

GENERAL EDUCATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES

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Could a general education program serve as an effective tool for the promotion of engaged citizenship among students if pedagogies of engagement were incorporated into a critical mass of the courses making up such a curriculum? The purpose of this article is to present empirical evidence suggesting the potential benefits of systematically utilizing general education as the institutional foundation for an integrated, multidisciplinary learning environment expressly dedicated to the promotion of civic engagement.

Recently, we conducted an assessment of student learning outcomes at four colleges and universities in an attempt to evaluate the effects that the pedagogy of service learning and the so-called democratic classroom approach to course management have on student attitudes toward civic engagement. The study involved 1,243 undergraduate students enrolled in 39 courses drawn from diverse academic programs.

In general, the findings provide empirical support for the claim that faculty can produce measurable and statistically significant changes in student attitudes toward the importance of engaged citizenship when they employ pedagogical strategies and instructional techniques expressly dedicated to the promotion of student engagement. Moreover, the project also demonstrated that it is possible to incorporate pedagogies of engagement across nearly all of the academic divisions that constitute the typical college campus. As a consequence, the study suggests that a systemic approach to civic education is administratively manageable and that a general education curriculum could serve as the academic platform for an institutionally based, mission driven commitment to civic engagement.

Pedagogy and Civic Engagement

The research presented below was conducted under the auspices of a three-year, \$1.2 million initiative designed to promote greater civic engagement among college students.¹ The overarching purpose of the Participating in Democracy Project was to promote greater student engagement in the classroom and the local community—and to assess the influence that pedagogies of engagement have on student attitudes toward the importance of engaged citizenship. Cedar Crest College, a private liberal arts college for women in Allentown, Pennsylvania, served as the lead institution on the project.

In the first phase of the initiative, two Cedar Crest faculty members with extensive experience in the area of civic education compiled an instructional tool kit outlining how the pedagogy of service learning and the so-called democratic classroom approach to course management could be utilized to promote engaged citizenship within courses (Meade & Weaver, 2004). Although “pedagogies of engagement” encompasses a considerably broader range of instructional practices than simply service learning and the democratic classroom technique, we opted to focus exclusively on these two particular strategies because of the relative ease with which they could be incorporated into courses across the curriculum and because of their hypothesized impact on student attitudes toward civic engagement.²

In the name of promoting student engagement in the local community, the project drew heavily on the well-established pedagogy of service learning (Furco, 1996; Hornet & Poulsen, 1989; Sigmon 1970, 1994). This technique emphasizes the value of off-campus placements, coupled with class-based opportunities for reflection and discussion, as a tool for nurturing a sense of engaged citizenship among students. Within the context of the Democracy Project, the pedagogy of service learning was utilized to promote two distinctive types of learning outcomes.

For faculty emphasizing civic engagement as a way of promoting the moral development of the individual, service learning was used to place students in the voluntary (i.e., nonprofit) sector of local communities wherein they would have an opportunity to develop their moral voice and a sense of community. From the standpoint of

engaged citizenship, such placements were designed to help students acquire a sense of personal responsibility for the well-being of their local communities and to affirm the importance of public service as a basic responsibility of citizens.

For faculty emphasizing civic engagement as a way of promoting an individual's sense of efficacy as an agent of social change, service learning was used to place students with politically active groups, organizations, and institutions wherein they would have an opportunity to learn about the techniques that citizens can use to reconcile contending normative values and diverse interests within the context of a democratic process operating under the constraints of limited public resources. From the standpoint of engaged citizenship, such placements were designed to help students appreciate the intrinsic importance of political engagement and to promote student acquisition of skills that are essential to the art of political participation.

In addition to promoting student engagement in the local community, we also emphasized the importance of utilizing instructional techniques that serve to promote student engagement in the classroom itself. This represents a relatively novel approach to civic education because it explicitly treats "the classroom" as a site of civic engagement in its own right. Because this technique has not been widely utilized in higher education, the following discussion is intended to provide an overview of the "democratic classroom" approach to course management and its implications for civic education.

Although instructors tend to view the classroom primarily as a learning environment, it also functions as a social and a political system. In regard to the latter, classrooms historically have been highly stratified and generally authoritarian, with instructors firmly entrenched at the apex of both structures (Caspary, 1996). The lecture, of course, stands as the most conspicuous manifestation of this phenomenon, but in practice an emphasis on hierarchy historically has pervaded virtually every aspect of course administration—from the preparation of syllabi to the nature of assignments and the determination of grades. Viewed from the perspective of civic education, however, this is a relatively inhospitable environment for the promotion of engaged citizenship because it implicitly

conditions students to accept a decidedly passive approach to both learning and class participation (Herman, 1996).

To address this issue, we incorporated classroom engagement techniques that were explicitly designed to encourage students to participate directly in the governance of a course and, in the process, redefine the relations of power and authority that have traditionally characterized the classroom as a social and political system. In essence, this approach to class management explicitly provides students with authentic opportunities to participate collectively in decision-making processes relating to the administration of a course, including syllabi construction, assessment procedures, and the specification of classroom protocols that both students and faculty are expected to observe (Meade & Weaver, 2004, pp. 39–95). From the standpoint of engaged citizenship, the democratic classroom approach is designed to help students take personal responsibility for their learning, appreciate the value of participating in the life of a community, and develop a sense of confidence, efficacy, and empowerment (Becker & Couto, 1996).

In summary, the central empirical claim underlying the Democracy Project was that the pedagogy of service learning and the democratic classroom technique would have a measurable effect on student attitudes toward the value of engaged citizenship. We tested this proposition in 2002–2003 within the context of an assessment of student learning outcomes conducted at four colleges and universities in the United States. Our goal was twofold. First, we wanted to compare the attitudes of students enrolled in courses utilizing either the pedagogy of service learning or the democratic classroom approach with the attitudes of students enrolled in courses that did not employ these instructional techniques. Second, we wanted to compare the attitudes of both types of students at both the beginning and the end of each academic semester. In this way, we hoped to gather both comparative and longitudinal data regarding the effect that pedagogies of engagement have on student attitudes toward engaged citizenship. To facilitate the analysis, we will subsequently refer to courses employing either service learning or the democratic classroom technique as “Democratic Academy” courses. Courses not employing either of these techniques will be referred to as “control group” courses.

Research Hypotheses and Methodology

The hypotheses at the core of this research study can be stated as follows:

1. Students who complete a Democratic Academy course will express a greater appreciation of the value and significance of engaged citizenship than students who do not complete a Democratic Academy course.
2. Students who complete a Democratic Academy course will express a greater sense of efficacy in regard to civic skills than students who do not complete a Democratic Academy course.

Data to test the hypotheses were gathered at Cedar Crest College, St. Thomas Aquinas College, Lesley University, and Heidelberg College. Altogether, 39 courses were featured in the study, encompassing academic programs as diverse as art, business, education, English, history, honors, international studies, nursing, political science, psychology, religious studies, social work, sociology, and the general education curriculum. Of the faculty participating in the study, 23 utilized the pedagogy of service learning, and 16 adopted techniques associated with the democratic classroom.³ The courses featured in the study are listed in Table 1.

Overall, 1,243 undergraduates participated in the study. Of these, 524 students were enrolled in Democratic Academy courses; the remainder of the students were enrolled in control group courses selected randomly from among all other courses offered in a given semester. A quasi-experimental research design was employed such that we could contrast the civic attitudes and skills of Democratic Academy students with the attitudes and skills of individuals in the general student population. Comparisons were drawn on the basis of student responses to a Civic Aptitudes Survey administered at each participating institution at the beginning and the end of each semester.

The Civic Aptitudes Survey consists of closed-ended questions designed to measure student attitudes about the importance they attach to civic engagement and the degree of confidence they have in regard to the social and analytical skills that facilitate

Table 1. Democratic Academy Courses

Code	Title
Democratic Classroom Courses	
ART 210	Art Since 1940
ART 360	Capstone in Studio
ART 372	Senior Art Exhibition
BUS 331	International Law
CST 217	Film History
EDU 341	Teaching Social Studies and Science
EDU 523	The Cuban Experience in Education
EDU 710	Perspectives in Educational Practice
ENG 100	Basic Composition
ENG 233	Creative Writing
ENG 306	Chaucer
HIS 302	American Topics
HON 224	Women in the Workplace
MGT 329	Organizational Behavior
PSY 301	Abnormal Psychology
SWK 346	Social Work, Field Practice Seminar
Service-Learning Courses	
ART 220	Women Artists
EDU 531	Teaching Students With Reading Disabilities
ENG 208	Expository Writing
ENG 211	Computer-Mediated Communication
HIS 400	Cold War Culture
HON 100	You Can Change the World
HON 133	Changing the World From the Inside Out
HON 225	Social Policy as Change Agent
HON 270	Emerging Leaders
HON 307	Service-Learning Seminar
HON 404	In the Shadow of the Holocaust
MKT 423	Advertising and Promotion
MUS 325	Private Music Instruction
MUS 393	Functional Piano
NUR 333	Health Promotion of the Community
NUR 334	Nursing Leadership

Table 1. Democratic Academy Courses (continued)

Code	Title
PSC 210	Contemporary American Politics
REL 250	Researching American Communities
SOC 203	Ethnic Groups in American Society
SOC 405	Research Methods in Social Science
SWK 244	Process of Social Change
SWK 300	Community Organizing

engaged citizenship.⁴ More specifically, the survey attempted to assess student attitudes toward civic engagement by posing several questions designed to capture the degree of connectedness that students felt toward their community as reflected in their attitudes toward other members of the community and the sense of personal responsibility they felt for the well-being of the community. In regard to civic skills, the survey was designed to measure the sense of efficacy that students had in regard to their ability to serve effectively as agents of social and political change. To that end, the Civic Aptitudes Survey focuses on two distinct skill sets emphasized by Thomas Ehrlich (2000) among other researchers on civic education: critical thinking skills and leadership.⁵

Surveys were administered during the first week of classes in both Democratic Academy courses and those courses that served as the control group for the study.⁶ It is important to note that control group courses were solicited on a voluntary basis. Hence, strictly speaking, the survey results for control group students are not necessarily representative of the general student population at each of the participating institutions. Moreover, it is possible that some of the students enrolled in control group courses either had previously completed a Democratic Academy course or were presently enrolled in one.

While acknowledging this possibility, the issue of cross-enrollment does not appear to represent a serious threat to the validity of the assessment results. This conclusion is based on two considerations. First, the institutions participating in the study collectively enroll thousands of students in hundreds of courses annually. However, less than 75 courses were featured in the evaluation study.

Hence, the vast majority of students at each institution were not involved in the project at all. Given this, the odds that a significant number of Democratic Academy students were among the approximately 350 undergraduates who happened to be enrolled in control group courses in a given semester are relatively small. Put differently, approximately 250 students completed a Democratic Academy course during any given semester. As a consequence, a relatively large number of these students would have had to have been enrolled in control group courses in order to significantly affect the results of the student surveys. In our view the odds of this happening seemed relatively small, especially as control group courses were solicited voluntarily (i.e., randomly) at each institution. In light of these considerations, we are confident that cross-enrollment does not pose a serious threat to the validity of the assessment results, even though it may have occurred on a limited basis.

Findings

The first hypothesis predicts that students who complete a Democratic Academy course will express a greater appreciation for the value and significance of engaged citizenship than students who were not enrolled in such classes. In assessing this outcome, the Civic Aptitudes Survey poses a variety of questions designed to measure student attitudes about the intrinsic importance of civic engagement and their attitudes toward other members of the community. Table 2 compares the attitudes of Democratic Academy and control group students in regard to the value of civic engagement; Table 3 contrasts the attitudes of these students when it comes to their attitudes toward others.

Table 2 indicates that there were statistically significant differences between the civic attitudes of Democratic Academy and control group students from the very outset of the semester. In essence, students enrolled in Democratic Academy courses appeared to have already drawn a tentative connection among the existence of social problems, the welfare of their community, and the importance of keeping abreast of public affairs. Hence, prior to taking the class, Democratic Academy students tended to attach more significance to civic engagement than their counterparts in the control group courses.

Table 2. Student Attitudes Toward Civic Engagement

Survey Item	Beginning of the Semester		End of the Semester	
	Students in Control Group Courses (N = 719)	Students in Democratic Academy Courses (N = 524)	Students in Control Group Courses (N = 643)	Students in Democratic Academy Courses (N = 466)
1. Having an impact on community problems is within the reach of most individuals.	3.77	3.85	3.78	3.88
2. Social problems directly affect the quality of life in my community.	3.73	3.86*	3.77	3.98**
3. I can have an impact on the problems that affect my community	3.72	3.82	3.72	3.86**
4. It is important to keep up with local and national news.	4.25	4.35*	4.24	4.31
5. The most important reason to get involved in the community is to help change a policy or law.	2.69	2.82*	2.73	2.92**
6. Community problems are more difficult to solve than most people think.	3.49	3.44	3.49	3.48

Note: Rating scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*.
 * $p = .05$; ** $p = .01$.

Table 3. Student Attitudes Toward Other Members of the Community

Survey Item	Beginning of the Semester		End of the Semester	
	Students in Control Group Courses (N = 719)	Students in Democratic Academy Courses (N = 524)	Students in Control Group Courses (N = 643)	Students in Democratic Academy Courses (N = 466)
1. Respecting the views of others	4.10	4.04	4.03	4.15*
2. Being tolerant of peoples' differences	4.01	4.11*	4.03	4.14*
3. Empathizing with the plight of others	3.76	3.85	3.74	3.99**
4. Working with others	3.95	3.95	3.90	4.01*
5. Being comfortable working with different cultures	4.05	4.13	4.05	4.17*
6. Being aware of my own biases and prejudices	3.91	4.04*	3.97	4.08*

Note: Rating scale: 1 = worse than most, 2 = not as good as most, 3 = about the same as most, 4 = better than most, 5 = much better than most.

* $p = .05$; ** $p = .01$.

This finding is surprising because numerous researchers have reported that today's 18–24 year olds are perhaps the most disengaged generation in American history (e.g., Putnam, 2000). Hence, it is not intuitively obvious as to why significant differences were found between those in Democratic Academy and control group courses. Clearly, this outcome cannot be attributed to self-selection on the part of students. During the fall and spring registration periods, Democratic Academy courses were not identified as such in the course schedules distributed to the general student population. In fact, students were not informed that they had enrolled in a Democratic Academy course until the first day of classes. Although it is possible that some students may have opted not to participate in Democratic Academy courses upon learning of their distinctive nature, faculty participating in the study did not mention this as an issue during focus group interviews conducted at the end of the project. It also is possible that the substantive nature of the Democratic Academy courses themselves tended to attract students who were already favorably predisposed to engaged citizenship. Given the diverse assortment of courses featured in the study, however, it is not clear what underlying thematic connection might have been responsible for this outcome.

Even so, Table 2 also reveals that differences in civic attitudes between Democratic Academy students and control group students did become somewhat more pronounced by the end of the semester. It is particularly interesting to note the difference between the groups in regard to the question of whether students, as individuals, can have an impact on the problems confronting their community. Whereas there was no change in the response of control group students to this question, Democratic Academy students exhibited a modest increase in the value they attached to civic engagement. In principle, this outcome is consistent with the claim that pedagogies of engagement can help to nurture a sense of personal responsibility on the part of students that may serve as a prelude to action.

Despite these differences, we should acknowledge that the student responses reported in Table 2 generally fall into a range indicating that students neither agreed nor disagreed with statements attesting to the importance of civic engagement. This was the case for both groups of students throughout a semester. At a minimum,

the modal student response to these questions suggests a lack of firmly held convictions relating to the value and significance of engaged citizenship. However, this finding also may be interpreted as tacit support for the claim advanced in some quarters that civic attitudes need to be reinforced repeatedly and routinely over the course of a student's entire undergraduate career (see Meade & Weaver, 2004).

The Civic Aptitudes Survey also attempts to assess civic attitudes by asking students to rate themselves in terms of their ability to relate to and interact with other members of the community. The presumption underlying these questions is that particular forms of sociality are conducive to civic engagement, whereas others serve to discourage engaged citizenship. More specifically, Ehrlich (2000) suggests that engagement is a function of an individual's ability to respect differences, empathize with others, and see the value of collaborative attempts to solve community problems. Table 3 presents the results of this analysis, and the findings are striking. At the beginning of the semester, there were few significant differences between Democratic Academy students and students enrolled in control group courses. By the end of the semester, however, Democratic Academy students were exhibiting statistically significant differences in regard to each of the items making up this portion of the survey.

The most conspicuous and noteworthy differences occurred in regard to the ability to empathize and work with others. At the beginning of the semester, there was no essential difference between Democratic Academy students and control group students in the case of either category. By the end of the semester, however, statistically significant differences had emerged in regard to both of these dimensions of sociality. Put differently, over the course of a semester, Democratic Academy students appear to have moved beyond simply "tolerating" differences and into the realm of a more authentic form of civic engagement.

This finding is consistent with the first hypothesis because the pedagogies constituting Democratic Academy courses ultimately are intended to produce a common set of student learning outcomes relating to civic attitudes. Despite differences in application, the instructional techniques associated with service learning and the democratic classroom share an underlying commitment to the

promotion of equality, civility, and consociation (i.e., fellowship) as the normative basis for civic engagement. Perhaps more important, both of these pedagogies also provide multiple opportunities for students to experience these norms within the context of either the classroom or their local communities. As a recent review of the literature on active learning suggests, real-world experiences can have a powerful effect on the extent to which students absorb content (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003, ch. 6). The results reported in Table 3 indicate that this may well be the case when it comes to the social dimensions underlying the principle of engaged citizenship.

In summary, the results presented above generally support the first hypothesis; there were measurable and significant differences in civic attitudes between students who completed Democratic Academy courses and students enrolled in control group courses. As Tables 2 and 3 suggest, however, this effect was most pronounced in regard to student attitudes toward other members of the community.

Upon reflection, the differences reflected in the tables may be a consequence of the fact that 16 of the 39 courses (41%) participating in the study utilized the democratic classroom technique. Although this type of learning experience is designed to promote a sense of “fellow feeling” among the members of a class, it does not embed students within their local communities *per se*. Hence, classroom engagement techniques may not nurture a student’s appreciation of the intrinsic value of civic engagement to the same extent as courses featuring the pedagogy of service learning. Given this, the less impressive results reported in Table 2 may be a consequence of aggregating different pedagogies of engagement into a single, overarching category (i.e., Democratic Academy courses).

The preceding analysis focused on the issue of student motivation as it relates to the principle of engaged citizenship. We now turn to the issue of civic skills and the sense of efficacy that students expressed in regard to various aptitudes deemed essential to the practice of civic engagement. The second hypothesis predicts that students who complete a Democratic Academy course will express a greater sense of efficacy in regard to civic skills than students who did not complete such a course. In assessing this outcome, the Civic Aptitudes Survey poses several questions designed to measure the

degree of confidence that students had in regard to their ability to serve effectively as agents of social and political change. More specifically, the survey asks students to rate themselves in terms of two distinct skill sets emphasized in the literature on civic education: critical thinking and leadership.

For the purposes of this study, critical thinking and leadership were operationalized in ways that seemed most appropriate to the nature of engaged citizenship. Hence, there is no reason to assume that the measures selected for this research will be applicable to other areas of study; nor would we argue that these operationalizations are the last word on the subject even within the domain of civic education. Critical thinking skills essentially refer to a variety of competencies that enable students to access, analyze, and apply information effectively. The concept of leadership—as understood within the context of civic engagement—refers most fundamentally to a set of interpersonal skills that an individual can use to inspire and mobilize others to take action in their community.

The Civic Aptitudes Survey asks students to rate their critical thinking skills on the basis of a five-point scale. Table 4 reveals that at the beginning of the semester there was only one statistically significant difference between the two groups of students. By the end of the semester, however, students enrolled in Democratic Academy courses were exhibiting statistically significant differences in regard to each of the six items making up this portion of the survey. In short, the pedagogies of engagement utilized in Democratic Academy courses appear to have had both an immediate and a significant effect on student learning outcomes.

These results are impressive because critical thinking skills figure prominently in many if not most college courses. Hence, in principle, one would not expect the difference between students in Democratic Academy courses and control group courses to be as pronounced as they prove to be. In fairness, we should note that the student responses reported in Table 4 generally fall into a range indicating that students rated their critical thinking skills as about the same as all other students. At the same time, however, Democratic Academy courses are distinctive because they explicitly encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. This is an especially conspicuous feature of democratic classroom

Table 4. Critical Thinking Skills

Survey Item	Beginning of the Semester		End of the Semester	
	Students in Control Group Courses (N = 719)	Students in Democratic Academy Courses (N = 524)	Students in Control Group Courses (N = 643)	Students in Democratic Academy Courses (N = 466)
1. Identifying compromise solutions to problems	3.77	3.82	3.80	3.91*
2. Assessing own strengths and weaknesses	3.64	3.71	3.73	3.84*
3. Planning and completing a project	3.69	3.82*	3.77	3.92**
4. Analyzing and synthesizing information	3.56	3.58	3.66	3.82**
5. Knowing where to find the information needed to answer a question	3.60	3.67	3.65	3.87**
6. Ability to make a sound moral or ethical decision	3.88	3.95	3.92	4.03*

Note: Rating scale: 1 = worse than most, 2 = not as good as most, 3 = about the same as most, 4 = better than most, 5 = much better than most.

* $p = .05$; ** $p = .01$.

courses wherein each student is required to complete a “learning agreement” specifying what a student hopes to learn by the end of a semester. Perhaps more important, the learning agreement also requires each student to specify what she or he is willing to do to achieve those goals. In short, this type of engagement places a premium on active learning, just as the pedagogy of service learning does within the context of local communities.⁷

The final item of the Civic Aptitudes Survey asks students to rate themselves in terms of their leadership skills. As noted above, the concept of leadership was operationalized in terms of several interpersonal skills relevant to the task of inspiring and mobilizing others. As Table 5 reveals, there were relatively few significant differences between students in Democratic Academy and control group courses at either the beginning or the end of a semester.

Although students enrolled in Democratic Academy courses did see themselves as somewhat more capable of taking action to address social and political problems, this presumption did not extend to the task of mobilizing others to participate in such undertakings. This implies that students may tend to conceive of civic engagement as something that citizens do as individuals rather than as members of a group. This impression is reinforced to some extent by the value students attached to the concept of autonomy. The last item in Table 5 asks students to rate their ability to stand up for their own ideas and opinions. Notice that both Democratic Academy students and control group students gave themselves the highest ratings on this particular civic skill. Although being steadfast in one’s convictions is certainly an admirable trait, in the absence of interpersonal skills a citizen is unlikely to serve as an effective agent of social and political change—except perhaps in the most exceptional of circumstances. Going further, to conceive of engaged citizenship as solitary acts that an individual does in isolation from others is to contribute to the deficit of social capital that presumably afflicts so many communities. Hence, it is important to better understand why the pedagogies utilized in this study did not promote this essential set of civic skills.⁸

Table 5. Student Leadership Skills

Survey Item	Beginning of the Semester		End of the Semester	
	Students in Control Group Courses (N = 719)	Students in Democratic Academy Courses (N = 524)	Students in Control Group Courses (N = 643)	Students in Democratic Academy Courses (N = 466)
1. Communicating ideas to others	3.74	3.75	3.82	3.87
2. Taking action to address problems	3.34	3.44*	3.42	3.59**
3. Accomplishing my goals	3.86	3.94	3.92	4.05*
4. Speaking in public	3.07	3.06	3.20	3.32
5. Ability to lead a group	3.59	3.60	3.64	3.68
6. Standing up for own ideas and opinions	3.92	4.03*	3.98	4.08

Note: Rating scale: 1 = worse than most, 2 = not as good as most, 3 = about the same as most, 4 = better than most, 5 = much better than most.

* $p = .05$; ** $p = .01$.

Summary and Conclusion

The assessment results presented in this study provide solid empirical evidence in support of the key theoretical claim underlying much of the literature on civic education: When faculty employ pedagogical strategies expressly dedicated to the promotion of civic engagement, they can have a significant effect on the value that students attach to the concept of engaged citizenship. Put differently, the analysis suggests that educators can make a decisive contribution to the fight against student apathy if they are willing to embrace instructional practices that explicitly emphasize the significance of civic engagement.

More specifically, the study has demonstrated that the pedagogy of service learning and the democratic classroom approach to course management are associated with measurable and statistically significant changes in student learning outcomes relevant to the practice of engaged citizenship. The major findings of the study suggest that pedagogies of engagement promote the following changes in regard to student attitudes:

- an increase in the value and significance that students attach to the principle of civic engagement;
- a change in the way that students relate to, and interact with, other members of the community;
- an increase in the degree of confidence that students express in regard to their critical thinking skills; and
- an increase in the sense of efficacy that students express in regard to their ability to serve as agents of social and political change.

As a final note, the study also has demonstrated that service learning and the democratic classroom approach to course management can be incorporated into nearly all of the academic divisions that make up a typical college campus. Hence, in principle, the study suggests that it would be administratively feasible to utilize a general education curriculum as the academic platform for an institutionally based, mission-driven commitment to the promotion of engaged citizenship that encompasses the entire campus.

Based on our experiences in the Democracy Project, however, if such an initiative is to succeed it must receive sustained academic

leadership on the part of key administrators. More specifically, we found that there was a direct relationship between the level of support that presidents and chief academic officers expressed for initiatives relating to student engagement and the number of service-learning and democratic classroom courses offered at each of the four institutions participating in the present study. Given this, we hope that the findings presented here will prompt both faculty and administrators to carefully consider the possibility of utilizing general education as the institutional foundation and platform for an integrated, multidisciplinary learning environment expressly dedicated to the promotion of civic engagement.

Notes

1. Funding for the project was graciously provided by the Teagle Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropic.

2. For a comprehensive survey of instructional practices subsumed under the rubric of pedagogies of engagement, see Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003, ch. 5.

3. In preparation for the study, faculty development workshops were conducted at each of the participating institutions to train instructors in regard to the use of service learning and especially the democratic classroom approach to course management. Of the 23 service-learning courses, 12 involved placements with nonprofit organizations dedicated to the delivery of community and social services. The remaining courses placed students with politically active organizations working to influence the political process either locally or at the state level.

4. A copy of the Civic Aptitudes Survey can be found at www.cedarcrest.edu/Redesign/democracy/results.html.

5. Following the lead of Ehrlich (2000), we maintain that the proximate goal of a civic education is to promote student acquisition of a discrete set of skills and aptitudes that predispose and enable individuals to become engaged citizens. The question of whether such an education actually increases the level of civic engagement among graduates is beyond the scope of this article.

6. To clarify, the Civic Aptitudes Survey was administrated in Democratic Academy classes and control group courses in August and December 2002 as well as in January and May 2003. Participants included all students enrolled in Democratic Academy courses as well as students enrolled in the randomly selected sample of courses that served as the control group. Hence, the same groups of students that were surveyed at the beginning of the fall semester were surveyed again at the end of that semester. The same procedure was used during the spring semester.

7. As the literature on experiential education suggests, active learning promotes academic achievement by providing students with opportunities to apply the knowledge and analytical skills they are acquiring within their chosen field(s) of study (National Society for Experiential Education, 1994). Hence, the results reported in Table 4 may be a reflection of the synergies that may characterize the typical Democratic Academy course. Whereas we have focused on the role such courses can play in regard to promoting engaged citizenship, the fundamental purpose of these courses remains the delivery of academic content and associated analytical techniques.

Seen from this perspective, Democratic Academy courses also may contribute to the achievement of discipline-specific learning objectives by presenting students with numerous opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills within the context of real-world settings. This possibility should be the subject of further research because it could alleviate faculty concerns that incorporating pedagogies of engagement into their courses interferes with student acquisition of content.

8. One possibility, of course, is that service learning and the democratic classroom technique may not be equally well suited to the promotion of leadership skills. Traditionally, community service has been utilized in courses that aspire to promote the moral development of the individual. To this end, students typically have been required to volunteer with nonprofit agencies wherein they—as individuals—are afforded an opportunity to perform charitable works for the less fortunate. In principle, this type of learning experience is designed to help students find their moral voice and develop a sense of civic virtue unencumbered by the need to do anything to resolve or eliminate the social problems they are witnessing. Put differently, the learning outcomes associated with the pedagogy of service learning typically are directed inwardly at the student rather than oriented toward the goal of social and political change. As a consequence, service-learning courses may have less of an impact on students when it comes to the acquisition of leadership skills because the emphasis of such courses is on ethics—not efficacy—as the basis for engaged citizenship (Spiezio, 2002).

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