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What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy

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Educators and policymakers increasingly pursue programs that aim to strengthen democracy through civic education, service learning, and other pedagogies. Their underlying beliefs, however, differ. This article calls attention to the spectrum of ideas about what good citizenship is and what good citizens do that are embodied in democratic education programs. It offers analyses of a 2-year study of educational programs in the United States that aimed to promote democracy. Drawing on democratic theory and on findings from their study, the authors detail three conceptions of the “good” citizen—personally responsible, participatory, and justice oriented—that underscore political implications of education for democracy. The article demonstrates that the narrow and often ideologically conservative conception of citizenship embedded in many current efforts at teaching for democracy reflects not arbitrary choices but, rather, political choices with political consequences.

KEYWORDS: character, citizenship, civic education, democracy, politics.

The notion of democracy occupies a privileged place in U.S. society. Everyone believes democracy is desirable. Indeed, educators, policymakers, politicians, and community activists alike pursue dozens of agendas for change under the banner of furthering democracy. The nature of their underlying beliefs, however, differs. We titled this article “What Kind of Citizen?” to call attention to the spectrum of ideas about what good citizenship *is* and what good citizens *do* that are embodied by democratic education programs nationwide. We added the subtitle “The Politics of Educating for Democracy” to underscore our belief that the narrow and often ideologically conservative conception of citizenship embedded in many current efforts at teaching for democracy reflects neither arbitrary choices nor pedagogical limitations but, rather, political choices that have political consequences.

In what follows, we examine the politics of educating for democracy. Specifically, we draw on our 2-year study of ten programs in the United States that aimed to advance the democratic purposes of education. We begin by

detailing three conceptions of citizenship (*personally responsible, participatory, and justice oriented*) that emerged from our analysis of democratic theory and program goals and practices. We then discuss some of the potentially significant political implications of these differing conceptions. The bulk of our empirical work describes two of the ten programs we studied. One program aimed to advance participatory citizens and the other justice-oriented citizens. Our data—both quantitative and qualitative—demonstrate that the decisions educators make when designing and researching these programs often influence politically important outcomes regarding the ways that students understand the strengths and weaknesses of our society and the ways that they should act as citizens in a democracy.

What Kind of Citizen?

Philosophers, historians, and political scientists have long debated which conceptions of citizenship would best advance democracy (see, for example, Kaestle, 2000; Smith, 1997; Schudson, 1998). Indeed, as Connolly (1983) has argued, conceptions of democracy and citizenship have been and will likely always be debated—no single formulation will triumph. The work of John Dewey, for example, which probably has done the most to shape dialogues on education and democracy, has not led to resolution. Rather, scholars and practitioners interpret his ideas in multiple ways, so no single conception emerges. In large part, discussion and debate regarding these different perspectives continue because the stakes are so high. Conceptions of “good citizenship” imply conceptions of the good society.

The various perspectives on citizenship also have significantly varying implications for curriculum. For example, Walter Parker (1996) describes three very different conceptions of citizen education for a democratic society: “traditional,” “progressive,” and “advanced.” He explains that traditionalists emphasize an understanding of how government works (how a bill becomes

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a law, for example) and traditional subject area content, as well as commitments to core democratic values—such as freedom of speech or liberty in general (see, for example, Butts, 1988). Progressives share a similar commitment to this knowledge, but they embrace visions such as “strong democracy” (Barber, 1984) and place a greater emphasis on civic participation in its numerous forms (see, for example, Newmann, 1975; Hanna, 1936). Finally, “advanced” citizenship, according to Parker, is one that builds on the progressive perspective but adds careful attention to inherent tensions between pluralism and assimilation or to what Charles Taylor labels the “politics of recognition” (1994, cited in Parker, p. 113).

Other writers, frequently those on the Left, place a greater emphasis on the need for social critique and structural change (Shor, 1992; Freire, 1990). Alternatively, those inclined to a conservative vision of citizenship education put forward a connection between citizenship and character (Bennett, 1995, 1998; Bennett, Cribb, & Finn, 1999). Rather than view problems that need attention as structural, they emphasize problems in society caused by personal deficits. Some educators reflect the liberal vision of citizenship embedded in John Rawls’s (1971) writings, aiming, for example, to recognize the varied perspectives on “the good” that exist in a pluralistic society. What citizens require, in this view, is preparation for a society characterized by “durable pluralism” (see Strike, 1999). Still other visions emphasize preparing informed voters, preparing individuals for public deliberation, and preparing students to critically analyze social policies and priorities. Indeed, there exists a vast and valuable array of perspectives on the kinds of citizens that democracies require and the kinds of curricula that can help to achieve democratic aims (see, for example, Callan, 1997; Fine, 1995; Gutmann, 1986; Soder et al., 2001; Youniss & Yates, 1997).

The particular framework that we provide below was selected to highlight several important political dimensions of efforts to educate citizens for democracy. Our description of three “kinds of citizens” is not intended to be exhaustive. In addition, although we detail strategies related to these goals elsewhere (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Westheimer & Kahne, 2002), we focus in this article not so much on the various strategies that educators use to reach a particular democratic destination, but more on the varied conceptions of the destination itself. Thus our title question: What kind of citizen?

Three Kinds of Citizens

Our framework aims to order some of these perspectives by grouping three kinds of answers to a question that is of central importance for both practitioners and scholars: *What kind of citizen do we need to support an effective democratic society?* In mapping the terrain that surrounds answers to this question, we found that three visions of “citizenship” were particularly helpful in making sense of the variation: the *personally responsible citizen*; the *participatory citizen*; and the *justice-oriented citizen* (see Table 1).

Table 1
Kinds of Citizens

Personally responsible citizen	Participatory citizen	Justice-oriented citizen
<i>Description</i>		
Acts responsibly in his/her community Works and pays taxes Obeys laws Recycles, gives blood Volunteers to lend a hand in times of crisis	Active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment Knows how government agencies work Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks	Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice Knows about democratic social movements and how to effect systemic change
<i>Sample action</i>		
Contributes food to a food drive	Helps to organize a food drive	Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes
<i>Core assumptions</i>		
To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community.	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures.	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time.

These three categories were chosen because they satisfied our three main criteria:

1. They aligned well with prominent theoretical perspectives described above;
2. They highlight important differences in the ways that educators conceive of democratic educational aims; that is, they frame distinctions that have significant implications for the politics of education for democracy; and
3. They articulate ideas and ideals that resonate with practitioners (teachers, administrators, and curriculum designers).

With these criteria in mind, we consulted both with the 10 teams of educators whose work we studied and with other leaders in the field in an effort to create categories and descriptions that aligned well with and communicated clearly their differing priorities.¹

Each vision of citizenship, therefore, reflects a relatively distinct set of theoretical and curricular goals. These visions are not cumulative. Programs that promote justice-oriented citizens do not necessarily promote personal responsibility or participatory citizenship. In saying this, we do not mean to imply that a given program might not simultaneously further more than one of these agendas. For instance, although a curriculum designed principally to promote personally responsible citizens will generally look quite different from one that focuses primarily on developing capacities and commitments for participatory citizenship, it is possible for a given curriculum to further both goals. At the same time, we believe that drawing attention to the distinctions between these visions of citizenship is important. Doing so highlights the value of examining the underlying goals and assumptions that drive different educational programs.

The Personally Responsible Citizen

The *personally responsible citizen* acts responsibly in his or her community by, for example, picking up litter, giving blood, recycling, obeying laws, and staying out of debt. The personally responsible citizen contributes to food or clothing drives when asked and volunteers to help those less fortunate, whether in a soup kitchen or a senior center. Programs that seek to develop personally responsible citizens attempt to build character and personal responsibility by emphasizing honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work (Horace Mann, 1838; also see current proponents such as Lickona, 1993; Wynne, 1986).

People who are involved in the character education movement frequently advance such perspectives. 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 (Character Counts! Coalition, 2004). Other programs that seek to develop personally responsible citizens hope to nurture compassion by engaging students in volunteer activities. As illustrated in the mission statement of the Points of Light Foundation, these programs hope to “help solve serious social problems” by “engag[ing] more people more effectively in volunteer service” (www.pointsoflight.org, retrieved in April 2000).

The Participatory Citizen

Other educators see good citizens as those who actively participate in the civic affairs and the social life of the community at the local, state, or national level. We call this kind of citizen the *participatory citizen*. Proponents of this vision emphasize preparing students to engage in collective, community-based efforts. Educational programs designed to support the development of participatory

citizens focus on teaching students how government and community-based organizations work and training them to plan and participate in organized efforts to care for people in need or, for example, to guide school policies. Skills associated with such collective endeavors—such as how to run a meeting—are also viewed as important (Newmann, 1975; also see Verba et al., 1995, for an empirical analysis of the importance of such skills and activities). Whereas the personally responsible citizen would contribute cans of food for the homeless, the participatory citizen might organize the food drive.

In the tradition of de Tocqueville, proponents of participatory citizenship argue that civic participation transcends particular community problems or opportunities. It also develops relationships, common understandings, trust, and collective commitments. Dewey (1916) put forward a vision of “Democracy as a Way of Life” and emphasized participation in collective endeavors. This perspective, like Benjamin Barber’s notion of “strong democracy,” adopts a broad notion of the political sphere—one in which citizens “with competing but overlapping interests can contrive to live together communally” (1984, p. 118).

The Justice-Oriented Citizen

Our third image of a good citizen is, perhaps, the perspective that is least commonly pursued. Justice-oriented educators argue that effective democratic citizens need opportunities to analyze and understand the interplay of social, economic, and political forces. We use the term justice-oriented citizen because advocates of these priorities use rhetoric and analysis that calls explicit attention to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice.² The vision of the justice-oriented citizen shares with the vision of the participatory citizen an emphasis on collective work related to the life and issues of the community. Its focus on responding to social problems and to structural critique make it somewhat different, however. Building on perspectives like those of Freire and Shor noted earlier, educational programs that emphasize social change seek to prepare students to improve society by critically analyzing and addressing social issues and injustices. These programs are less likely to emphasize the need for charity and volunteerism as ends in themselves and more likely to teach about social movements and how to effect systemic change (see, for example, Ayers et al., 1998; Bigelow & Diamond, 1988; Isaac, 1992).³ That today’s citizens are “bowling alone” (Putnam, 2000) would worry those who are focused on civic participation. Those who emphasize social justice, however, would worry more that when citizens do get together, they often fail to focus on root causes of problems. In other words, if participatory citizens are organizing the food drive and personally responsible citizens are donating food, justice-oriented citizens are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover.

Although educators aiming to promote justice-oriented citizens may well employ curriculum that makes political issues more explicit than those who emphasize personal responsibility or participatory citizenship, the focus on

social change and social justice does not imply an emphasis on particular political perspectives, conclusions, or priorities. (The range of structural approaches for alleviating poverty that exist, for example, spans the political spectrum.) Indeed, those working to prepare justice-oriented citizens for a democracy do not aim to impart a fixed set of truths or critiques regarding the structure of the society.⁴ Rather, they work to engage students in informed analysis and discussion regarding social, political, and economic structures. They want students to consider collective strategies for change that challenge injustice and, when possible, address root causes of problems. The nature of this discussion is of critical importance. As many theorists of democracy make clear, it is fundamentally important that the process respect the varied voices and priorities of citizens while considering the evidence of experts, the analysis of government leaders, or the particular preferences of a given group or of an individual leader. Similarly, students must learn to weigh the varied opinions and arguments of fellow students and teachers. Because conceptions of the greater good will differ, justice-oriented students must develop the ability to communicate with and learn from those who hold different perspectives. This is not to say that consensus is always the appropriate outcome. Educating justice-oriented citizens also requires that they be prepared to effectively promote their goals as individuals and groups in sometimes-contentious political arenas.

The Limits of Personal Responsibility

Among competing conceptions of democratic values and citizenship, personal responsibility receives the most attention. This is especially true of the character education and community service movements, both of which are well-funded efforts to bring about these particular kinds of reforms. We find this emphasis an inadequate response to the challenges of educating a democratic citizenry. The limits of character education and of volunteerism and the conservative political orientation reflected in many of these efforts have been addressed elsewhere in some detail, so we simply summarize them here. Critics note that the emphasis placed on individual character and behavior obscures the need for collective and public sector initiatives; that this emphasis distracts attention from analysis of the causes of social problems and from systemic solutions; that volunteerism and kindness are put forward as ways of avoiding politics and policy (Barber, 1992; Boyte, 1991; Westheimer & Kahne, 2000; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996).

The central tenets of the Character Counts! Coalition illustrate what we see as the limitations of personally responsible citizenship as it is commonly practiced in school-based programs. Certainly honesty, integrity, and responsibility for one's actions are valuable character traits for good neighbors and citizens. We are not arguing that personal responsibility or related virtuous behavior is unimportant. Similarly, in most circumstances, obeying laws that flow from democratic structures such as legislatures is essential. Such traits have the potential to strengthen a democracy by fostering social trust and willingness

to commit to collective efforts, for example.⁵ There are a host of reasons beyond our focus on democratic citizenship that could be used to justify efforts by educators to foster personal responsibility—to produce trustworthy, helpful, hard-working, and pleasant students. No one wants young people to lie, cheat, or steal.

At the same time, the visions of obedience and patriotism that are often and increasingly associated with this agenda can be at odds with democratic goals. And even the widely accepted goals—fostering honesty, good-neighborliness, and so on—are not *inherently* about democracy. 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 personally responsible citizenship: Don't do drugs; show up at school; show up at work; give blood; help others during a flood; recycle; pick up litter; clean up a park; treat old people with respect. These are desirable traits for people living in a community. But they are not about democratic citizenship. To the extent that emphasis on these character traits detracts from other important democratic priorities, it may actually hinder rather than make possible democratic participation and change. For example, a focus on loyalty or obedience (common components of character education as well) works against the kind of critical reflection and action that many assume are essential in a democratic society.

Data regarding the way young people often think about their civic responsibilities reinforce our concern regarding an exclusive focus on personally responsible citizenship. A study commissioned by the National Association of Secretaries of State (1999) found that fewer than 32% of eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 24 voted in the 1996 presidential election (in 1972, the comparable number was 50%), but that a whopping 94% of those aged 15–24 believed that “the most important thing I can do as a citizen is to help others” (also see Sax et al., 1999). In a very real sense, youth seem to be “learning” that citizenship does not require democratic governments, politics, or even collective endeavors.

Research and evaluation of educational programs also frequently reflect this conservative and individualistic conception of personally responsible citizenship.⁶ Studies commonly ask participants, for example, whether they feel it is their responsibility to take care of those in need and whether problems of pollution and toxic waste are “everyone's responsibility” or “not my responsibility.” They rarely ask questions about corporate responsibility—in what ways industries should be regulated, for example—or about ways that government policies can advance or hinder solutions to social problems. Survey questions typically emphasize individual and charitable acts. They ignore important influences such as social movements and government policy on efforts to improve society. Educators who seek to teach personally responsible citizenship and researchers who study their programs focus on individual acts of compassion and kindness, not on collective social action and the pursuit of social justice (Kahne, Westheimer, & Rogers, 2000).

Pursuit of Participatory and Justice-Oriented Citizens

Often, democratic theorists blend commitments to participation with commitments to justice. For example, Benjamin Barber's "strong democracy" focuses on forms of civic engagement that are "persuasively progressive and democratic . . . useful especially to those who are partisans of democratic struggle and social justice" (1998, p. 10). Similarly, Boyte and Kari (1996) invoke the populist tradition and emphasize the need to recognize the talent, intelligence, and capacities of ordinary people by engaging them in collective civic projects. They stress the importance of forms of civic participation that have historically been used to pursue social justice, showcasing, for example, the work of civil rights activists who used nonviolent actions of civil disobedience.

From the standpoint of supporting the development of democratic communities, combining these commitments is rational. Developing commitments for civic participation and social justice as well as fostering the capacities to fulfill those commitments will support the development of a more democratic society. We should be wary of assuming that commitments to participatory citizenship and to justice necessarily align, however. These two orientations have potentially differing implications for educators. Although pursuit of both goals may well support development of a more democratic society, it is not clear whether making advances along one dimension will necessarily further progress on the other. Do programs that support civic participation necessarily promote students' capacities for critical analysis and social change? Conversely, does focusing on social justice provide the foundation for effective and committed civic actors? Or might such programs support the development of armchair activists who have articulate conversations over coffee, without ever acting? We now turn to these questions.

Our empirical investigation of this topic focuses on the subtle and not-so-subtle differences between programs that emphasize participation and those that emphasize justice. We focus this part of our discussion on goals of participatory and justice-oriented citizenship for two reasons. First, because of shortcomings of the personally responsible model as a means of developing citizens, none of the programs funded by the foundation that supported our study emphasized this approach. Moreover, as noted earlier, a significant body of work already addresses the conflicts and limitations of equating personal responsibility with democratic citizenship.

Below, we describe two of the programs we studied, to draw attention to the differences in their civic and democratic priorities and to the tensions that those differences raise for educators. Both programs worked with classes of high school students, and both were designed to support the development of democratic and civic understandings and commitments. But their goals and strategies differed. The first, which we call "Madison County Youth in Public Service," aims to develop participatory citizens; the second, which we call "Bayside Students for Justice," aims to develop justice-oriented citizens.

Method

Sample

This article focuses on data from two of the ten programs, all in the United States, that we studied as part of the Surdna Foundation's Democratic Values Initiative.⁷ The first, Madison County Youth in Public Service, was located in a suburban/rural East Coast community outside a city of roughly 23,000 people. Two teachers were involved in this project, one from each of the county's high schools. Although we were not able to collect reports on students' ethnicity, teachers characterized the student population as almost entirely European American (with a few recent immigrants). An estimated 3% of the schools' students were persons of color. Each year, the teachers worked with one of their government classes, so over period of 2 years, four classes participated. Students needed to request to participate in this version of the 12th-grade government class, and teachers characterized participants as slightly better than average in terms of academic background. Students who enrolled in the advanced placement government course could not participate. More girls (59%) than boys (41%) participated.

The second program, Bayside Students for Justice, was a curriculum developed as part of a 12th-grade social studies course for low-achieving students in a comprehensive urban high school on the West Coast. The student population was typical of West Coast city schools: a total of 25 students took part in the program, and 21 of them completed both pretest and posttest surveys; of those taking the survey, 13 were female (62%) and 8 male (38%), 8 were African American (38%), 1 was Caucasian (5%), 8 were Asian or Pacific Islander (38%), 1 was Latino (5%), and 3 identified themselves as "Other" (10%). The group tested roughly at national norms and was relatively low-income, with 40% living in public housing (data provided by the instructor).

Procedures

Our study employs a mixed-methods approach—it combines qualitative data from observations and interviews with quantitative analysis of pre/post survey data. Our rationale for adopting a mixed-methods approach reflects what Lois-ellin Datta (1997) has labeled "the pragmatic basis" for mixed-method designs. That is, we employed the combination of methods that we felt were best suited to our inquiry—the methods that would best enable us to gain insight and to communicate what we learned to relevant audiences (also see Patton, 1988).

At all 10 sites in our study, we collected four forms of data: observations, interviews, surveys, and documents prepared by program staff. Each year, our observations took place over a 2-to-3-day period in classrooms and at service sites. Over the 2 years of the study, we interviewed 61 students from the "Madison" program (close to all participating students, in groups of 3 or 4). We interviewed 23 students from "Bayside" (either individually or in groups

of 2 to 3. We aimed for a cross-section of students in terms of academic ability, enthusiasm for the program, and gender. We also interviewed at least three staff members for each program toward the end of each year. Interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes, and all interviews were both taped and transcribed. Finally, we conducted pre and post surveys of all participating students in September and June. In the case of Madison, we studied the same program for 2 years.⁸ The Bayside program changed significantly after the 1st year of operation, and so it did not make sense to merge the data from Years 1 and 2. In this article, we report data only from the 2nd year.⁹ To receive feedback and as a check on our interpretations, we shared our analysis of quantitative and qualitative findings with those who ran the programs.

Measures and Analysis

Survey items were selected in an effort to assess capacities and orientations related to aspects of the three kinds of citizenship we identified. We also included several measures associated with students' civic orientation and capacities: civic efficacy, vision, leadership efficacy, desire to volunteer in the future, knowledge/social capital for community development, following news stories, views on government responsibility for those in need, and employer responsibility for employees.¹⁰ Together, these measures helped us to see differences across programs in democratic orientation and the capacities that they promoted.

The interviews and observations were designed to help us clarify students' beliefs regarding what it means to be a good citizen and the ways that features of the curriculum may have affected those perspectives. We asked participants to identify and discuss particular social issues that were important to them and to community members. We encouraged them to describe their perspective on the nature of these problems, the causes, and possible ways of responding. Did the students emphasize needs for individual morality, civic participation, or challenges to structures or social inequities? Next we asked participants to describe any ways that their participation in the given program might have altered their attitudes, knowledge, or skills in relation to those issues.

We asked similar questions of teachers. We wanted to understand their priorities, their conception of responsible and effective citizenship, their perspective on civic education, their strategies, and how these approaches did and did not appear to be working. During these interviews we encouraged students and instructors to talk about specific "critical incidents" so that we could better understand the curricular components that promoted varied forms of development. Our methods here were informed by critical incident interviewing techniques (see Flanagan, 1954).

The analysis of interview and observation data occurred throughout data collection as well as after data collection was complete and followed the process described by Strauss (1990) as the "constant comparative method."

This iterative process occurred through reflective and analytical memorandums between the researchers as well as through the ongoing coding of field notes. In particular, we analyzed the interviews for recurring themes and patterns regarding student and teacher perceptions of how participation had affected students' beliefs regarding citizenship and democratic values. We also asked teachers to reflect on our observations, not only to test the accuracy of statements but also to reexamine perceptions and conclusions, drawing on their insider knowledge.¹¹

Authors' Predispositions

Given the ideological nature of the content of our inquiry, it makes sense for us to be explicit about our own perspectives with regard to personally responsible citizenship, participatory citizenship, and justice-oriented citizenship. We think that each vision has merit. However, although we value character traits such as honesty, diligence, and compassion, for reasons already discussed, we find the exclusive emphasis on personally responsible citizenship apart from analysis of social, political, and economic contexts (as it frequently is, in practice) inadequate for advancing democracy. There is nothing inherently *democratic* about personally responsible citizenship, and specifically *un-democratic* practices are sometimes associated with programs that rely exclusively on notions of personal responsibility.

From our perspective, traits associated with participatory and justice-oriented citizenship are essential. Not every program needs to address all goals simultaneously to be of value. But educators must attend to these priorities if schools are to prepare citizens for democracy.

Developing Participatory Citizens: Madison County Youth in Public Service

Madison County Youth in Public Service was run by two social studies teachers in a rural East Coast community. The idea for Youth in Public Service came to one of the teachers after she had attended a speech by Benjamin Barber about the importance of engaging students in public life. These teachers (one a 20-year veteran and the other a 2nd-year teacher) taught a condensed and intensified version of a standard government course during the first semester of the academic year. For the second semester, they developed a service learning curriculum. Students focused on particular topics related to their government curriculum as they worked in small teams on public service projects in their county's administrative offices. Their goal, as one teacher explained, was "to produce kids that are active citizens in our community . . . kids that won't be afraid to go out and take part in their community . . . kids that understand that you have to have factual evidence to back up anything you say, anything you do."

One group of students investigated whether citizens in their community wanted curbside trash pickup for recycling that was organized by the county. They conducted phone interviews, undertook a cost analysis, and examined charts of projected housing growth to estimate growth in trash and its cost and environmental implications. Another group identified jobs that prisoners incarcerated for fewer than 90 days could perform and analyzed the cost of similar programs in other localities. Other students helped to develop a 5-year plan for the fire and rescue department. For each project, students had to collect and analyze data, interact with government agencies, write a report, and present their findings in a formal hearing before the county's board of supervisors.

The teachers of the program believed that placing students in internships where they worked on meaningful projects under the supervision of committed role models would

- Teach students how government works;
- Help students to recognize the importance of being actively involved in community issues; and
- Provide students with the skills required for effective and informed civic involvement.

As we discuss below, Madison County Youth in Public Service was quite successful in achieving many of these goals.

Making Civic Education Meaningful

Our interviews, observations, and survey data all indicated that the experience of working in the local community had a significant impact on students, especially as compared with traditional classwork. Janine's reaction was typical:

I learned more by doing this than I would just sitting in a classroom. . . . I mean, you really don't have hands-on activities in a classroom. But when you go out [to the public agencies] instead of getting to read about problems, we see the problems. Instead of, you know, writing down a solution, we make a solution.

Teresa, another student, said,

I kind of felt like everything that we had been taught in class, how the whole government works. . . . We got to learn it and we got to go out and experience it. We saw things happening in front of us within the agency. I think it was more useful to put it together and see it happening instead of just reading from a book and learning from it.

Not only did the activities in the community help to enliven classroom learning, but many of the students' projects also tangibly affected the local

community. Indeed, students talked about the powerful impact of realizing that what they did would or could make a difference:

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 in 5 years, this [curbside recycling] is going to be a real thing. . . . It's really going to happen.

I didn't expect [our work] to have such an impact. . . . I mean, we've been in the newspaper, like, a lot.

By engaging students in projects in the community, Madison County Youth in Public Service had significant success in making learning relevant to students, conveying practical knowledge about how to engage in community affairs, and demonstrating to students the ways that classroom-based academic knowledge can be used for civic work in the community.

Making a Difference in the Lives of Others

The curriculum also developed students' desire to participate in civic affairs and gave them a sense that they could make a difference in the lives of others. When asked about how the program influenced their thinking, most students talked about how the experience deepened their belief in the importance of civic involvement. Emily, for example, spoke about the difference between talking about a problem and doing something active:

Everyone needs to do their part if they want something to be done. . . . In politics, the people always say their opinions and get mad about this and that but then they never do anything about what they feel. . . . This [experience] makes me feel like you have to do your part.

Moreover, many students reported a strong sense that they could get things done if they tried:

We're just kids to most people, and I kind of figured that those people wouldn't really give us the time of day, [but] they were always willing to help us.

I realized there's a lot more to government than being a senator or a representative. There's so many different things you can do for the [community] that aren't as high up.

Students also reported excitement at the prospect of getting involved in ways they did not know were available to them before their experience with the Madison program:

I didn't know that [the sheriff's office] had meetings all the time. . . . It makes me think that I'll go to them when I get older.

I think if more people were aware of [how they could participate], we wouldn't have as many problems, because they would understand that . . . people do have an impact. But I think in our community . . . people just don't seem to think that they will, so they don't even try.

Our survey results help to further illustrate many of these effects. Student responses to questions asked on a five-point Likert scale indicated statistically significant ($p < .05$) changes from pretest to posttest raw scores on several measures related to civic participation. As detailed in Table 2, students expressed a greater belief that they had a personal responsibility to help others (+0.21), a greater belief that government should help those in need (+0.24), a stronger sense that they could be effective leaders (+0.31), and an increased sense of agency—a sense that they could make a difference in their communities (+0.24). Students also reported that they had a greater commitment to community involvement (this increase, +0.19, was marginally significant, $p = .06$).

The robust nature of these results became clearer during the 2nd year because a control group was also surveyed. This group had similar academic skills and was taught by the same two teachers. We used *t* tests to examine whether the gains noted above for the students who participated in the Madison program were different than those that occurred in the control classrooms. For six of the seven measures on which Madison students registered statistically significant gains, we found a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference between the gains of the students in the Madison program and those in the control classrooms.¹² This finding, combined with the fact that the control group did not show statistically significant changes on any survey measures, adds to our confidence that the Madison curriculum supported student development in ways consistent with a vision of participatory citizenship.

A Vision of What to Do and the Knowledge and Skills Needed to Do It

Students consistently spoke of the needs in their community and of their ideas about how to address those needs. The group of students investigating curbside trash pickup for recycling, for example, conducted surveys of community residents, researched other communities' recycling programs, met with county officials about their plan, and wrote letters to the editors of local newspapers. "We researched the Code of [Madison] County to find out, you know, the legal requirements," one student explained. Another group of students discovered that child immunization rates were low in their community and worked with the health department to develop ways to encourage parents to have their children immunized:

[We] worked on the computer a lot, putting records in, trying to find percentages [of children immunized] for the counties around us. . . . We talked about outreach programs and stuff like that. We're basically trying to let parents know.

Table 2
Madison County Youth in Public Service

Factors (Cronbach's alpha pretest, posttest)	Sample	Change	Pretest	Posttest	Significance level	Number of students
Personal responsibility to help others (.62, .74)	Intervention	.21*	4.00	4.21	.01	61
	Control	-.06	3.99	3.92	.63	37
Commitment to community involvement (.54, .71)	Intervention	.19	4.27	4.46	.06	61
	Control	-.10	3.89	3.99	.54	37
Interest in politics (.81, .81)	Intervention	.03	3.41	3.44	.55	61
	Control	-.05	2.76	2.71	.63	37
Structural/individual explanations for poverty (.59, .61)	Intervention	-.10	3.13	3.03	.56	32
	Control	.14	3.37	3.51	.35	37
Desire to work for justice (.65, .73)	Intervention	.07	3.07	3.14	.31	61
	Control	.03	2.84	2.88	.81	37
Civic efficacy (.66, .71)	Intervention	.34**	3.78	4.12	.00	61
	Control	.10	3.38	3.48	.34	37
Vision (.65, .71)	Intervention	.30*	2.65	2.95	.01	61
	Control	.12	2.63	2.75	.35	37
Knowledge/social capital for community development (.67, .72)	Intervention	.94**	3.95	4.89	.00	60
	Control	-.23	3.13	2.90	.25	37
Leadership efficacy (.78, .81)	Intervention	.31**	3.60	3.91	.00	61
	Control	.03	3.57	3.60	.72	37
I will volunteer (.80, .86)	Intervention	.10	3.59	3.70	.14	61
	Control	-.09	3.28	3.18	.43	37
Follow the news (.43, .41)	Intervention	.24**	3.35	3.59	.00	60
	Control	-.12	3.22	3.10	.27	37
Government responsibility for those in need (.68, .61)	Intervention	.24*	3.10	3.34	.05	32
	Control	.00	3.28	3.28	1.00	37
Employer responsibility for employees (.83, .87)	Intervention	.09	3.81	3.9	.35	32
	Control	-.02	4.14	4.12	.83	37

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.