on a study of programs that aimed to promote democratic values and effective citizenry. For an analysis of the politics that underlie different conceptions of citizenship, see Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," 2003; send e-mail to [joelw@uottawa.ca](mailto:joelw@uottawa.ca). For our findings on the role of efficacy and the limits of deliberately structuring programs to be successful, see Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer, "The Limits of Efficacy: Education for a Democratic Society," in Beth Rubin and James Giarelli, eds., *Social Studies for a New Millennium: Re-envisioning Civic Education for a Changing World* (Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, forthcoming). For a discussion of neutrality and indoctrination, see Joel Westheimer and Joe Kahne, "Teaching Justice: Indoctrination, Neutrality, and the Need for Alternatives," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, 2003.
3. Robert L. Dudley and Alan R. Gitelson, "Political Literacy, Civic Education, and Civic Engagement: A Return to Political Socialization?," *Applied Developmental Science*, vol. 6, 2000, pp. 175-82.
4. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), p. 41.
5. Oliver Thomas, *The Real Coke, The Real Story* (New York: Random House, 1990), pp. 155, 157.
6. Martha Paskoff, "Idol Worship: What American Politics Can Learn from American Idol," *American Prospect Online*, 23 May 2003.
7. *Character Counts!* (Los Angeles: Character Counts Coalition, 1996).
8. "Mission Statement," Points of Light Foundation, May 2003, [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org).
9. Cited in Tony Robinson, "Dare the School Build a New Social Order?," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Fall 2000, p. 145.
10. Kathryn H. Porter, Kathy Larin, and Wendell Primus, *Social Security and Poverty Among the Elderly: A National and State Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1999).
11. For a critique of character education programs along these lines, see Alfie Kohn, "How Not to Teach Values: A Critical Look at Character Education," *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 1997, pp. 428-39. For an analysis of the job market and its disconnect from character-building programs of job training, see Gordon Lafer, *The Job Training Charade* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002).
12. Harry C. Boyte, "Community Service and Civic Education," *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 1991, p. 766.
13. National Association of Secretaries of State, *New Millennium Project — Phase I: A Nationwide Study of 15–24-Year-Old Youth* (Alexandria, Va.: Tarrance Group, 1999).
14. For a well-conceived description of goals for civic education, see Cynthia Gibson and Peter Levine, *The Civic Mission of Schools* (New

York: Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning, 2003), p. 4; for a description of the complexities of pursuing democratic goals amidst diversity, see Walter Parker, *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003).

15. The Overground Railroad/Agora Project was a collaboration between six private colleges in Kentucky, Indiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Ohio, with Berea (Ky.) College and the College of St. Catherine coordinating. The colleges came together in an effort to create opportunities for students that promote democracy and public works. The students receive college credit through their participation.
16. See Myles Horton, *The Long Haul: An Autobiography* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).
17. For detailed findings, see Westheimer and Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen?"
18. For a related quantitative study that comes to similar conclusions, see Joseph Kahne, Bernadette Chi, and Ellen Middaugh, "Democratic Education: The Untapped Potential of High School Government Courses," unpublished paper, 2003. Please contact [jkahne@mills.edu](mailto:jkahne@mills.edu) for copies.
19. For a review, see Gibson and Levine, op. cit. See also Shelley H. Billig, "Research on School-Based Service-Learning: The Evidence Builds," *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2000, pp. 658-64; and Judith Torney-Purta, "The School's Role in Developing Civic Engagement: A Study of Adolescents in Twenty-Eight Countries," *Applied Developmental Science*, vol. 6, 2002, pp. 203-12.
20. Kahne, Chi, and Middaugh, op. cit.
21. Gibson and Levine, op. cit.
22. For an up-close example of this process in a high school social studies class that explicitly taught students how to discuss and debate controversial social issues, see Diana Hess and Julie Posselt, "How High School Students Experience and Learn from the Discussion of Controversial Public Issues," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, Summer 2002, pp. 283-314.
23. Harold Rugg, "That Men May Understand," in Melinda Fine, ed., *Habits of Mind: Struggling over Values in America's Classrooms* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), p. 171.
24. John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education* (1909; reprint, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), p. 41.
25. See Kahne and Westheimer, op. cit.
26. Anthony D. Lutkus et al., *The NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card for the Nation* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2000-457, 1999).
27. Indeed, despite the importance of social relations in democratic action, school textbooks and curricula most often turn the history of collective efforts into myths about individual heroes. See, for example, Herb Kohl's comparison of the Rosa Parks story as told in children's history textbooks with the history recognized by historians and by Parks herself. Herbert Kohl, *Should We Burn Barbar?: Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories* (New York: New Press, 1995).
28. See Shelly Berman, *Children's Social Consciousness and the Development of Social Responsibility* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).
29. See Susan Ohanian, *One Size Fits Few: The Folly of Educational Standards* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1999); and idem, "Goals 2000: What's in a Name?," *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 2000, pp. 345-55.
30. See, for example, Bill Ayers et al., eds., *Teaching for Social Justice: A Democracy and Education Reader* (New York: New Press, 1998); E. Wayne Ross, "Remaking the Social Studies," in idem, ed., *The Social Studies Curriculum: Purposes, Problems, and Possibilities* (New Paltz, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2001), pp. 313-27; and David W. Hursh and E. Wayne Ross, eds., *Democratic Social Education: Social Studies for Social Change* (New York: Falmer, 2000).
31. See, for example, Robert S. Leming, "An Evaluation of the Instructional Effects of We the People . . . The Citizen and the Constitution Program Using 'with Liberty and Justice for all,'" Social Studies Development Center, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1993; and Kahne, Chi, and Middaugh, op. cit.
32. Kenneth Holdsmen, unpublished paper, 24 February 2003. 

# A Guide to Organizations, Programs, and Resources

**Agenda for Education in a Democracy.** Seeks to support young people's participation in a social and political democracy through research and programs that promote democratic citizenship. Includes Institute for Educational Inquiry and the Center for Educational Renewal. <http://depts.washington.edu/cedren/AED.htm>

**American Political Science Association – Civic Education Organizations.** Extensive online list of civic education organizations. [www.apsanet.org/cennet/organizations/index.cfm](http://www.apsanet.org/cennet/organizations/index.cfm)

**America's Promise.** National coalition of organizations committed to five "promises" for young people: caring adults, safe places, healthy start, marketable skills, and opportunities to serve. Founded by Colin Powell. [www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org)

**Campus Compact.** Organization representing 900 college and university presidents committed to the civic purposes of higher education. [www.compact.org](http://www.compact.org)

**Center for Civic Education.** Specializes in civic/citizenship education, law-related education, and international educational exchange programs for developing democracies. [www.civiced.org](http://www.civiced.org)

**Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE).** Funds and disseminates research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)

**Citizenship Education and Research Network.** Researchers, policy makers, and practitioners interested in citizenship education and research in Canada. [www.canada.metropolis.net/research-policy/cern-pub/overview.html](http://www.canada.metropolis.net/research-policy/cern-pub/overview.html)

**CIVNET.** Online resource and service that promotes civic education all over the world. [www.civnet.org](http://www.civnet.org)

**Close-Up Foundation.** Works to promote responsible and informed participation in the democratic process through a variety of educational programs for middle and high school students, teachers, and adults. The website describes programs and provides a range of links to resources and organizations. [www.closeup.org](http://www.closeup.org)

**Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) and the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC).** Both offer civic education curricula, activities for students, and professional development for teachers. [www.crf-usa.org](http://www.crf-usa.org) and [www.crfc.org](http://www.crfc.org)

**Corporation for National and Community Service.** Provides opportunities for community service through three programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. Part of USA Freedom Corps, a White House initiative to foster a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility. [www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org)

**Democratic Dialogue at the University of Ottawa.** International, collaborative inquiry into democracy, education, and society. For educators, political scientists, sociologists, philosophers, teachers, policy makers, artists, critics, and the broader public concerned with ideals, tensions, policies, and practices of education for democracy. [www.democraticdialogue.com](http://www.democraticdialogue.com)

**Educators for Social Responsibility.** Helps educators create safe, caring, respectful, and productive learning environments that foster democratic participation and change. [www.esnational.org](http://www.esnational.org)

**e.thePeople.** Digital town hall that "promotes intelligent and diverse discussion and political action." [www.e-thepeople.org](http://www.e-thepeople.org)

**Gay-Straight Alliances - Safe Schools Coalition.** Gay-Straight Alliances or GSAs are high school clubs devoted to human rights and human dignity, including the rights and dignity of gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-

gender people. These clubs usually have a social justice and education focus. [www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-gaystraightalliances.html](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-gaystraightalliances.html)

**Highlander Research and Education Center.** Highlander sponsors educational programs and research into community problems, as well as a residential Workshop Center for social change organizations and workers active in the South and internationally. Over the course of its history, Highlander has played important roles in many major political movements, including the Southern labor movements of the 1930s, the civil rights movement of the 1940s-60s, and the Appalachian people's movements of the 1970s-80s. [www.highlandercenter.org](http://www.highlandercenter.org)

**IEA Civic Education Study.** Survey research report of nearly 90,000 14-year-old students in 28 countries on democracy, national identity, social cohesion, and diversity. [www.wam.umd.edu/~iea](http://www.wam.umd.edu/~iea)

**Institute for Civic Leadership.** A semesterlong program in civic leadership for democratic change open to undergraduate women from colleges and universities across the country. The Institute also undertakes research into strategies for increasing civic engagement among students in K-12 and higher education. [www.mills.edu/ICL](http://www.mills.edu/ICL)

**Institute for Democracy and Education at Ohio University.** Provides teachers, administrators, parents, and students committed to democratic education with a forum for sharing ideas, with a support network of people holding similar values, and with opportunities for professional development. [www.ohiou.edu/ide](http://www.ohiou.edu/ide)

**Kids Can Make A Difference.** School program and detailed curriculum to inspire young people to realize that it is within their power to help eliminate hunger and poverty in their communities, their country, and their world. [www.kidscanmakeadifference.org](http://www.kidscanmakeadifference.org)

**National Alliance for Civic Education.** Selected resources and guidelines for civic education. [www.cived.net](http://www.cived.net)

**The Political Engagement Project – Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.** A collaborative study of 21 college- and university-based programs that strengthen students' political understanding and engagement. The website includes curriculum resources. [www.carnegiefoundation.org/PEP](http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/PEP)

**Project 540.** Gives students nationwide the opportunity to talk about issues that matter to them and to turn these conversations into real school and community change. [www.project540.org](http://www.project540.org)

**Project Vote Smart.** Project Vote Smart (PVS) is dedicated to providing all Americans with accurate and unbiased information for electoral decision making. [www.vote-smart.org/index.htm](http://www.vote-smart.org/index.htm)

**Public Achievement.** People of all ages work with others, meet challenges, and solve problems, learning from one another the meaning of citizenship and democracy. <http://publicachievement.org>

**Rethinking Schools.** Writing, resources, and advocacy for public education reform in the pursuit of equity and social justice. [www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org)

**Rouge Forum.** Meetings and resources for educators, students, and parents interested in teaching and learning for a democratic society. [www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge\\_forum](http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge_forum)

**Street Law Inc.** Practical, participatory education about law, democracy and human rights. Street Law features the curriculum Street Law and many other curricular resources for teachers and students. [www.streetlaw.org](http://www.streetlaw.org)

**Teaching Tolerance.** Founded by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance supports the efforts of K-12 teachers and other educators to promote respect for differences and appreciation of diversity. [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)

— JW/JK

File Name and Bibliographic Information

**k0309kah.pdf**

**Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer, "Teaching Democracy: What Schools Need to Do," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 85, No. 1, September 2003, pp. 34-40,57-66.**

**Also includes EDUCATORS' ROUNDTABLE articles:**

**Roger Soder, "The Good Citizen and the Common School," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 85, No. 1, September 2003, p. 37.**

**Timothy J. Stanley, "Creating the 'Space' for Civic Dialogue," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 85, No. 1, September 2003, p. 38.**

**Terri Camajani and Ingrid Seyer-Ochi, "Leading Students Toward Citizenship," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 85, No. 1, September 2003, p. 39.**

**Rod Paige, "Civics Education in America," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 85, No. 1, September 2003, p. 59.**

**Kim Westheimer, "Hope for a Better Future," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 85, No. 1, September 2003, pp. 60-61.**

**Shahara Ahmad-Llewellyn, "From Knowledge, to Service, to Citizenship," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 85, No. 1, September 2003, p. 62.**

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