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Youth Civic Development: Implications of Research for Social Policy and Programs

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Summary

Democracies must insure that each new generation of citizens identify with the common good and become engaged members of their communities. Such goals are prominent in the missions of public schools and community youth organizations. This report summarizes research which points to directions youth programs and policies should follow to achieve these civic goals.

First, public spaces must be inclusive of all youth. This means that adults in such settings (teachers, principals, coaches of sports teams and mentors in community based organizations) should insist on tolerance as the basis for social interaction and should intervene to stop acts of intolerance. It means that all youth should have a voice in defining group goals and that the groups to which they belong should provide a forum for deliberative discourse — where citizens learn how to discuss and negotiate fair resolutions of differing views. And, rather than targeting specific individuals, programs in conflict resolution should be universal efforts that influence norms about how members of a Civil Society interact in the public spaces we share.

Second, the values with which we raise our youth are the foundation for their political views and for the society they will create. To the extent that values focus on enhancing the self rather than connecting personal interests to the public interest, young people will be less aware that the exercise of rights implies obligations to the community. In such a situation social trust, the glue of Civil Society, will be undermined.

Finally, to promote democracy youth need to know the full story, not just the 'good parts' of history. If they appreciate that history and politics are controversial, they may see the importance of taking a stand and of adding their voice to the debate.

A Publication of the Society for Research in Child Development

From the Editor

In this issue of the *Social Policy Report*, the third that Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and I have produced, Connie Flanagan and Nakesha Faison address youth civic development.

Robert Putnam's paper some years ago, "Bowling Alone," argued that we face a civic crisis in this country, particularly in regard to youth. Civic participation, Putnam claimed, is at an all-time low. He has since produced a book. Although his argument is controversial—some argue that civic participation has changed. but has not decreased appreciably—it has spurred attention to the topic of civic involvement, particularly in young people.

There have been two periods of research attention to political socialization. In the 1950's research reflected the developmental dogma of that time emphasizing early development and viewing children as rather passive recipients of socialization influences. The 1970's witnessed renewed attention due in part to the variety of social movements such as civil rights and the anti-Vietnam war reaction. This period of research focused on youth but was not very developmental in orientation.

Connie Flanagan was one of the first researchers to enter this field in the 1990's. I was pleased that she approached the William T. Grant Foundation for support at the time I was Vice President there. She obtained a Faculty Scholar Award for her seven nation study of youth political development. She now leads the field.

I have a particular personal professional interest in this topic. It represents the latest version of my longstanding interest in social cognitive development and I will follow the work of Flanagan and others in doing my own research on this topic at Fordham. This article does an outstanding job of addressing the implications of research for policy. Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and I hope that this article may have some of the effect of Putnam's early writings by fueling both research and policy attention to this important but understudied and socially ignored area.

Lonnie R. Sherrod, Ph.D., Editor
Department of Psychology, Fordham University

Youth Civic Development:
Implications of Research for Social Policy and Programs

Constance A. Flanagan and Nakesha Faison
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Developing the civic literacy, skills, and attachments of the younger generation are prominent goals of virtually every public school in the United States. Likewise, most non formal youth organizations such as Scouts, 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs list such civic values as responsibility, leadership, and patriotism as conspicuous objectives of their programs, and activities such as team projects or public service to the community as means by which to attain those goals. Even the rationale for sports include their potential for teaching young people cooperation, team work, and the value of fair play. Yet there is very little known about program effectiveness in these areas because the civic goals of youth programs have rarely been evaluated. Indeed, were we to ask teachers, coaches, or the staff of youth programs to define the 'civic' outcomes of their programs, we might find an array of meanings for terms such as leadership, responsibility, or patriotism. (The recent Supreme Court decision allowing the Boy Scouts of America to exclude gay members from the organization illustrates the potential for contestation over the meaning of 'civic values').

Defining Terms: Civic Literacy, Skills, and Attachment

The terms 'civic' and 'political' connote different things today but have similar roots historically. Whereas the Latin root, 'civis', refers to a citizen, the Greek equivalent is 'polites', a member of the polity (Walzer, 1989). Today the term 'political' or 'politics' connotes (erroneously in our view) the affairs of state or the business of government. For this reason we have chosen the broader 'civic' connotation for this report.

By civic literacy we refer to knowledge about community affairs, political issues and the processes whereby citizens effect change, and about how one could become informed if they were not already. Civic skills include competencies in achieving group goals. Social skills such as active listening and perspective taking when applied to civic goals would fit in this category as would skills in leadership, public speaking, contacting public officials, and organizing meetings to insure that all participants have a voice in the process. By civic attachment we allude to an affective or

National assessments of high-school students' civic knowledge indicate that they know most about issues that matter to them such as a citizen's right to due process and which level of government issues a driver's license.

emotional connection to the community or polity. Youth who lack such attachments are often called disaffected. They neither identify with nor feel that they count in community affairs. In contrast, civic attachment implies a feeling that one matters, has a voice and a stake in public affairs, and thus wants to be a contributing member of the community.

Correlates of Civic Literacy, Skills, and Attachments

The importance of civic literacy to democracy is indicated by the fact that, among adults, political knowledge is positively associated with levels of social tolerance and engagement in community affairs (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Among adolescents, parental education is positively associated with their political knowledge, participatory attitudes, and behavior (Chapman, Nolin, & Kline, 1997). Beyond family background, adolescents' civic knowledge is correlated with the civic content they learn in school, its range and recency, to class discussions of current events, and to participation in student government and community service (Chapman et al., 1997; Niemi & Junn, 1998). National assessments of high-school students' civic knowledge indicate that they know most about issues that matter to them such as a citizen's right to due process and which level of government issues a driver's license (Niemi & Junn, 1998).

Practices in families also appear to make a difference. Family communication styles that engage young people in the discussion of controversial issues and encourage them to hold autonomous opinions are related to greater civic knowledge, interest, and exposure to political information (Chaffee & Yang, 1990; McLeod, 2000; Niemi & Junn, 1998) as well as to their tolerance (Owen & Dennis, 1987) and ability to see political issues from more than one simple perspective (Santolupo & Pratt, 1994). Tolerance in young people also is higher among those who are involved in political or quasi-political activities (Avery, 1992).

In terms of civic attachment or affection for the polity, trust may play a key role. Social trust, defined as a belief that 'most people' are generally fair and helpful rather than merely out for their own gain (Smith, 1997), is considered the social glue of a Civil Society and the grease that eases collective life and democratic governance (Putnam, 2000). Analyses of the General Social Survey indicate that the generation gap in social trust grew between 1973 and 1997 due to declines in the youngest adult cohorts' beliefs that 'most

people' are trustworthy, helpful, and fair (Smith, 2000). Why this is the case is not entirely clear. One thesis points to demographic changes in the composition of the generations and in whom they consider in judgments about 'most people'. Others contend that declines in social trust are associated with increasing self-interest over the past few decades (Rahn & Transue, 1998), an issue we revisit in our discussion of values later in this report.

Trends in Voting and Volunteerism among Youth

Voting provides a barometer of the public's trust in the political process and in government. In any era, young adults are typically less likely than their elders to vote. But the generation gap has increased in recent years with the youngest cohorts of adults least likely to participate in the process (Putnam, 2000; Smith, 2000). That trend is not unique to the United States but is found across western democracies.

Surveys of American youth indicate that, whereas they have little confidence in their ability to effect change through the political process, they do feel that they can make a difference via voluntary efforts in their local communities (National Association of Secretaries of State, 2000). In contrast to declining participation in the electoral process, over the past decade community volunteerism has become the norm among young people (Sagawa, 1998). In 1997 an annual nationwide study of college freshmen found that 73% of incoming freshmen had performed community service during their senior year in high school, an increase of 11% over 1989 (Astin & Sax, 1998).

The question is how to link their community volunteer work to larger civic issues and to engage them in a broader political process. One suggestion is provided in Yates and Youniss' (1997) work on community service in which reflection and group discussions enabled students to connect their individual experiences of service to broader political issues. Another is provided in national assessments of high-school students' civic knowledge. Niemi and Junn (1998) note that students understand local government better than federal government. Although the latter is emphasized in their classes, the authors contend that the federal level is distant from the realities of their everyday lives. Enabling youth to connect issues in their everyday lives to local elections is one of the goals of a new project led by the Annenberg School for Communication. Known as Student Voices, this project provides opportunities for high school students to raise their concerns with candidates running for public office in their communities.

Research on Youth Civic Development

We turn next to a discussion of developmental research and the ways it could inform the civic goals of schools and community youth development programs. We note at the outset that this has typically not been a topic of human development studies. Nor, as already stated, has there been much evaluation work on the civic impacts of youth programs. The research from which we have drawn is often, although not always, correlational. Yet, in the absence of prospective designs we believe there is convergent evidence from various studies that can inform policies and programs.

Our main points can be stated at the outset. First, the civic identities, political views and values of young people are rooted in their social relations and in the opportunities they have for civic practice (Flanagan & Gallay, 1995; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Second, there is a pivotal role for adults who work with young people (teachers, coaches, counsellors, recreation program staff) in conveying the principles of tolerance that bind members of the polity together. They do this both by modeling those principles in their own behavior and by expecting the same norms of tolerance in youth interactions. Our final point is related: The values that we emphasize in child-rearing and that structure institutions and norms of social interaction will shape the political views and civic commitments young people will develop.

The Role of Adults: Communicating the Principles of a Civil Society

Research Findings

Political scientists have argued that the stability of a democratic polity like the United States depends on diffuse support in the population for the principles on which the democracy is based (Easton & Dennis, 1969). From a developmental perspective, this implies that, if a democracy is to remain secure and stable, each new generation of her citizens must believe in the system and believe that it works for people like them. Our studies of different racial and ethnic groups of American youth point to the pivotal role of teachers in this regard (Flanagan, Gill, & Gallay, 1998).

We have found that, to the extent that a civic ethos describes the climate at school, students are more likely to believe that America is a just society where equal opportunity is the rule. The ethos to which we refer is one in which teachers insure that all students are treated equally. Not only do teachers hold the same high standards for and respect the ideas of all students, but they insist that students listen to and respect one another as well. And, if there are instances of intolerance or bullying, the teacher intervenes to stop the incivility. Note that by tolerance we are not referring to apathy or indifference. Students are encouraged to develop their own opinions. They are not asked to agree with one another,

only to respect one another's rights to self-determination.

Adolescents' civic commitments also were associated with a civic ethos at school. Those who felt their teachers practiced this ethic were more committed to the kinds of public interest goals that would sustain a democratic polity, i.e., service to the common good (contributing to their communities and serving their country) and promoting equality (working to improve race relations and helping the disenfranchised). In other studies similar teaching practices were associated with civic competencies in young people including their ability to critically assess social issues (Newmann, 1990), their tolerance of dissenting opinions (Ehman, 1980), and their knowledge about international affairs (Torney-Purta & Lansdale, 1986).

Affection for the Polity among Ethnic Minority Youth

Teachers' insistence on a civic ethic is especially important in an increasingly diverse society. By the year 2050, more than half of the population in the United States will be members of ethnic minority groups (Roberts, 1993) and a disproportionate number of those citizens will be children. There has been relatively little research on the processes whereby children develop an affection for the polity and become engaged citizens. Yet we know even less about these processes among youth who are members of ethnic minority groups. And what we do know does not engender optimism.

According to some ethnographers, the political disaffection of minority youth should be expected because they are so frequently marginalized from the mainstream. As Milbrey McLaughlin (1993) observes, "There are powerful signals to minority youth about their value, social legitimacy, and future and many respond to these signals by retreating to the confines of their cultural group and by distrusting the possibility or desirability of ever becoming part of the broader society" (p. 43). Those sentiments are echoed in Sanchez-Jankowski's (1992) interviews with Chicano youth in which one 17-year-old reflects, "Before I knew anything about how the American government worked, I could tell Chicanos didn't have much say in how things got done 'cause of the way Anglo people would treat us".

Youth opinion surveys also point to the lower confidence that disadvantaged and ethnic minority youth have in the state and its institutions. Mistrust of the government and cynicism about its attention to the average citizen is higher among disadvantaged youth (Hepburn & Popwell, 1992). Even when socioeconomic factors are controlled, national studies of high-school students indicate that racial differences in political efficacy and trust persist. Both Latino and African-American high-school students are more skeptical than their white peers about the amount of attention the gov-

ernment pays to the average person (Niemi & Junn, 1998). According to Abramson (1983), 1967 was a turning point in such sentiments. Prior to that year, similar feelings of political trust were reported by African-American and white youth but since that time most surveys find lower levels of political trust among African-American youth.

According to political socialization theorists, stable governance in a democracy is based on diffuse support in the population for the system. The foundation for that support, the scholars believed, occurred early in development when

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children placed their trust in the benevolence of leaders who presumably governed with the child's best interests in mind. The president and the police were considered the 'head and tail' symbols in children's schema about the state and its authority (Easton & Dennis, 1969). Whether these symbols serve a similar role today remains an open question. Research in the wake of Watergate indicates that children's and adolescents' support for leaders is not unconditional. It can be undermined when those leaders abrogate the civic trust (Dennis & Webster, 1975; Greenstein & Polsby, 1975; Sigel & Hoskin, 1981). And, once lost, the belief that the government can be trusted to do the right thing 'most of the time' is difficult to recover. Analyses of panel data following a sample of 1965 high school seniors into their late thirties showed that reactions to political events such as Watergate or the Vietnam War had an enduring effect on their trust in the government (Damico, Conway, & Damico, 2000).

Policy Implications: Adults' Roles in Reinforcing Democracy

If neither the president nor the police, the so-called 'head and tail' symbols of the state, can be expected to engender diffuse support for the polity and its principles, other authority figures may need to fill that gap. It may well be through such proximal authority figures as teachers, school administrators, coaches, or the staff of community based youth organizations that children learn to accept the more distal authority of the state as legitimate and binding.

Tolerance has been called the litmus test of a democracy (Elshtain, 1995). It is also the most fundamental principle on which the United States of America was founded and thus the principle that should unite us as a nation (Walzer, 1990). We have argued that when teachers model a civic ethic and insist that students treat one another in a civil fashion, they play a critical role in promoting the younger generation's support for the polity. Decisions at the institutional level are critical as well and we turn to this point in our next section.

Bullying and Intolerance

Schools differ in the extent to which they have adopted intervention vs. laissez-faire policies concerning intolerance and bullying. Anecdotally, some school administrators in our studies shared with us the belief that students need to learn to handle their disagreements "on their own". In principle, we might agree. But in practice a laissez-faire policy does not enable students to settle differences in a civil fashion. Rather, a hands off policy tells young people (bullies, victims, and bystanders alike) that there are no principles governing social interactions. The rules are simply whatever you can get away with. Because bullying has been a fact of life for generations and across societies, there is a tendency to dismiss it as a problem that will go away as "kids grow out of it". But this is one of the myths about bullying. Young people who bully peers often become adults who use violence to settle disputes. They learn that the strategy is effective. They get their way.

There are typically asymmetries of power between bullies and victims (Olweus, 1992). In our studies, for example, it was the adolescents from racial and ethnic minority groups who were more likely to report teachers' intervening to stop acts of peer intolerance. As the research on intergroup relations has shown, status differences based on age, physical size, language, race and ethnicity do not level themselves by default. The leadership and decisions of adults are ultimately called for (Schofield, 1995).

Efficacy of Interventions to Curb Intolerance

Universal prevention efforts can be effective as the campaign to curb bullying in Norway has shown. In the early eighties, although 15% of the nation's students reported some involvement in bully/victim problems, a laissez-faire attitude prevailed (Olweus, 1992). But the political will to address the problem was considerable and the universal intervention was effective. Research dispelling myths and informing the public about bully/victim problems was widely distributed. A comprehensive set of recommendations listed actions that could be taken at the individual (serious talks

with bullies and victims), classroom (cooperative learning, class discussions to develop civil norms), and school level (changing the school climate). Evaluations revealed a reduction in bullying in classrooms that shifted norms toward more civil behavior and provided public time for class meetings to reinforce those norms.

In the United States the topic of bullying has received neither the scientific nor the policy attention it has enjoyed in other nations (Smith et al., 1999). Although it has been the subject of popular films, magazines, and talk shows, when it comes to educational programs and scientific literature in the United States, bullying is "subsumed within broader issues such as school safety or violence" (Harachi, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1999, p. 282). Ironically, schools in the United States are held legally accountable for insuring children's well being and, by law, must report any suspicions of child abuse outside of school. Yet concerted efforts to address peer bully/victim problems in schools have not become widespread in the United States.

Policy Implications: Resolving Conflict in a Civil Fashion

The political will and leadership of adults is important. However, youth intolerance and exclusion will often occur when no adults are around. If school districts and communities genuinely want young people to 'work it out on their own', they can enable them by making training in conflict resolution more common in communities. In 1997 the National Institution for Dispute Resolution estimated that there were over 8,500 school-based conflict resolution programs in the nation's public schools. From skills in managing personal anger and interpersonal disputes to deliberative discourse practices and law related education, programs cover a wide spectrum of skills and exist for all age groups. Peer mediation is a common aspect of most programs, as is training school staff in techniques for resolving conflicts. A national clearinghouse of programs is provided by the Conflict Resolution Education Network organized by the joint efforts of the National Association for Mediation in Education and the National Institution for Dispute Resolution. (For an in depth evaluation of three conflict resolution programs, see the *Social Policy Report* by Henrich, Brown, & Aber, 1999).

Policy Implications: Zero Tolerance vs. Teaching Tolerance

Zero Tolerance

In response to a rash of high profile incidents of youth violence during the spring of 1999, many schools responded to concerns about public safety by increasing surveillance,

enacting 'zero tolerance' policies, and expelling troublemakers. Although safety is the goal, these policies may be off the mark as measures to guarantee public safety for the following reasons. First, there should be no tolerance of violence. Yet expulsion of 'troublemakers' may simply send the problem elsewhere. Young people who are accustomed to handling conflict violently need to learn other ways to deal with it. Programs that help aggressive children learn to monitor and redirect their anger not only enable the young person to live a more productive life but ultimately protect public safety.

Second, zero tolerance is not the same as teaching tolerance. Indirect forms of bullying include ostracism and exclusion of victims from the group (Olweus, 1992). Thus, proactive efforts to teach tolerance and develop an inclusive climate are crucial. When the norms of interaction include listening and respecting one another and when the teacher him/herself holds the same standards for all students, a tone of civility is established and the likelihood of bullying minimized. Finally, we worry that surveillance may erode the very social trust and solidarity that we will argue in the next section of this report are essential to developing young people's feelings of loyalty to the polity and their motivation for civic engagement. As national studies of adolescent health and risk have shown, school policies and rules are less effective in curtailing problems than are school climates of inclusion in which students in general feel a sense of belonging and connection to others in the institution (Resnick et al., 1997). And, as Kurt Lewin (1951) argued, group norms affect individual values but their efficacy depends on a sense of group cohesion and solidarity.

Indirect forms of bullying include ostracism and exclusion of victims from the group.

Teaching Tolerance

In our view a public orientation is needed in conflict resolution programs. That is, to meet a civic criterion, programs should take an environmental rather than an individual focus. A public orientation helps to establish norms about how members of a Civil Society interact in public spaces. It creates a forum for deliberative discourse — where citizens learn skills that enable them to discuss and negotiate fair resolutions of their differences. In addition, to the extent that such programs actively engage young people in deciding on the norms of group interaction, they promote 'buy in' by all the members. As a result they enlarge the pool of potential bystanders who might intervene and object to instances of intolerance and come to the defense of victims who are being ostracized. Ultimately, such universal efforts shift group

norms toward greater inclusion and tolerance and contribute to a shared understanding of how members of a Civil Society treat one another.

Institutions and Climates Promoting Peer Solidarity and Pride

According to Aristotle, the polis is a network of friends bound together by the mutual pursuit of a common good. Whereas vertical relationships between patrons and clients are the structure underlying an authoritarian social order, horizontal networks that build trust between equals are the basis for a democratic social order (Putnam, 1993). Extracurricular activities at school and non formal youth organizations in communities serve this purpose. Participation in such activities and organizations offers young people opportunities to explore what it means to be a member of 'the public', and to work out the reciprocity between rights and obligations in the meaning of citizenship. As a member of a group, the young person helps to define its meaning and has a "say" in defining group goals. By having a say, youth exercise the citizen's right to self-determination. But self determination is not enough. Democratic societies rely on persons with "democratic dispositions", i.e. "a preparedness to work with others different from oneself toward shared ends; a combination of strong convictions with a readiness to compromise in the recognition that one can't always get everything one wants; and a sense of individuality and a commitment to civic goods that are not the possession of one person or one small group alone" (Elshtain, 1995, p. 2).

In our research we have conceived of young people's experiences of membership in institutions and organizations as the developmental foundation for a political community and for the ties that bind members of that community together. The importance of student solidarity as a factor in developing identification with the common good emerged in our comparative study in which adolescents from four fledgling democracies and three stable democracies participated. Across countries, youth were more likely to commit to public interest goals such as serving their communities and country *if* they felt a solidarity with peers at school and *if* they felt that most students in the school were proud to be part of an institution where caring transcended the borders of social cliques (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998).

We should note that student solidarity is not a property of individuals. Rather, it is a student's perceptions of the

collective properties of his/her school. Similar to the 'collective efficacy' of neighborhoods where residents act in the public interest (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997), ours is a measure of the collective properties of the student body. As such, it taps an inclusive climate in which students generally feel that they and their fellow students matter to one another and to the institution.

We do not mean to imply that social cliques are absent from these schools. Rather cliques do not override the broader climate of inclusiveness in the school. Social cliques seem to be a natural support system that help young people move through the adolescent years. But as Erikson (1968) warned, cliques pose dangers to democracy if youth have no opportunities to connect to others beyond their narrow borders. Dewey (1916) listed two aspects of groups that make them democratic. First, to the extent that the interests of the members are numerous and varied, it should be more likely that everyone would play an integral role in the group and less likely that only a few people would 'take charge'. Second, to the extent that interactions with others outside the group were "full and free", the group should be less likely to be isolationist and exclusive. Isolationist groups, Dewey warned, were not only undemocratic but antisocial.

Tolerance and interdependence are essential aspects of a democratic identity and participation in extracurricular activities and youth organizations play a role in building these qualities in young people. Participation in such activities in one's youth is associated with higher involvement in civic and political activity in adulthood (Verba et al., 1995; Youniss et al., 1997). Even when socioeconomic status and academic achievement are controlled, involvement in extracurricular activities is related to later involvement in organizations such as the PTA, communities of faith, or labor unions (Hanks & Eckland, 1978; Otto, 1975) as well as to political action such as voting, writing letters to the editor, or contacting local officials (Otto, 1975). But there is also evidence that involvement in non-formal youth organizations may play a role in promoting inter-group understanding. One study found, for example, that participation in extracurricular activities was related to positive race relations (Holland & Andre, 1987).

Policy Implications: Equal Opportunities for Public Engagement

The issue of equal opportunity for youth to participate in extracurricular and community organizations is a policy question which has received little attention. The fact that involvement in such organizations seems to protect young people from health-compromising behaviors (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000) is reason alone to raise the issue of equal access. However, we would argue that, besides keeping youth out of trouble, these institutions of Civil Society, what Tocqueville (1848) dubbed the "schools of democracy", connect young people to the broader polity and foster their commitment to its service. Thus, if access to community clubs and extracurricular activities is unevenly distributed, we should not be surprised if those youth who have few opportunities to connect are disaffected politically and disengaged from civic activity as well.

According to analyses of national longitudinal data, youth from more advantaged families are more likely to be involved in community clubs, teams, or organizations and involvement in such groups is highly related to the likelihood of being engaged in community service (Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1998). Connell and Halpern-Felsher (1997) have observed that the institutions that provide primary services to youth — Little League, YMCA, 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc. — are typically less represented, with fewer resources, in poorer neighborhoods. Taken together, these studies suggest that there are multiple ways that socioeconomic advantages in families and in neighborhoods afford children opportunities for civic connection and practice.

Among adults, higher socioeconomic status is positively associated with political efficacy and involvement. But beyond personal disadvantage, when poverty is concentrated in a community, it reduces the number of civic organizations, church groups, and indirect ties to public officials that would enable residents to address their community's problems (Cohen & Dawson, 1993). The political advantages of socioeconomic status are stockpiled over a lifetime (Verba et al., 1995) and may in part be rooted in the uneven opportunities across different communities that youth have to engage in clubs, youth organizations, and public service.

Policy Implications: Innovative Programs

Innovative directions in community based programs illustrate ways to maximize civic learning opportunities for young people. For example, recognizing disparities in the stock of social capital across different communities, the Citizen Schools project in Boston has reached across borders of neighborhood and social class to link citizens (adults and

Tolerance and interdependence are essential aspects of a democratic identity and participation in extracurricular activities and youth organizations play a role in building these qualities in young people.

children alike) in projects that produce public goods for their communities. Both the middle school students and the adults from the greater Boston area gain civic practice. They also develop connections to members in their community that they might otherwise never encounter and learn about op-

> *Values are standards we use to judge our own behavior as well as a basis for our political views and positions on public policies.*

portunities in the greater Boston area about which they would otherwise be unaware. YouthBuild is another example of an innovative youth led community development and employment training program. The 16-24 year old participants learn job skills in the construction trades and in the process produce affordable housing units for residents of their communities. Putatively, a key ingredient of the program's success is the fact that the young participants are in charge. Trainees learn leadership and decision making skills which they exercise by governing the YouthBuild organization and also by participating in the public arena (including testifying before Congress) on behalf of their communities. As Tony Minor, one of the founding members of the first YouthBuild program in East Harlem notes, by experiencing success, the young people believe that they too share in the American dream.

A third example of an innovative direction in community youth development is the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA), a national effort to transform youth sports. Concerned that the potential of sports to teach team work, cooperation, and fair play was being eroded by a 'win at all cost' mentality, the PCA has returned team work to the game. Star athletes do not enjoy a privileged status but live by the rules that apply to everyone. Like the teacher in our studies who insists on a civic ethic in the classroom, the role of the coach is considered pivotal in transforming youth sports. But the Alliance is aware that coaches typically lack training in understanding children's needs and their own roles as mentors. Thus, training coaches is a high priority of the program. Because sports engages large numbers of young people, the Positive Coaching model could have a ripple effect across communities and thus holds promise for shifting norms toward a more Civil Society.

Finally, restorative community justice is a new approach to juvenile crime. In contrast to a retributive framework in which the state punishes or treats individual law breakers, restorative justice is a different way of thinking about crime and justice. Because crime is considered an act that harms people and violates relationships in a community, restorative justice practices emphasize the juvenile offender's obligation to repair the harm done to victims and to the broader community. Practices such as victim-offender mediation and conflict resolution are designed to repair relationships. Social support is provided both to victims and offenders in practices such as circle sentencing and family group conferencing in which multiple parties have a voice in the determination of community justice. Practices including remediation of the harm done to the victim and community service to repair the violation of the community insure that young offenders know that they have to be accountable for their actions. And service done in the company of law abiding adults is a means of strengthening cross-generation relationships and reintegrating the young offender into the community (Bazemore & Walgrave, 1999).

The Relationship between Personal Values and a Civic Ethic

In his treatise on *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville (1848/1966) pointed to the importance of mores, common practices or habits that shaped the character of democracy in America. He observed the ardent commitment of the average American to the freedom and rights of the individual. But he warned that a preoccupation with the self unmoderated by group commitments and a connection to others, could create people who "owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody" (p. 508). Ultimately, this would lead to a disintegration of the social fabric, and undermine the very civil liberties Americans prized by leading to more control "from above".

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in Tocqueville's thesis as concerns are voiced about self-interest eclipsing commitments to the commonwealth (Bellah et al., 1985). Empirical work suggests that there is reason for concern. Trend studies have pointed to increasing materialism and declining social trust among adolescents over the past few decades (Rahn & Transue, 1998). Self-interest and materialist values also are associated with lower levels of tolerance: Among high-school and college students, they are related to negative stereotypes of African-Americans (Katz & Hass, 1988), to anti-foreigner attitudes among German students (Boehnke, Hagan, & Hefler, 1998), and to anti-immigrant attitudes among American youth (Flanagan & Gallay, 1999).

Personal, Familial, and Societal Values

Values are standards we use to judge our own behavior. They also are a basis for our political views and positions on public policies. From a developmental perspective, values

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help young people define who they are. And family values provide a context for those decisions in part by framing a view of the world and how one should relate to 'others' in that world. Societies also differ in the way they have defined social goals and interpreted what is just or fair in their social policies. In fact, the political scientist, David Easton (1953), described politics as the 'authoritative allocation of values' (p. 129), alluding to the connection between political views, policies, and widespread norms and practices in a society.

In our cross-national comparative studies, we have looked at values at the macro level of society and at the micro level of families and individuals. The nations in that project (Australia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Russia, Sweden, and the United States) differed in the degree to which they had adopted market principles vs. principles of a command (and typically strong social welfare) economy. We found that youth who are accustomed to a welfare state consider it the duty of the government to support those in need (Jonsson & Flanagan, 2000). But we also found that practices in the settings of development were logically linked to the principles of the politico-economic order. For example, in nations where the principles of a market economy were in place, it was common for children to learn the connection between wages and work by earning an allowance for doing chores (Bowes, Flanagan, & Taylor, in press).

> *In all countries, family values of compassion and social responsibility were the most consistent correlates of teen involvement in service in their community, of their commitment to serving their country and their society, and of their empathy for disenfranchised groups.*

Personal Values and Commitments to the Common Good

At the same time, there was substantial variation within each country in adolescents' views of justice, their concerns about social inequality, and their involvement in civic action. Across countries, personal and family values were consistently related to these views and behaviors. Among youth in Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic, en-

dorsements of liberal or market principles were positively related to the teen's beliefs in the efficacy of individual initiative and negatively related to their concerns that economic disparities were on the rise in their country (Macek et al., 1998). In all seven nations, teens with higher altruistic and empathic values were more likely than their compatriots to base decisions about resource distribution on people's needs (Flanagan & Bowes, 2000). Likewise, in all countries, family values of compassion and social responsibility were the most consistent correlates of teen involvement in service in their community (Flanagan, Jonsson, et al., 1998), of their commitment to serving their country and their society (Flanagan, Bowes, et al.,1998), and of their empathy for disenfranchised groups (Bowes & Flanagan, 2000).

American adolescents' theories about inequality also were concordant with their personal and familial values: Those who said poverty, unemployment, and homelessness are the fault of individuals (e.g., for failing to work hard) were more committed to materialist values whereas those who focused on the conditions in which poor people lived or pointed to the systemic roots of unemployment tended to be more altruistic and reported that compassion was emphasized in their families (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999). The extent to which a teen's goals and family values reflected self interest, materialism, and social vigilance or mistrust towards others vs. public interest and the common good were related to his/her conceptions of democracy as well (Flanagan, Gallay, & Nti, 2000): Those for whom material achievements were a high priority and whose families emphasized vigilance towards and mistrust of 'others' were more likely to emphasize the rights and freedoms of individuals. In contrast, youth with more altruistic values and whose families emphasized social responsibility were more likely to say that democracy is a form of government where principles of tolerance and civil liberties should prevail.

These differing views of democracy reflect core American values - communalism with an emphasis on egalitarian and humanitarian principles on the one hand and individualism emphasizing self-reliance, personal freedom, and material achievements on the other (Katz & Hass, 1988; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Lane, 1986; Verba & Orren, 1985). In fact, these values are rooted in historical traditions of liberalism and civic republicanism. In the former, individuals are conceived as bearers of rights with minimal emphasis on their civic obligations. By contrast, the republican tradition links one's own interests to the common good and emphasizes the democratic ideals of equality, social justice, and concern for others. In that tradition, citizens pursue what Tocqueville referred to as 'self interest properly understood', that is, enlightened by an awareness of how one's own interests are connected to those of the broader public.

Implications for Policy: Civic Education and Character Education

We have noted that diffuse support for democratic principles is necessary to insure stability in a democratic system. Next we focus on the United States and ask, what are the principles children are learning as those that bind us together as a people? To address that question, we draw from work on civic education and character education.

Civic Education

According to a recent content analysis of middle-school civics texts, democracy and citizenship are discussed within the framework of individual rights with comparatively little attention to civic responsibilities (Simmons & Avery, in press). These results are not surprising in light of the National Standards for Civics and Government from which both textbook publishers and teachers take their cues. A content analysis of those standards revealed disproportionate references to citizens' rights (and these were typically to individual rather than to group rights) when compared to responsibilities, and a lack of reciprocity between rights and obligations (Gonzales, Riedel, Avery, & Sullivan, in press). The inattention to citizen obligations may be symptomatic of a larger issue in civic education. According to Niemi and Junn (1998), in the areas of gender and race, civic education tends to emphasize the 'good things' (p. 151) such as the abolition of slavery, the end of legal segregation, and the enfranchisement of women. Yet students seem unaware that laws were actually used to segregate people and to prevent them from voting. If only the 'good things' about history are communicated, if political and historical questions are represented as settled rather than contested, then there may be no need to emphasize the obligations of citizens to take a stand and no perception on the part of youth that their voice in politics might matter.

Teachers often hesitate to draw attention to racial issues or to historical instances of intolerance, for fear that such attention will generate conflict (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997). But that silence exacts a cost not only on minority children who may feel excluded but also on the collective resolve of future generations to decide about history and to choose a future with full knowledge of the past. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa recognized, if a society does not have accurate public knowledge about its past, however painful, it cannot move forward to create a new social order.

Character Education

Taking a stand — on historical or controversial issues — brings us to character education. Since 1995, the United States Department of Education has been providing grants to states under the Partnerships in Character Education Pilot Projects Program. Under this program, state education agencies work with local school districts to develop curricular materials, train teachers, and operate an information clearinghouse on character education. Character education encompasses a broad array of programs and we caution against generalizations. However, based on the research summarized in this report, we would apply a civic standard to character education programs by asking: a) to what extent is an orientation to the well being of others and the common good thematic in the program and b) to what extent are participants encouraged to think critically about and be actively engaged in the concerns of their community?

The term, character, connotes a distinctive mark, quality or trait. It is exhibited when we face dilemmas and have to take a stand, deciding between different alternatives. Thus, the exercise of character implies a capacity for thoughtful inquiry, open mindedness, information gathering, and reflection. These skills are not central components of some character education programs which instead adopt a didactic approach, teaching a prescribed set of personal virtues which basically encourage kids to 'be good'. To illustrate our point, we draw from the open-ended responses of adolescents in one of our studies when we asked them to list the characteristics of a 'good citizen'. Whereas many listed passive or what we might refer to as 'lowest common denominator' qualities, (i.e., someone who stayed out of trouble, didn't lie, cheat, or steal), others nominated as a 'good citizen' a proactive person who helped others, voted, contributed to the community, paid attention to current events, sought out information, and stood up for what s/he believed in. There are character education programs that encourage this more active and engaged citizenship. The "Giraffe Project", initiated in the state of Washington in 1982, is a good example. This story-based curriculum which encourages children to be active and compassionate citizens, teaches them about people with vision and courage who are willing to stick their necks out, take a stand, and solve their community's problems. This framework, like that of programs such as Facing History and Ourselves (see Henrich et al., 1999) and Teaching Tolerance from the Southern Poverty Law Center, help children understand that they are actors in a democracy with choices

The exercise of character implies a capacity for thoughtful inquiry, open mindedness, information gathering, and reflection.

to make and that their collective decisions shape the character and ultimately the history of their society.

Conclusion

We began this report by asking how developmental research could inform the civic goals of programs and policies for young people. We conclude with the following points. First, the leadership of adults in public spaces (teachers, principals, sports coaches, mentors of non formal youth groups) is essential in communicating the principles of tolerance that bind democratic polities together. This means that adults must insist that public spaces are climates of inclusion where membership transcends the borders of cliques. It also means that public programs provide all young people with practice in working as teams toward mutually defined goals and in resolving differences that may divide them. It means that conflict resolution programs should focus on universal efforts that have the potential to shift the norms of group interaction rather than target specific individuals to change.

Second, the values emphasized in education and child rearing will affect the kinds of citizens the younger generation will become as well as the kind of society they will create. To the extent that values focus on enhancing the self rather than connecting individual interests to those of a larger public, young people will be less oriented to the needs of others and less aware of their responsibilities for the common good. Finally, to promote a deep democracy, young people need to know the full story of history and be encouraged to become engaged in and take a stand on issues of concern to their communities.

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