

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: THE POTENTIAL OF HIGH-SCHOOL CIVICS COURSES

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We employed a quasi-experimental design using pre/post surveys and comparisons with control groups to examine the impact of the Constitutional Rights Foundation's CityWorks (U.S.A.) curriculum. In particular, we assessed its ability to further democratic aims by supporting the development of three forms of social capital: norms of civic participation, social trust, and knowledge of social networks. Our evaluation indicates that this curriculum and several of its curricular features (use of simulations, role models, service learning, learning about problems in the community, learning how local government works, and personal relevance) have the potential to further the democratic purposes of education.

Key words: democratic education, simulations, role models, service-learning.

Se servant d'un design quasi-expérimental faisant appel à des sondages en prétest et post-test et à des comparaisons avec des groupes-contrôles, les auteurs analysent dans cet article l'impact du programme américain *Constitutional Rights Foundation's CityWorks*. Ils se penchent notamment sur son aptitude à promouvoir davantage des objectifs démocratiques en appuyant le développement de trois formes de capital social : les normes de la participation citoyenne, la confiance sociale et la connaissance des réseaux sociaux. D'après les auteurs, ce programme et plusieurs de ses caractéristiques (recours à des simulations, modèles de comportement, apprentissage du service, analyse de problèmes communautaires, étude du mode de fonctionnement du gouvernement local et pertinence pour les élèves) sont susceptibles de promouvoir l'éducation à la démocratie.

Mots clés : éducation à la démocratie, simulations, modèles de comportement, apprentissage du service.

Interviewer: What are your feelings about government and politics?

Boy's voice: It's boring.

Interviewer: When you say it's boring, what's boring about it?

Boy's Voice: The subject matter.

Girl's Voice: Yes, very true.

Boy's Voice: It's not just the work. It's what the work is about. We don't care about it.

(Focus group—high school seniors studying government in a traditional classroom)

Recently, many reformers, scholars, and policy advocates have focused on how schools prepare democratic citizens. This focus reflects concern regarding the health of American democracy and, in particular, young people's declining civic and political participation. Whether one considers youth voting rates, engagement in community-based efforts for social change, or interest in discussing political issues, the last several decades have seen relatively steady and sizable declines in the United States (Galston, 2001).¹ Although young people's voting rates increased in the November 2004 elections in the United States, young voters remained roughly the same proportion of the total electorate and we do not yet know if this rebound in overall participation represents a unique occurrence or the beginning of a sustained trend (see Lopez, Kirby, and Sagoff, 2004).

In either case, given the fundamental importance of civic and political engagement in a democratic society, attention to the ways public schools can prepare citizens for a democratic society is warranted. We have numerous indications from research that some educational practices and contexts promote the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that support a democratic society (see Gibson & Levine, 2003, for a review). This research also suggests, however, that schools are not doing all that they could. In response to this shortcoming, we focus on high-school courses that teach about American government. This course is arguably the feature of the high-school curriculum that is most explicitly tied to the preparation of informed and active citizens. More specifically, we have examined whether high-school government courses can support

development of key elements of social capital (i.e., norms for civic commitment and engagement, social trust, and knowledge of social networks) as a means to promote civic and political participation.

WHY FOCUS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL?

For more than a decade, sociologists, political scientists, and educators have examined ways that social capital can improve groups and individuals' productive capacity in economic, political, and social domains as well as the functioning of democratic institutions. Although Jacobs (1961) used the term several decades ago, Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), Putnam (1993), and others have reintroduced social capital as a valuable and widely used framework for discussions among academics, social theorists, and policy developers.² As Putnam (1993) describes it, "social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 35-6).

Like physical and human capital, social capital is a particular type of resource available to individuals and groups that is of functional value: it enables actors to meet needs and pursue interests. Unlike physical capital such as plant and equipment or human capital such as an individual's knowledge and skills, social capital is embedded in the structure of relations between actors in a given setting. It exists neither within a given individual nor apart from a set of social relations.

Coleman's (1988) theoretical model includes three forms of social capital. The first form, *community norms*, rewards certain kinds of behavior and sanctions others. The second is the degree to which community members *trust* that others will meet their obligations and expectations. The third is the degree to which social relations facilitate *access to networks and information* that help individuals achieve their priorities. From a theoretical standpoint, all three forms of social capital can facilitate the pursuit of a particular goal; there is also empirical evidence that communities with high levels of social capital are more likely to achieve their goals (Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 1995). Evidence also indicates that varied forms of social capital support the effective functioning of a community's democratic institutions (Knack, 2002; Putnam, 1993). Indeed, one would expect more engaged and effective

citizens in communities that share norms of civic and political commitment; trust in governmental, civic, and political institutions; and knowledge of relevant civic, political, and social networks.

Although many have trumpeted the potential value of social capital, it is also important to underscore that social capital can have negative social consequences. For example, access by some individuals to information and influence through social networks via group membership (as a member of a particular social class, ethnic, racial, or religious group, for example) may simultaneously bar access to others. Group norms can also be problematic. They can result in excess claims on group members; restrictions on individual freedoms because of expectations of conformity to group norms; and downward leveling norms of non-mainstream groups that ostracize individual success and keep members of downtrodden groups from seeking to join mainstream society. Finally, social trust can be valuable when it exists and is warranted, but democratic societies also benefit from the healthy skepticism of citizens and from formal accountability structures (see, for example, Portes, 1998).

Although recognition of these potential problems has received some attention (and we return to some of these issues later in the paper), most attention has focused on the perceived promise of social capital. Indeed, scholars, foundation staff, and policymakers have begun exploring specific ways to generate social capital. Of particular relevance here, civic education is suggested as a promising strategy (Campbell, 2000; Patrick, 1998; Print & Coleman, 2003), especially as a way schools can promote norms of US government participation, social trust, and knowledge of social networks that support the development of social capital (Print & Coleman, 2003). Along these lines, our study examines how courses in US government might promote the three forms of social capital as emphasized by Coleman (1988). We have premised this focus on the belief that when students who develop these norms, trust, and knowledge of networks enter the broader society, they will add to the stock of social capital and, as a result, foster civic and political engagement. As Brehm and Rahn (1997) explain, "Social capital is an aggregate concept that has its basis in individual behavior, attitudes, and predispositions" (p. 1000).

Our interest in high-school US civics courses stems from our belief in their potential to encourage active citizenship. Such courses are the part of the formal high-school curriculum that is most explicitly linked to the democratic purposes of education. In addition, such courses reach the majority of students because most states require the study of civics or US government in high school and approximately 90 per cent of all high-school students enroll in at least one civics or government course (Niemi & Junn, 1998; Tolo, 1999). In addition, it makes particular sense to focus on civics courses at the high-school level because late adolescence is a critical period for development of sociopolitical orientations (e.g., Erikson, 1968). Moreover, this is the period when societies traditionally work to promote political socialization (see Niemi & Hepburn, 1995).

THE INTERVENTION: CITYWORKS

The Constitutional Rights Foundation, a national leader in civic and law-related education, developed an innovative curriculum emphasizing the study of local government and civic participation in the context of US government courses. We found that the design of the CityWorks curriculum was useful to examine efforts to support the generation of social capital through civic education. First, the curriculum expanded on traditional government curricula because it promoted capacities and commitments for active citizenship by highlighting issues about which students care, helped students gain an understanding of how change can occur and, more generally, demonstrated the importance of civic and political engagement. In the CRF curriculum, knowledge regarding how government works (how a bill becomes a law, etc.) received extensive attention, and the curriculum was designed to align with state standards. However, this information was taught as a means of motivating and preparing students to participate effectively.

Second, the CRF curriculum employed a broad range of promising strategies to promote active student engagement, including the use of simulations, role models, and service-learning projects. As citizens of a fictional city called Central Heights, students participated in six simulations of prototypical processes related to local government, learning about a variety of issues and the processes and people responsible for making decisions about these issues. For example,

students debated changes in the city charter, took part in a press conference for a local election, acted as lobbyists and local politicians, and participated in a mock trial. Students also actively engaged in decision-making processes regarding policy issues related to diversity, education, crime and safety, environment, and recreation. An issue of the city's fictional newspaper, *The Bugle*, was devoted to the policy topic within each simulation.

Students also met with various community leaders from local government, including judges, elected officials, media representatives, and community activists who served as potential role models. Students also participated in a service-learning activity by researching and taking action to address a local issue of the students' choice (e.g., teen pregnancy, local voter registration, drug prevention). These curricular experiences were designed to foster students' motivation to learn, commitment to participate, and development of participatory skills.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME

In conceptualizing this intervention as a strategy to support the development of social capital, we focus on experiential connections to civic and political engagement that includes three kinds of active learning pedagogies (service learning, simulations, and exposure to role models); and civic-oriented content that provides opportunities for students to learn about the causes of problems in their communities, about the workings of local government, and about issues that matter to them. Our focus on these pedagogical and curricular characteristics grew out of an earlier study (see Kahne & Westheimer, 2003) and align with widely accepted visions of best practice (for example, Billig, 2000; Hahn, 1998; Hess, 1998; McDevitt & Kioussis, 2004; Torney-Purta, 2002). The empirical support for the effectiveness of these practices, however, is uneven and in need of further testing (Gibson & Levine, 2003).³

The outcomes considered in this study reflect the three forms of social capital emphasized by Coleman (1988): social norms, social trust, and social networks. Our categorization of norms was developed in the prior study with Joel Westheimer (see Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) that drew on priorities that prominent educational and democratic theorists articulated including Dewey (1916); Putnam (2000); Wynne (1986);

Barber (1984); Counts (1932); and Newman (1975). This framework of social norms specifies commitment to three models of citizenship: Personally Responsible Citizenship, Participatory Citizenship, and Justice-Oriented Citizenship. These visions of citizenship are not mutually incompatible but reflect distinct norms regarding civic and political engagement. A Personally Responsible Citizen “acts responsibly” in his or her community by, for example, recycling, paying taxes, or volunteering in times of crisis. A Participatory Citizen actively participates in civic affairs and social life of the community. A Justice-Oriented Citizen critically assesses social, political, and economic structures and considers collective strategies for change that address root causes of problems (see Westheimer & Kahne, 2004 for a more detailed discussion). In addition to considering student commitments to social norms of citizenship, we also assess students’ trust in social institutions and their self-reported knowledge of social networks.

METHOD

Research Design

In this study, we employed a quasi-experimental design, using both pre/post surveys and comparisons with control groups to examine the impact of the CityWorks curriculum on high-school seniors’ civic commitments, social trust, and knowledge of social networks. The use of control classrooms in a quasi-experimental research design is a significant strength of this study because a recent review of civic engagement research found only two studies of civic education programs employing an experimental design (Zaff & Michelsen, 2002; see also Cook, 2002). Although the reality of the school environment makes it difficult to employ some features of true experimental design—such as random assignment and matched samples—the use of matched pre- and post-test surveys and the inclusion of control classrooms with demographically and academically similar students taught by the same teacher allows us to speak to the effect of the CityWorks curriculum with greater confidence.

The Sample

We evaluated the effects of the CityWorks curriculum on high-school seniors in six classrooms from five high schools in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The schools were located in both urban and suburban settings with student populations of varying ethnic and socioeconomic demographics. Three of the six teachers in this sample (two suburban and one urban) also taught an additional US government class without the CityWorks curriculum to serve as control classrooms. One of the suburban teachers' two classrooms were not sufficiently comparable to be used in this respect.⁴ The entire sample included 231 high-school students. The CityWorks-only sample included 154 students. The comparison-only sample included 77 students. The sample used to compare students who received the CityWorks intervention and those with the same teacher who did not included 48 intervention students and 50 control students.

Data

Pre- and post-surveys were collected from 231 high-school seniors in both the CityWorks and control classrooms. Pencil and paper surveys were administered by classroom teachers in their US government courses at the beginning of the semester and again in the last two weeks of the semester. Paper surveys were mailed to the researchers for data entry and analysis. Items linked to outcomes are a slightly modified version of measures developed with Joel Westheimer (see Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). They assessed students' sense of commitment to three sets of social norms that reflect related but distinct visions of good citizenship, feelings of trust in a variety of social institutions, and knowledge of social networks (See Appendix A for our measures of these outcomes). Responses on these measures were used to examine changes in CityWorks students' attitudes over time and to compare these changes with the responses of students in the control classrooms.

Although it is logical to expect that stated commitments to be civically and politically active will be related to actual action, we stress that our outcome variable is a commitment, not a behavior. It is, therefore, relevant to note that some studies have found that adolescents who express greater commitment to civic and political engagement are

more civically and politically engaged as adults than adolescents who express less of a commitment to act. Oesterle, Johnson, and Mortimer (2004), for example, found that adolescents who said that participation in the community was important to them were more likely to volunteer as young adults. Theiss-Morse (1993) found that individuals' perspectives on what good citizens do relates to their behaviors. More generally, Fishbein, Azjen, and Hinkle (1980) describe a strong connection between political beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

In addition to pre- and post-survey items, additional items were included in the post-survey that were not included in the pre-survey in the CityWorks and control classrooms to provide indicators of classroom features. Specifically, we asked students to rate on a Likert scale how prevalent a number of classroom learning opportunities had been over the course of their semester in US government. These items specifically asked about learning opportunities that highlighted the importance of civic and political engagement (service learning, simulations, and exposure to role models) and civic-oriented content (learning about how local government works, causes of community problems, and issues that matter to the students). Students' responses to these items were then used to compare the relationship between particular curricular opportunities and civic outcomes.

Analyses

Using paired-samples t-tests, we analyzed changes in students' ratings of their agreement with items that describe commitment to civic and political norms of engagement, trust in civic and political institutions, and knowledge of social network tied to civic and political engagement. Comparisons of civic outcomes between CityWorks and control classrooms were analyzed using independent samples t-tests. Tests of Multivariate Linear Regression, using pre-test responses to control for differing baseline scores, were performed to assess the relationship between student outcomes and both the use of active learning strategies and of civically oriented content.

In addition to survey data, we conducted interviews with six participating teachers and held eight focus groups (of 36 high-school seniors) from both CityWorks and control classes. These data helped us

to understand survey responses and to identify issues and reasoning that were not captured in the survey data (e.g., why they found simulations or exposure to role models so valuable). We draw on these data to illustrate students' perspectives.

FINDINGS

Changes in Civic Outcomes

Interviewer: Has this class changed the way you think about government?

Student 1: Entirely. Before this, I didn't care about government.

Student 2: Exactly.

Student 1: I was just like; it's not of part of my business. I'm living my life. They make the laws. I'll follow the laws. Fine. But now, it's like I know why the laws are here and how they make the laws.

Student 2: And how can you change them if you want to...

(Focus group of CityWorks students)

As detailed in Table 1, comparisons of pre- and post-surveys indicate that students exposed to the CityWorks curriculum exhibited greater gains on civic outcome measures than those in the control classrooms. Specifically, independent sample t-tests indicated that the gains in CityWorks classrooms on our measures of commitment to Participatory Citizenship and Justice Oriented Citizenship were greater ($p < .05$) than those in control classrooms taught by the same teacher. Comparisons of treatment and control classrooms also revealed a marginally significant gain ($p < .10$) in students' commitment to Personally Responsible Citizenship. Similarly, comparisons indicated a marginally significant ($p < .10$) gain in Knowledge of Social Networks. Pre/post survey changes on the measures of Trust were not statistically significant (See Table 1). These findings were reinforced by our focus group data.

Student focus groups revealed that those who participated in CityWorks classes were consistently positive about the curriculum and provided helpful details regarding how the curriculum had increased their capacities and commitments to actively participate in their communities. In particular, when asked about the impact of the class, students emphasized the ways it focused their attention on how active

TABLE 1
Changes in Students' Commitment to Civic Norms, Trust, and Knowledge of Social Networks in CityWorks vs. Control Classrooms

FACTORS (Cronbach's Alpha pre, post)	SAMPLE (n=48, n=50)	Mean Change Pre/Post	Difference in Change	Significance Level
Personally responsible citizen/person (.69, .71)	CityWorks	.12	.16†	.09
	Control	-.04		
Participatory Citizen (.74, .77)	CityWorks	.20	.37*	.03
	Control	-.17		
Justice-Oriented Citizen (.57, .66)	CityWorks	.12	.27*	.04
	Control	-.15		
Knowledge of Social Networks (.80, .87)	CityWorks	.68	.36†	.07
	Control	.32		
Social Trust (.79, .82)	CityWorks	.02	.18	.24
	Control	-.16		

†p < .10; *p < .05

citizenship can improve their lives and the lives of those in their communities. They also said it expanded their knowledge of what such involvement might entail and of how to make a difference. The following statements were representative of what we heard.

If I was never in this class, if something was wrong in my neighborhood, I wouldn't have known what to do. But now, since I'm in this classroom, if I think something's wrong in my neighborhood or something, I know where to go. Go to the City Council, call the Chamber of Commerce. Before, if I wasn't in this class, I wouldn't have known what to do.

You really do get involved, and your interest increases, and when they say, "what is it to be a good citizen?" then you have something to say like, "yeah, being involved with your city is being a good citizen."

I never really thought about it before until we started learning about it because you know how you have other things to do but then once you realize it, you want to do something to make a difference.

Practices Associated with Enhanced Civic Outcomes

Basically, as long as you're not being read to out of the textbook, it's positive in school because half the kids don't listen when you're reading out of textbooks. But when you have to get involved, it's a different story. (A CityWorks Student)

Evidence that CityWorks promoted civic outcomes to a greater degree than what teachers had been doing prior to their use of CityWorks is helpful. However, such data did not help us understand the reasons for these positive effects nor did it help us develop a broader understanding of ways to strengthen the impact of curriculum on desired civic outcomes. The importance of this discussion was driven home when we saw the differing changes in student attitudes within the six CityWorks classes that we studied in our larger research. Some CityWorks classrooms showed much larger gains than others. Indeed, relatively sizable statistically significant declines on measures of several desired outcomes were noted in one of the six CityWorks classrooms. Thus, the curriculum by itself does not guarantee change. The ways teachers use the curriculum—what they emphasize and how they do it—is also very important.

We explored the influence of variations in teacher implementation in two ways. First, we looked at how relative exposure to three active learning strategies (simulations, service project, and exposure to role models) were related to a range of civic outcomes. All three strategies were part of the CityWorks curriculum, but teachers placed differing emphasis on these practices. As detailed in Table 2, multivariate linear regression results indicate that all three approaches were associated with gains in at least one set of democratic norms (commitment to either Personally Responsible, Participatory, or Justice Oriented citizenship). Although meeting role models was the only strategy that was significantly associated with participatory citizenship, the relationship between simulations and participatory citizenship approached significance ($p=.08$). Exposure to role models and simulations were both related to commitment to justice-oriented citizenship. All three strategies

were significantly related to knowledge of social networks. Simulations were significantly and role models were marginally significantly related to social trust.

TABLE 2
City Works Teaching Strategies Associated with Civic Commitments and Capacities (n=154)

Civic Outcomes	Teaching Strategies		
	Role-play, simulation Std. Beta (Sig)	Service-learning Std. Beta (Sig)	Exposure to role models/speakers Std. Beta (Sig)
Personally Responsible Citizen	.11* (.04)	.18* (.02)	.15* (.05)
Participatory Citizen	.12 (.08)	.06 (.43)	.27** (.00)
Justice-Oriented Citizen	.19* (.01)	.12 (.08)	.22** (.001)
Knowledge of Social Networks	.16* (.04)	.20* (.01)	.18* (.02)
Social Trust	.21* (.01)	.03 (.69)	.13 (.08)

** p < .01

*p < .05

We also used multivariate linear regression to examine the influence of civic-oriented content on civic outcomes. In addition to providing teachers with active teaching strategies, the CityWorks curriculum encourages teachers to provide students with learning opportunities that may not be typically found in a traditional high-school government course. In particular, the CityWorks curriculum provides students with

an opportunity to learn about problems in their communities, how local government works, and what topics students might find personally relevant. Although CityWorks encourages these curricular opportunities, teachers using traditional high-school government curricula may provide these opportunities as well. Therefore, we performed analyses on the entire sample to see whether prevalence of these learning opportunities made an independent contribution to civic outcomes.

As seen in Table 3, all three opportunities—learning about problems in the community, learning how local government works to address these problems, and learning about issues the students find personally relevant—promoted various civic norms, knowledge of social networks, and trust. Personal relevance was the strongest predictor of civic outcomes with significant relationships to all outcomes. Learning about community problems and local government was related to democratic norms, albeit different ones. More emphasis on local government was related to commitment to participatory citizenship while learning about community problems was related to commitment to justice-oriented citizenship. All three learning opportunities promoted knowledge of social networks. Learning about local government and personally relevant issues was significantly related to social trust.

DISCUSSION

Our goals for this study were two-fold: to see whether a high-school civics curriculum could increase the kinds of dispositions and capacities that would support the development of social capital for civic and political engagement, and to identify curricular features that were responsible for desired impact. Findings from our study enable responses to both queries and lend support to the idea that courses in government can meaningfully facilitate the development of forms of social capital that may lead to a more engaged citizenry.

Data comparing CityWorks and control classrooms make clear this curriculum's potential to promote norms reflecting commitment to engage in civic and political work. More generally, some teaching strategies and some curricular emphases appear to foster student dispositions and capacities that support the development of social capital

TABLE 3
Effect of Classroom Features on Civic Commitments and Capacities (n=231)*

Outcome	Classroom Practices		
	Learned about problems students' community faces.	Learned how local government works.	Personal Relevance of the curriculum
Personally Responsible Citizen	.10 (.11)	.08 (.18)	.20** (.00)
Participatory Citizen	.12 (.07)	.13* (.04)	.25** (.00)
Justice Orientation	.18* (.01)	.05 (.35)	.22** (.00)
Knowledge of Social Networks	.24** (.00)	.13* (.03)	.24** (.00)
Social Trust	.04 (.51)	.16* (.01)	.18* (.01)

*The larger N reflects the fact that this analysis includes the entire sample of students who were surveyed, both CityWorks and non-CityWorks.

** $p < .01$

in non-school settings. Obviously, more work is needed to test the staying power of these shifts and their consequences once students graduate. Nonetheless, the study indicates that both CityWorks and its curricular components may well help foster social capital and support civic and political engagement. Such findings provide a meaningful counterpoint to less promising findings about the impact of civic education that have been prominent in the field since the 1960s (Langston & Jennings, 1968, for example).

Our findings do not imply, however, that government courses as they are structured now necessarily promote desired outcomes. Rather, we found that teacher practices and curricular content matters a great deal. In particular, the study identified several strategies that may be especially effective means to promote desired outcomes. First, our findings indicate that experience-based teaching strategies such as exposure to simulations, service learning projects, and compelling role models orient students towards norms of civic commitment and provide students with greater confidence in their knowledge of social networks. Experiences gained through simulations also appear to foster social trust. In addition, curriculum that students find to be personally relevant appears to support individual growth that is consistent with the three forms of social capital we considered in this study. Opportunities to learn how local government works and to learn about problems in students' communities also appeared to exert a desirable impact on all forms of social capital that were examined in this study.

Our findings, supported by qualitative work (for example, Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Youniss & Yates, 1997), suggest that when structured appropriately, both real and simulated experiences – as well as exposure to role models who discuss compelling civic and political experiences – can help students envision themselves as civic and political actors and adopt related identities. Our data, however, do not permit more than speculation on the underlying causes of these relationships. For example, curriculum that addresses topics that are personally relevant or that highlight problems in the community might be presumed to provide motivation for students' civic and political commitments. Perhaps simulations and exposure to role models appeared more likely to promote participatory and justice-oriented citizenship because the curriculum made explicit connections to politics, the simulations were of political processes, and the role models were actors in the political process. In contrast, students' service experiences were not generally linked to political analysis or action as students planted trees on their school grounds, conducted an oral history project with seniors in their community, or created peer drug and pregnancy prevention workshops. Although links could have been made to political or policy processes, the overall focus of these service-learning projects emphasized actions that

the students could undertake directly to provide assistance to their communities. These explanations are both tentative and incomplete. A larger sample size and more detailed examination of how particular experiences and opportunities can prompt these changes in individual students would be very valuable.

Implications

These findings may have implications for how policymakers and practitioners can promote civic and political engagement. First, although experienced-based curricula appear desirable, substantial evidence indicated that they are not commonly found in classrooms. In fact, rather than having substantial opportunities for simulations or other experiential approaches, 90 per cent of U.S. students reported in the recent International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement study (IEA) that they most commonly spent time reading textbooks and doing worksheets (Baldi, et al., 2001). Similarly, students rarely had the opportunity to develop critical appraisals of problems in society, especially those about which students care. For example, a study of eighth, ninth, and tenth grade social studies classes in Chicago revealed that in over 80 per cent of the classes there was no mention of a social problem. In an additional 11 per cent of the classes, while a social problem was noted, there was no discussion of solutions, connections to modern times, or action (Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede, 2000). Efforts to ensure that course material has personal relevance for students are also quite rare. In fact, although personally relevant content was the classroom feature that was most consistently related to our desired outcomes, it was also the least common classroom feature.

Second, not only are such practices relatively rare, but current state and federal policies in the United States do little to promote them, especially given the current educational policy context set out by No Child Left Behind and its emphasis on language arts and mathematics instruction through high-stakes testing. For example, federal expenditures on civic education by the United States Department of Education totaled less than half of one per cent of its total budget. And the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is often referred to as the "nation's report card," does not directly measure

students' attitudes towards civic participation in their civics assessment. Moreover, the largest recent federal initiatives to support civic development emphasize community service, character education, and the teaching of traditional American history. Certainly, those responding to these initiatives could incorporate the active learning pedagogies and the civically oriented content that we found to matter. Such incorporation, however, is not guaranteed. Current policies could do much more to focus attention on the value of such curricular practices and to support the reform and improvement of US government courses along these lines through, for example, funds for professional development, curriculum development, and implementation. Indeed, part of what makes CityWorks and similar programs attractive from the standpoint of policy is their potential for widespread implementation.

Finally, our focus on desirable practices should not obscure the importance of clarifying the civic and political goals associated with educational policies and programs (Vinson, 2001). As noted above, different curricular opportunities appeared to further different civic and political dispositions and capacities. For example, service learning appeared to foster commitment to personal responsibility but not to broader civic participation. Learning about problems in the community fostered a justice orientation, but not social trust.

Our point is not that service learning inevitably promotes commitment to personal responsibility or that, for example, simulations inevitably promote commitment to justice-oriented citizenship. We suspect that the impact of these approaches depends on the nature of the service-learning experiences and on the types of simulations to which students are exposed. We are arguing, however, that when studying the impact of civics curriculum, it is very important to be clear about the kinds of civic and political outcomes being considered – commitment to personal responsibility is much different from commitment to social justice. Civic education includes a wide range of strategies and potentially desirable outcomes. Different practices and the ways different practices are used may often promote different capacities and commitments related to democratic citizenship (for related findings see Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Torney-Purta & Richardson, 2002).

In short, this study supports the contention that high-school government courses have the potential to meaningfully support development of key elements of social capital (i.e., commitment to engagement, social trust, and knowledge of social networks) that might, in turn, spur civic and political engagement in non-school settings. The study also helps identify qualities of the high-school government courses that may promote these desired goals. The conditions under which benefits are realized and the nature of that impact deserve continued attention from practitioners, policymakers, and scholars.

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NOTES

¹ For example, voting rates of those under age 25 in US Presidential elections have declined steadily between 1972 (the first election when 18 year-olds were given the right to vote in a Presidential election) and 2000 (Levine & Lopez, 2002). Similarly, youth interest in discussing political issues declined to their lowest levels since historic highs in the 1960s (Sax, 2000). In response to these signs of declining interest, some observers (and, in particular, youth from this generation) have argued that young people are participating in new, non-traditional ways (Long, 2002). Proponents of this view argue that youth participation is often informal and grass-roots-oriented rather than explicitly political and that youth acquire information through alternative means such as the internet. Although forms of civic and political engagement will vary by generation, a systematic qualitative study of young people that investigated this possibility did not find evidence that supported this contention (see Andolina, Jenkins, Keeter, & Zukin, 2002).

² Bourdieu, for example, distinguishes between human and cultural capital and, in contrast to Putnam's and Coleman's formulation, emphasizes issues of power and inequality. (See Portes, 1998, for a review of the contemporary use and evolution of social capital as a construct.)

³ Many features of the CityWorks curriculum are similar to the activity- and inquiry-based projects of the New Social Studies era in the 1960s that expected students to mimic social scientists by discovering knowledge about social life through primary sources rather than "memorizing long lists of facts and generalizations from text books" (Fenton, 1966, p. 2).

⁴One classroom was AP while the other was a general US Government class.

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