

COMMON SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHING PRACTICES AND THEIR CIVIC OUTCOMES

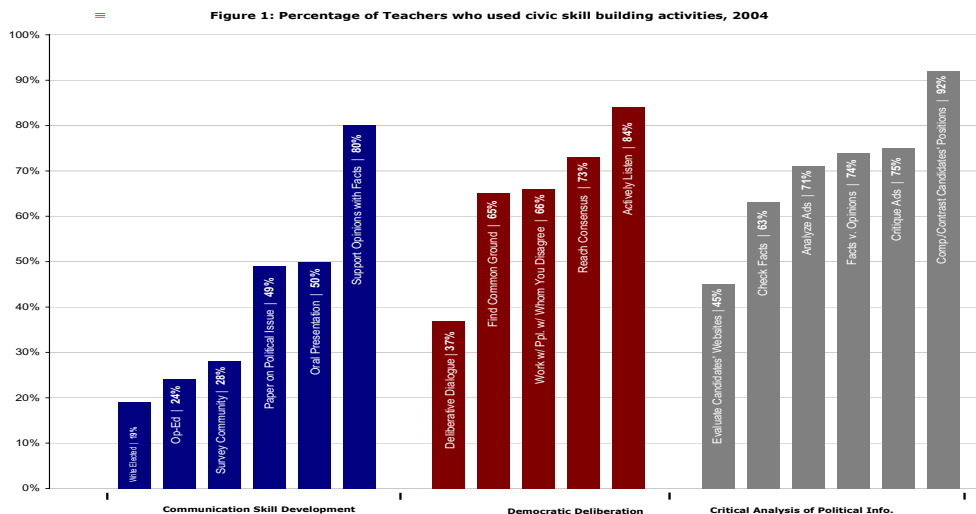
CIRCLE Working Paper #57 examines the association between activities regularly used in high school civic education courses (e.g., staging a mock election) and their impact on key student outcomes. The authors report on the prevalence of a variety of teaching practices used by social studies teachers and assess whether various practices have a demonstrable impact on targeted civic outcomes for students. The paper was written by Amy K. Syvertsen, Constance A. Flanagan, and Michael D. Stout of The Pennsylvania State University and can be downloaded from CIRCLE’s Web site at <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=226>.

The study is based on two waves of surveys with 1,670 students ages 14 to 19 from 80 social studies classes in the United States. Classes were recruited from a pool of teachers throughout one mid-Atlantic state who had expressed interest in training in an election-based curriculum.

TOP TEACHING ACTIVITIES

The researchers asked social studies teachers about the types of teaching activities they used in the classroom. They broke activities up into four distinct groups: (1) exercises that provide students with opportunities to practice and hone civic skills, (2) practices that encourage students to think about and engage in electoral politics, (3) discussions that encourage awareness of civic issues and concepts, and (4) other specific activities (watching presidential debates, visiting candidates, etc). (Please see the authors’ previous report, “CIRCLE Working Paper 55: Civic Measurement Models: Tapping Adolescents’ Civic Engagement,” for more information on the measures used in this paper.)

They found that for the most part teachers use a variety of teaching activities to promote civic outcomes. Looking at the “civic skills” category most teachers employ an assortment of techniques to encourage critical analysis of political information and



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CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement

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democratic deliberation. For example, 92 percent of teachers ask students to “compare/contrast candidates’ positions” and 84 percent encourage “active listening.” Activities that encourage communication skill development were more varied. While 80 percent of teachers reported that they encourage students to “support opinions with facts” only 19 percent ask their students to “write elected officials” and only 28 percent have their students “survey the community.” (See Figure 1 on page 1.)

When it comes to electoral politics, teachers again used a range of teaching strategies. The most popular strategies included: discussing the presidential debate in class (99%), mock elections (90%), and acquainting students with the voting process (90%). The least popular activities included: field trips to local polling sites (9%), mock debates (26%), and candidate visits to the class (23%).

Nine out of ten teachers reported discussing the following issues: why young people do not vote, important issues to the students’ generation, democracy as a form of government, and domestic issues in the U.S.

Finally, the researchers asked teachers whether they facilitate student discussions that encourage awareness of civic issues and concepts. Nine out of ten teachers reported discussing the following issues: why young people do not vote, important issues to the students’ generation, democracy as a form of government, and domestic issues in the U.S. The least discussed issues tended to cluster in the “contested issues” category and included: the civil rights movement, cultures outside the U.S., and the Patriot Act.

THE CIVIC OUTCOMES OF VARIOUS TEACHING ACTIVITIES

In addition to asking about the types of teaching activities that teachers employ, the researchers also measured the impact of these activities on student behavior and knowledge. The results of the analysis were mixed. Some activities had positive impacts while others had a negative impact (although some of the negative results may be due to issues with the research methodology and may be explained by the response shift bias theory).

The study suggests that engagement with electoral politics and/or field trips to government offices have a negative impact on students’ sense of political efficacy and make them less likely to want to pursue a career in politics. This may, in part, stem from students’ increased understanding of the day-to-day tasks of political figures and first-hand accounts of the political process. On the other hand, the authors found that when teachers discussed concrete ways other than voting that students could have a voice in political affairs they found positive effects on students’ self-reported political

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efficacy.

Moreover, the authors found that there was a positive relationship between discussion of basic civic education concepts and students' civic knowledge (measured by their ability to correctly identify the governor and answer a series of basic questions about the electoral process).

Discussion of hotly contested issues seems to encourage students' interest in the topics. The researchers found that discussion of issues such as the war in Iraq, the Patriot Act, civil rights, and homeland security positively predicted students' concern about the unjust treatment of others.

Discussion of hotly contested issues seems to encourage students' interest in the topics. The researchers found that discussion of issues such as the war in Iraq, the Patriot Act, civil rights, and homeland security positively predicted students' concern about the unjust treatment of others. They hypothesize that "controversy invites deliberation thereby providing students with a forum to voice their opinions and, potentially, spark their interests." According to Syvertsen and colleagues, "One of the more surprising findings was that discussion of international issues like America's role in the world over the course of the semester made students more likely to express concerns about their economic future."

Finally, the authors suggest using caution when interpreting the results of their analyses. According to Syvertsen et al., "It is important to keep in mind the relatively short interval of time between the two times of measurement. Further, in terms of generalizability, it is important to note that these data were collected during a semester when a national election campaign was taking place. Thus, it is unclear whether these same results can be generalized to other semesters (with or without an election)." *

REPORT RELEASE: NOVEMBER 7, 2007

CIRCLE, in partnership with the Charles Kettering Foundation, cordially invites you to attend the upcoming release of a new report about college student civic engagement entitled:

"MILLENNIALS TALK POLITICS: A STUDY OF COLLEGE STUDENT POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT."

The event will take place on November 7th and will include a briefing on the report findings as well as several panel discussions. It will be held at The University of California, Washington Center (<http://www.ucdc.edu/>) in Washington DC.

*For more information about the event or to RSVP, please contact Dionne Williams at dwillia8@umd.edu.
RSVP required.*

The report revisits the 1993 study "College Students Talk Politics" by Richard C. Harwood and John A. Creighton of the Harwood Group. There are notable differences in the research findings between the 2007 and 1993 reports.

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

The Research Roundup column highlights recent research findings commissioned or generated by CIRCLE. Also included is an update on new CIRCLE products such as Fact Sheets, Research Articles, Research Abstracts, Bibliographies, and Datasets.

CIRCLE JOINTLY HOSTS SUMMER YOUTH MAPPING PROGRAM

On June 25th, CIRCLE began an exciting five-week youth mapping program for fifteen teenagers from Prince George's County in Maryland. Program participants used mapping software to study a community problem of their choice. This program preceded a larger joint project between CIRCLE and the University of Wisconsin-Madison which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education (DoE). The goal of the larger project is to develop and test educational software that can be used in service-learning and social studies classes to map community issues.

On June 25th, CIRCLE began an exciting five-week youth mapping program for fifteen teenagers from Prince George's County in Maryland. Program participants used mapping software to study a community problem of their choice.

The summer mapping program was jointly hosted by CIRCLE and Maryland-National Capital Area Park & Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). All students were enrolled in summer recreation programs through the M-NCPPC and during the school year they attend Prince George's County Public Schools.

THE BIG ISSUES

The students wanted to know how their school system could be improved. In particular, they investigated funding, discipline, parental involvement, and school size as possible avenues for

reform. They interviewed experts, elected officials, and community activists. The students did all the research, interviewing, and writing. With technical help from CIRCLE, students also created a public Web site that summarizes their research findings.

The students wanted to know how their school system could be improved. In particular, they investigated funding, discipline, parental involvement, and school size as possible avenues for reform.

Several of the interviewees—especially the University of Maryland's Dr. Martin Johnson—said that Prince George's County Public School students should be held to higher standards. He felt that if students are expected to learn more, they will rise to the occasion. Higher expectations might also help with discipline and order. Other interviewees stressed that schools are not orderly enough and students do not show enough respect. Lack of discipline interferes with learning and makes it more difficult to attract good teachers. The project helped students to understand how the different avenues of reform are often inter-related. The results of the project can be viewed at the Web site the students built: <http://www.princegeorges.org/parksandplanning/index.html>



Program participants and organizers (from the left): Dr. Stephanie Timmons-Brown, Dr. Peter Levine, Andra, Harmonee, Ronai, Leah, Anthony, Gary, Miguel, and Dr. Martin Johnson. (Last names of the student participants are not included.)

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

EXPANDING YOUTH MAPPING

A team at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is now developing a software suite, Youth Map, and a curriculum called CivNet, informed in part by the CIRCLE pilot project. Youth Map software is based on the epistemic games research of David Williamson Shaffer in which young people use software tools to play roles that parallel adult professions. In CivNet, young people play the role of civic organizers to explore an issue in their own community. As part of the project, they conduct interviews with real adults who are involved in their issue. The software uses powerful civic mapping tools that have been developed for use by news media, non-profit, and government organizations, to model the process of community organizing in the format of an epistemic game, and publish the results for the benefit of the local community. The result of each project is an interactive, customizable, sophisticated, research-based public Web site. Using U.S. Department of Education funds, Community Knowledgebase has subcontracted with CIRCLE to evaluate Youth Map, first in pilot sites and then in a formal experiment with control groups. ■

STUDENTS INTERVIEWED...

Martin Johnson, Professor of Mathematics Education and former Dean, University of Maryland

Gerron Levi, Maryland State Delegate

Arthur Turner, President of the Coalition of Central Prince George's Community Organizations

Phil Lee, President, Kettering (MD) Civic Federation

Peter Shapiro, Former County Council Chair

CIRCLE FACT SHEETS

CIRCLE has produced numerous Fact Sheets, which are brief documents with basic information and graphs on various topics. The following Fact Sheets have been recently added to CIRCLE's Web site:

≡ **U.S. Civics Instruction: Content and Teaching Strategies.** This fact sheet presents previously unreleased evidence from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation survey (CPHS) about the themes emphasized in civics classes as well as the teaching strategies teachers employ in civics instruction.

≡ **Voter Registration Among Young People.** This fact sheet presents youth voter registration rates in presidential elections. Voter registration among young people reached its highest level in thirty years in 2004. Seventy percent of young people, ages 18-29, said they were registered to vote in the 2004 Presidential election. Uses data from the Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement.

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

NEW BOOK BY CIRCLE GRANTEE, NICHOLAS V. LONGO: "WHY COMMUNITY MATTERS"

CIRCLE grantee Nicholas V. Longo recently published a new book entitled *Why Community Matters: Connecting Education with Civic Life*. The book was published by the State University of New York (SUNY) Press. The following summary is reprinted from the SUNY Press Web site with permission. For more information, please see the SUNY Web site at <http://www.sunypress.edu/details.asp?id=61491>.

Provides a fresh perspective on the undeniable relationship between education reform and democratic revitalization.

Providing a new perspective on the undeniable relationship between education reform and democratic revitalization, Nicholas V. Longo uncovers and examines practical models in which communities play an essential role in teaching the art of democracy.

"Nicholas Longo tells the story of how real civic education goes on in a book that opens the door for concerned Americans to the many institutions that can and do shape the civic attitudes and skills of young people." — **David Mathews, President, Charles F. Kettering Foundation**

"Longo's *Why Community Matters* is an outstanding work that unearths unknown connections between Hull House and Highlander Folk School, two pivotal community-rooted sites in America in the twentieth century, and their contemporary offspring, the Neighborhood Learning Community in St. Paul, Minnesota. It brings all these to life with vivid stories, gripping history, and a compelling interpretative framework that recasts 'education for democracy' in citizen centered terms. This is a book of abundant hope, expressed through voices of new immigrants, organizers, young people, and educators of all kinds." — **Harry C. Boyte, Codirector, Center for Democracy and Citizenship, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute, University of Minnesota**

"There is perhaps no more central question for the future of American society than how to educate for democracy. Longo's impressive and hopeful *Why Community Matters* persuasively makes the case that schools and communities must connect if schools are to succeed and America is to fulfill its democratic promise. Longo convincingly calls on schools, communities, and universities to act and give full attention to the democratic work of building democracy." — **Ira Harkavy, Associate Vice President and Director, Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania**

"Nicholas Longo provides the best contemporary argument for a crucial and often neglected idea. Schools alone cannot prepare young people to be effective and responsible democratic citizens. Civic development is a task for whole communities. The historical detail is fascinating and the conclusions are compelling." — **Peter Levine, Director, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)**

"For anyone interested in educating young people to be active citizens, this gem of a book will be a source of inspiration. It reaffirms the power of educating students through their whole life experience and explicates a convincing theory of education as an ecological enterprise." — **Elizabeth L. Hollander, Tufts University**

ORDER "WHY COMMUNITY MATTERS: CONNECTING EDUCATION WITH CIVIC LIFE"

Why Community Matters: Connecting Education with Civic Life is available for purchase from the State University of New York (SUNY) Press. Hard copies are \$65.50 and paperback copies are \$21.95. The book is 176 pages. To order a copy of the book please visit: <http://www.sunypress.edu/details.asp?id=61491>.

Nicholas V. Longo is Director of the Harry T. Wilks Leadership Institute and Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Miami University in Ohio as well as Associate at the Kettering Foundation.



RESEARCH ROUNDUP

EVALUATING THE CIVIC EFFECTS OF CLUSTERING AND SCHOOL-WIDE GOVERNANCE

In September 2003, Hudson High School in Hudson, MA, launched two new civic development efforts— clustering and school-wide governance—and moved into a new building designed to facilitate them. This new educational strategy provided an opportunity to study the influence of school-wide democratic deliberation on students' civic knowledge and participation.

The interim findings suggest that the programs are associated with improvements in the political knowledge, community service, and school-wide civic engagement of twelfth graders.

CIRCLE Working Paper #58 contains preliminary findings of an evaluation of this unusual approach to civic education. The interim findings suggest that the programs are associated with improvements in the political knowledge, community service, and school-wide civic engagement of twelfth graders. The paper is entitled "Evaluation of a Comprehensive High School Civic Engagement Intervention in Hudson, Massachusetts" and was written by Hugh McIntosh, Sheldon H. Berman, and James Youniss.

CLUSTERING STUDENTS TO ENCOURAGE DELIBERATION

Hudson High School's civic reform effort centered around two changes: changes to the school structure and changes to the school governance. Structural changes included organizing the school into small clusters of 100 to 150 students that met for one hour each week to discuss governance and other school-related issues, performed community service, and pursued other cluster-related activities. The new school building was designed so that clusters of students could deliberate about school issues in public space—reflecting the idea that democratic deliberations need public spaces where citizens can exchange ideas. Clusters also form the basic unit of Hudson High's school-wide governance model, which the authors note, "attempted to draw the entire student body into the governance process, not just the most engaged students." According to Dr. Berman, "The belief underpinning school-wide governance is that students will become more civic-minded and engaged if they experience democratic deliberation as part of their school experience."

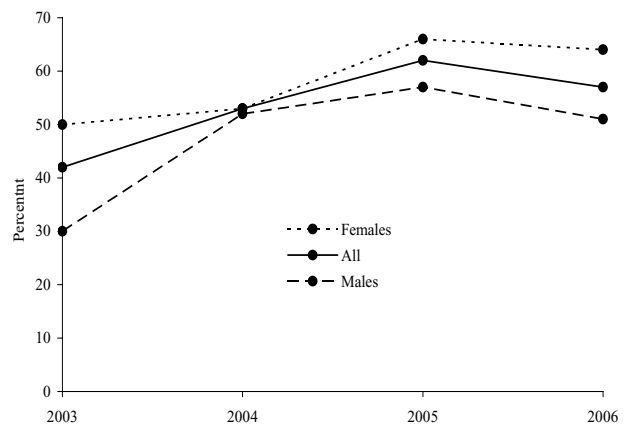
STUDENTS LIKE DELIBERATING IN SMALL GROUPS

The evaluation of Hudson High School's reform efforts used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The first analysis relied on qualitative data and assessed the implementation of the cluster/governance programs. The findings are drawn largely from five focus group interviews with a quarter of the 2006 12th grade class—the first class at Hudson High School to go through all three years of the intervention.

According to the report, one student noted, "I didn't feel comfortable around 150 kids expressing their opinion. ... So usually when we have to talk about governance or anything like that, we meet in a small group. That way they can express their opinions OK."

Among other things, the focus groups revealed that students found it easier to discuss school governance issues in interest groups than in cluster-wide meetings (which involved often 100 or more students). According to the report, one student noted, "I didn't feel comfortable around 150 kids expressing their opinion. ... So usually when we have to talk about governance or anything like that, we meet in a small group. That way they can express their opinions OK."


Figure 1: Community Service Among Twelfth Graders.



INTERIM FINDINGS SHOW IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENT POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND LEVELS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

The second analysis evaluated the impact of the school reform efforts on the civic development of the students and used questionnaire data collected from the 2003 to 2006 senior classes. The interim findings suggest that while the cluster/governance programs are still in the process of being fully implemented, the initial programs are associated with improvements in the political knowledge, community service, and school-wide civic engagement of 12th graders. Another important finding is that many civic engagement indicators rose for all groups of students, not just the most engaged students. According to Dr. McIntosh, "Two measures that showed some of the largest differences over the four years of the study—political knowledge and community service—also showed increases across different categories of students."

Another important finding is that many civic engagement indicators rose for all groups of students, not just the most engaged students.

While the evaluation is still ongoing, initial results certainly suggest some positive civic effects. According to the authors, "These [initial] results seem to warrant optimism that this effort might develop further to include a broader segment of the students and become a tradition that gives this high school and its students an inspiring introduction to participatory democracy and fosters a collective civic identity." Complete findings are contained in CIRCLE Working Paper #58 which can be downloaded from <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=227>. 

CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

SOME RECENT NEWS ARTICLES CITING CIRCLE RESEARCH...

- ≡ "Rallying on Facebook"
by Gabrielle Russon
The Baltimore Sun, 9/28/2007
- ≡ "A Pioneer in the Brave New MTV World"
by Jose Antonio Vargas
The Washington Post, 9/27/2007
- ≡ "Candidates Court Youth Vote"
by Shira Schoenberg
Concord Monitor, 9/9/2007
- ≡ "Young Adults Showing Political Savvy"
by Lisa Osburn
The Birmingham News, 9/3/2007
- ≡ "Student Voting Skyrockets" by Kate King
The Daily Campus (University of Connecticut Student Paper), 8/30/2007
- ≡ "Fervor for Volunteerism Enjoying Youthful Surge: Corporate Ladder Declining as Lure" by Dorie Turner
Associated Press, 8/27/2007
- ≡ "Gen Y Does Care About State's Future"
by Richard Toon
Tucson Citizen, 8/6/2007
- ≡ "Getting Them Involved" by Michael Hill
The Baltimore Sun,
8/5/2007
- ≡ "Presidential Candidates Step into Youthful Turf with Debate on YouTube" by Mark Bennett
The Tribune-Star, 7/28/2007

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

From Research to Practice, a column dedicated to recognizing successful "bridges" between researchers and practitioners, reports on research with practical implications for youth civic engagement. Additionally, it presents concrete examples of how practitioners have applied this research to encourage the participation of young people in civic and political life.

MEANINGFUL LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CONFINES OF THE SCHOOL BUILDING

In his recent book, ***Why Community Matters: Connecting Education with Civic Life***, Nicholas Longo advocates a broader definition of "civic education." He argues that "schools are essential for the civic growth of children, but inadequate to the educational equation. Communities must also be educative." He cites examples from U.S. history, compiles lessons learned from his research, and highlights current work that illustrates how these lessons can be put into practice, two of which are highlighted in this article.

Longo describes his book as "an attempt to introduce a conception of learning and civic life in which education for democracy is a function of whole communities." He provides the following recommendations for connecting education with civic life:

- Commit to making change over extended periods of time,
- Place a deliberate emphasis on comprehensive and public education which utilize community relationships,
- Make learning relevant to people's everyday lives,
- Recognize the creative powers of diversity through community work,
- Utilize the talents and instincts of nonprofessionals,
- Foster reciprocal relationships, and
- Embrace flexibility and trust in the messiness of democracy.

Both the Neighborhood Learning Community (NLC) in St. Paul, Minnesota and the University of Pennsylvania Center for Community Partnerships (CCP) provide insights into how some of these lessons manifest and can be used in everyday practice.

USING A MISSION STATEMENT TO CULTIVATE A "LONG-TERM" COMMITMENT

Longo states that "having educators willing to 'stick to it' is essential for long-term civic change." One way organizations can stay focused on the long-term change is by developing a mission statement focused on a place and the "big picture." As seen in the text box, both NLC and CCP have created mission statements that clearly articulate a long-term commitment to a place as a defining aspect of their work. Nan Skelton, Co-Director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota, one of the coordinating partners of the NLC, suggests that higher education institutions that seek to create a culture of learning, such as the NLC, should first "focus on a place" and then get to know

that place. "From there," she says, "think about how one could connect their institution to that whole place so students have a way to be there over time."

CIVIC MISSION STATEMENTS

The Center for Community Partnerships (CCP) is the University of Pennsylvania's "primary vehicle for bringing to bear the broad range of human knowledge needed to solve the complex, comprehensive, and interconnected problems of the American city so that West Philadelphia (Penn's local geographic community), Philadelphia, the University itself, and society benefit. Through the Center, the University currently engages in three types of activities: academically based community service, direct traditional service, and community development."¹

The Neighborhood Learning Community (NLC), "is a network of people and organizations working together to strengthen learning on the West Side of St. Paul, Minnesota. We create a culture of learning by tapping the experience and aspirations of all people through leadership development, language learning, informal learning experiences and sharing resources."²

¹ <http://www.upenn.edu/ccp/about/about-the-center.html>

² <http://www.westsidlearning.org/index.html>

EMPHASIZING RELATIONAL EDUCATION

One of the keys to the NLC's surviving over time, Skelton suggests, is that "people are gathering together on a very regular basis with time for work they're going to do together and reflection on the meaning of that work. So it's not all tasks. It's not all tactics." Another way they promote relational education is through the regular activities of a "coordinating group" who, Skelton notes, all "have a stake in the vision." The coordinating group has met diligently every month, "ensuring that they have reflective time together" as well.

According to Skelton, "When people come together for the first time or there are new people in the group we do a story circle so that each individual tells their story in relation to a theme or what we're working on." Skelton believes that "in sharing people really

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

develop a respect for one another.”

FOSTERING RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS

Skelton and Harkavy emphasize that their respective universities have resources that they can leverage to which their partners would not otherwise have access. Skelton specifically points to their ability to leverage professional development resources and youth development training through the University of Minnesota for the benefit of the neighborhood and the work they are doing.


Ira Harkavy, Founding Director of the CCP, attributes the CCP's ability to do long-term work to having "strong partners who we learn from" and "an enthusiastic group of students and faculty who believe in the work and are committed to advancing it."

Ira Harkavy, Founding Director of the CCP, attributes the CCP's ability to do long-term work to having "strong partners who we learn from" and "an enthusiastic group of students and faculty who believe in the work and are committed to advancing it." On September 7th, 2007 a ribbon-cutting ceremony marked the opening of the Sayre Health Center (SHC), an idea that emerged from an undergraduate research project. Today the SHC is a nonprofit that will "provide clinical services to residents of the surrounding community, and educational opportunities for high school, undergraduate, and graduate students."¹ The SHC, housed in Sayre High School, "is a cooperative effort between the University of Pennsylvania, the Sayre High School, and the West Philadelphia community surrounding the school."²

TRUSTING THE MESSINESS OF DEMOCRACY

In the preface of his book, Longo talks about connecting civic learning to a "broader culture of engagement." He suggests that civic educators can transform the traditional paradigm wherein "civic education becomes about getting young people to participate in the system as it is, rather than helping to create a different kind of public life." He believes embracing flexibility

and trusting in the "messiness of democracy" are essential for connecting civic education and civic life.

Both Nan Skelton and Ira Harkavy frame their work in the context of ideas and the democratic process. Dr. Harkavy attributes the successes at CCP to the "powerful democratic partnerships." Dr. Skelton talks about the work of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship as having a "grounded theory" that is the foundation: "Our work is focusing on civic learning and democratic practice and so we really use our leadership to help guide democratic practice in a neighborhood." 

HELPFUL LINKS

The Center for Community Partnerships

<http://www.upenn.edu/ccp/index.php>

Sayre Health Center

<http://sayrehealth.org/index.html>

Neighborhood Learning Community

<http://www.westsidlearning.org/index.html>

Center for Democracy and Citizenship

<http://www.publicwork.org/home.html>

¹ <http://sayrehealth.org/>

² *ibid*

UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS BOOK: CIRCLE HAS A NEW MAILING ADDRESS

CIRCLE has moved! We're still at the University of Maryland,
School of Public Policy but our new address is:

CIRCLE
1112 Preinkert Hall
School of Public Policy
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742

Our phone numbers and email addresses have NOT changed.

Design: Lomangino Studio Inc.

www.civicyouth.org

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