Community Service-Learning in a Democracy: 
An Introduction

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The premise of this book is that community service-learning should have a central place in our nation’s public schools. Embodying the original mission of public schooling, to create active and informed citizens, community service-learning has the potential to assist in reviving an apathetic citizenry through the transformation of civic education. In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of our faltering democracy and ineffectual civic education practices. Along with many other scholars, I propose that a vision of society based solely on respect for individual rights is an inappropriate view to guide civic education in a democracy. Instead, an alternate view of civic education, guided by both individualistic and communal values, is presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of service-learning and its central role in democratic citizenship education.

WHY IS OUR DEMOCRACY FALTERING?

For more than two hundred years, the American people have lived with democracy as their form of government, in Abraham Lincoln’s words, “government of, by, and for the people.” Democracy is characterized by both rights and responsibilities. At its core, democracy upholds respect for the dignity of the individual and the right of all citizens to participate in decision making (Engle and Ochoa, 1988). A democracy cannot function effectively without these basic tenets. A democracy in many ways should be an open society, where individuals have the right to dissent, where differences are accepted, and where efforts to change and improve the quality of life are commonplace.
While these ideals of democratic life have not varied much over more than two centuries, in practice our democracy has gone through numerous changes and transformations. In the early years of English settlements, democracy functioned primarily within local associations and town meetings. Political decision making was an extension of the communal participation so necessary for the health and well-being of each person. Citizens needed each other not only to decide on local laws and regulations, but to build homes, grow food, and provide a wide array of goods and services necessary for living.

The onset of industrialization is marked by some scholars as the beginning of a profound shift in the lives of communities and the livelihood of American democracy. Since the beginning of the exodus from farm life to the cities, Americans have increasingly valued independence and personal success over their commitment to a participatory egalitarian society. Alexis de Tocqueville (1840/1969) recognized that a healthy democracy was integrally connected to a lively moral civic culture engendered by local communities and associations. He was prescient in his fear that economic enterprise would turn citizens away from a vigorous civic life in the public sphere and toward individual concern for wealth and happiness in the private sphere.

As national markets and large scale enterprise gradually replaced small-town America, the survival of democracy depended on meeting the concentration of economic power with a concentration of political power. Some were positive about the possibility of the nationalization of political, economic, and social life resulting in "an essentially formative and enlightening political transformation" (Croly, 1965, p. 270). But the nationalization of politics and the centralization of government promoted in the appeal for the consolidation of the union and consummated in the New Deal failed to engender a strong sense of national unity. The scale proved too large across which to cultivate the shared values, ideals, and commitment necessary to community. "And so the gradual shift, in our practices and institutions, from a public philosophy of common purposes to one of fair procedures, from a politics of good to a politics of right, from the national republic to the procedural republic" (Sandel, 1984, p. 93).

As the scale of our social and political organization has grown, the sense of our collective identity as a people with common needs and purposes has become increasingly fragmented. As we have increasingly placed individual good ahead of the common good, we have forgotten our common roots as Americans. Bellah and his colleagues (1985) noted that many Americans feel isolated from their institutions—schools, governments, and churches. Institutional problems seem too large, too complex; the result is frustration, lack of trust, and ultimately withdrawal from active involvement in the decision making process. Numerous studies have confirmed young people’s disengagement from political involvement in particular (Center for Civic Education, 1994). As just one example of this fact, the mean voter turnout for presidential
elections in the United States since World War II has hovered around 50 percent, the lowest percentage for any noncompulsory democracy in the West. "In a country where voting is the primary expression of citizenship, the refusal to vote signals the bankruptcy of democracy" (Barber, 1984, p. xiv).

Further evidence of our fragmentation as a national community can be seen in citizens' views of the nation state. Many view the state as distant and alien, an overly intrusive and powerful presence that must be carefully watched lest we become its victims. At the same time, the state is seen as disempowered, unable to effectively control the nation's economy or respond capably to persistent social problems (Sandel, 1984).

While the vestiges of a more participatory democracy can still be found in some New England town meetings or in grassroots movements for social change, for many citizens, democratic life seems to be a thing of the past. A democracy lacking in participation by the majority of its constituents is a democracy at risk. Bellah and his colleagues (1985) conclude, "We have failed at every level; we have put our own good, as individuals, as groups, as a nation, ahead of the common good" (p. 285). For a thriving democracy, we need a majority of concerned citizens willing to participate in decisions from the local to the national level that effect their own lives and the common good.

Where do we turn then in our efforts to resuscitate a faltering democracy? Clearly, efforts must be mounted on many fronts if we are to develop a vibrant national life. The purpose of this book is to explore just one potential means: community service-learning in public education. Given the original mission of public schooling as civic education, we turn now to a discussion of the school's role in educating citizens. This discussion will illuminate the failure of education to foster a participatory public lifestyle for American citizens.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLING IN EDUCATING CITIZENS?

The founders of our democratic society and the formulators of public schooling believed that one of the central purposes of education was to develop informed and active citizens. Historically, public education was education for community, a means for making both plurality and difference honored in civic life. Aristotle noted that citizens are made, not born. Many years later, Jefferson, in his support for public schooling, hoped that education would enable citizens' moral and intellectual development so that they could create good government. Jefferson, Madison, Adams, and others realized that a free society depends on the knowledge, skills, and virtues of its citizens (Center for Civic Education, 1994). The theme of education for citizenship has continued throughout the history of education in the work of Horace Mann, Henry
Bernard, John Dewey, Arthur Bestor, Max Rafferty, and contemporary scholars such as Benjamin Barber who asserted, “There are certain things a democracy simply must teach, employing its full authority to do so: citizenship is first among them” (1992, p. 256).

Schools were (and still are) the sole institution available to society as a whole to train youth in the theory and practice of democratic citizenship. Many civic qualities cannot be learned in private spheres such as the family. They must, therefore, be taught and learned with public support and guidance. While family, church, the media, and the streets all play powerful roles in children’s development, it is schools that provide the greatest opportunity for youth to experience community, to work toward common goals, and to uphold both individual rights and collective good. The communal nature of public school classrooms offers students an excellent opportunity to balance the development of individual character, autonomy, and confidence with the strengthening of a public self through dialogue, decision making, and cooperative learning.

HOW HAS CIVIC EDUCATION FAILED TO CREATE ACTIVE CITIZENS?

While most educators acknowledge the potential of public schooling for civic training, the results of traditional civic education have been far from promising. Despite a variety of curricular innovations over the last twenty-five years, most efforts at teaching citizenship in the schools fall on the shoulders of narrowly conceived social studies courses that in most cases have failed to engender student interest, involvement, or competence in political life (Ferguson, 1991). Research has shown that most high school government and civics courses have little impact on students’ democratic political attitudes, in part because they fail to link cognitive information with the affective lessons of citizenship (Battistoni, 1985). Bellah and his colleagues (1992) observed that “On the whole Americans have done better in developing their educational resources for the transmission of specialized knowledge and skills than they have for citizenship” (p. 175).

Educators have offered other reasons for the ineffectual nature of the civics curriculum as well. First, students have little reason to become interested in simply reading about civics. “Give people some significant power and they will quickly appreciate the need for knowledge, but foist knowledge on them without giving them responsibility and they will display only indifference” (Barber, 1984, p. 234). Thus, traditional teaching strategies provide little incentive for students’ taking to heart and acting on the lessons in their social studies textbooks.

This finding points to a second and related reason for the failure of traditional schooling to create active, informed citizens: the school’s hierarchical
social arrangements. Schools cannot teach democracy when they are not democratic places themselves. Civic education in our schools is much more than what goes on in social studies classes; civic education is influenced by the whole school environment. Dewey contended that any educational regimen consisting of “authorities at the upper end handing down to receivers at the lower end what they must accept” was an education “fit to subvert, pervert, and destroy the foundations of democratic society” (Dewey, 1916/1969: 133). Purpel (1989) similarly saw schooling as a powerful force for social, intellectual, and personal oppression. The reasons for this oppression are rooted in our history and represent the deeply held values of hierarchical power, materialism, and individualism.

Students learn powerful lessons from the “hidden curriculum,” the school’s structural elements and the sum total of human experience in schools (Purpel, 1989; Purpel and Giroux, 1987). In addition to the message of obeying authority without question, students are also taught that individual success is what matters. What else can students conclude when teachers tell them to “mind their own business” and “keep to yourself” as a matter of course in learning? Many of the structures of traditional schooling—individual seat work, competitive grading, discouragement of collaboration, training in docility—foster an ethic of individual success over collective learning and of obedience over empowerment.

Pratte (1988) maintained that we cannot bring about civic education for a truly democratic society “by isolating it as a subject, by teaching it through lecture or recitation, or by separating it from the social life of the school and community” (p. 17). Bellah and his colleagues (1992) concurred, stating that “learning is never the result of the efforts of isolated, competitive individuals alone” (p. 172).

A third reason, perhaps underlying both of the others presented here, is lack of a consensus opinion on the nature of a “good citizen.” Purpel (1989) noted that social/cultural demands and limited economic resources have distracted us from a commitment to the values underlying our common heritage: love, justice, equality, and community. Bellah and his colleagues (1985) concluded their interviews of over 200 U.S. citizens with the following observation,

It seemed particularly hard for those we interviewed to articulate a language of citizenship based neither on the metaphor of extended kinship nor on a conflict of interests. It was difficult for them to conceive of a common good or a public interest that recognizes economic, social, and cultural differences between people but sees them all as parts of a single society on which they all depend. (pp. 191–92)

Current civic education efforts in our nation’s schools reflect this uncertainty about the nature of citizenship, although most civic educational practices
support the individualistic values so prevalent in almost all American public
schools. Bellah and his coauthors (1992) noted the inadequacy of this approach,
even for individualistic goals.

The idea of an education that simply gives individuals the methods and
skills they need to get ahead in the world is almost certainly inadequate,
even as "job preparation," in an advanced technical economy, which
requires morally and socially sensitive people capable of responsible
interaction. It is even more inadequate for preparing citizens for active
participation in a complex world. (p. 170)

While we cannot ignore the need for individual freedom and rights in our
society, neither can we dismiss the need for active public engagement in a
healthy democracy. In order to create a more balanced view of citizenship and
ultimately, civic education, I turn now to exploring in greater depth the nature
of the predominant individualistic perspective. This view is informed by the
political theory of liberalism (not to be confused with the liberal/conservative
dichotomy). The ideas of liberalism will be contrasted with another political
perspective with a long legacy in American history, that of participatory-republican-
ism.

In this discussion, I will highlight the benefits and shortcomings of both
perspectives. It would be unproductive to promote one approach to the exclu-
sion of the other. Walzer (1990) noted that political theory will always debate
the advantages of individual choice versus communal bonds and Neal (1990)
astutely pointed out that both perspectives have legitimate critiques of the
other. Green (1990) advocated that rather than treating liberalism as "the
enemy," we should respect the need to guarantee rights, but work toward bring-
ing about a more connected society.

WHAT IS THE LIBERAL VIEW
OF THE DEMOCRATIC CITIZEN?

The term "liberal" is derived from the word "liberty." The ideas associated
with liberalism originated during the Protestant Reformation and were further
developed during the rise of market economies and free enterprise and eight-
teenth century Enlightenment. Thinkers such as John Locke argued that the pri-
mary purpose of government is the protection of individual rights and that the
authority of the government, which should be limited to the protection of those
rights, is based on the consent of the people (Center for Civic Education, 1994).

At the center of the liberal democratic view stands the individual. The
goal in life is the peaceful enjoyment of private independence. Historically, lib-
eral have taken as their foundation a theory of individualism and natural rights; their approach separates private and public life in an effort to guarantee the secure existence and free activity of the individual (Walzer, 1984). Many believe that the principal characteristic of a democratic society is that the government leaves its citizens free to pursue their own interests and ambitions (Battistoni, 1985).

What matters most from the liberal perspective is not the ends chosen but our capacity to choose that which is meaningful to us as individuals (Sandel, 1984). The common good in the liberal perspective is the protection of individual freedom and the practices of independence and pursuit of private interests. Smith (1989) argues that “a liberal polity should be united . . . by a shared political and social purpose: to promote ways of life that advance liberty for all” (p. 290).

In the liberal view, the “good citizen” is one who has adopted certain rules and standards of public behavior that are useful in forming the orderly accommodation of private wishes in the public realm (Battistoni, 1985). Thus, “good citizens” will participate in politics to the extent necessary to ensure their private interests, for example, by voting for leaders who will represent them and by occasionally running for public office themselves.

From a liberal perspective, civic education should consist of the 3 Rs and certain rules and standards of public behavior. Liberalism envisions the function of education to facilitate individuals’ coexistence as distinct persons, rather than giving students the knowledge, skills, and values to participate actively in public life. Most of the virtues to be learned in life are personal or social, not political. Thus, civic education involving practical democratic experience in the school or community would generally be viewed as undesirable or unnecessary from the liberal perspective.

WHAT ARE SOME PROBLEMS WITH LIBERALISM?

Walzer (1984) has labeled liberalism “a world of walls” (p. 315). Yet the goal set by liberalism, each person within his or her own circle, is literally unattainable. We live in a social world; the rights we enjoy exist within the framework of the many ongoing institutions of our lives. Walzer (1984) maintained that “We aim, or we should aim, not at the freedom of the solitary individual but at what can best be called institutional integrity. Individuals should be free, indeed, in all sorts of ways, but we don’t set them free by separating them from their fellows” (p. 325).

A free state in a complex society such as ours is one that is in the hands of its citizens. Aristotle noted long ago that the civic bond is the one that orders and governs all the others. It is the bond that creates the public structure within
which personal and private social relationships can flourish. Bellah and his colleagues (1985) interviewed hundreds of U.S. citizens about their private and public lives and came to the conclusion that a quest for purely private fulfillment is illusory and often ends up empty; private fulfillment and public involvement are likely intricately connected.

While the liberal citizen sees the private sphere of life as the source of fulfillment, others maintain that people have an inherent need for political life (Barber, 1984; Battistoni, 1985; Bellah et al., 1985; Lappe and DuBois, 1994; Sandel, 1984; Walzer, 1984). Personal relationships and accomplishments are not enough in their view. Mutual recognition and communion are necessary to the complete development of the self. It is in association with others—in relationships characterized by mutual respect, justice, fairness, benevolence, truthfulness, caring about others, and fellowship—that human nature most fully expresses itself (Pratte, 1988).

In sum, the liberal vision alone is unsuited to our modern democracy. It does not present an accurate view of the individual, separate from the institutions with which he or she is integrally connected. Nor does it recognize the individuals' need for public life or the positive aspirations of the individual as one who seeks to contribute to the lives of others rather than just to protect oneself from them. Finally, as Sandel (1984) argued, the liberal view is not morally or practically self-sufficient. In order to guarantee the individual rights so central to the liberal citizen's view, we need a majority who are active participants in democratic decision making. We turn now to another view of citizenship, described as civic or participatory republicanism in the political science literature and recast in recent works as "strong democracy" (Barber, 1984) or "living democracy" (Lappe and DuBois, 1994).

WHAT IS THE PARTICIPATORY REPUBLICAN VIEW OF THE DEMOCRATIC CITIZEN?

The founders of American democracy were influenced by the republican ideas of both ancient Greece and Rome. Classical republicanism stressed two primary ideas: first, that the primary purpose of government is to promote the common good of the whole society and second, that civic virtue is a necessary characteristic of citizens. Civic virtue requires individuals to place the common good above private interest (Center for Civic Education, 1994).

The participatory-republican perspective (Battistoni, 1985) combines elements of the republican and participatory traditions in the history of political thought. Although these two traditions have their differences, there are points at which they have converged in history. Battistoni (1985) noted that modern participatory democrats have called upon aspects of the republican tradition,
such as the concern for public virtue and the primacy of civic life, to inform their vision of politics and republican thinkers have at times promoted greater citizen participation in political decision making. These traditions are combined here, in part, because they may offer the theoretical foundation for solutions to contemporary problems in civic education (Battistoni, 1985).

In the participatory-republican perspective, the recognition of conflicting interests of the liberal tradition is just one element; the other is the belief that we also have common bonds and mutual interests as members of a political community. “A democratic community sees its members as equal partners who mutually contend and reciprocally persuade each other in the process of public deliberation, decision, and action” (Battistoni, 1985, p. 58). In the participatory-republican view one must be a good citizen to be a good person. The process of mutual dialogue and collective action develops individual character so that private interests are transformed into public issues and personalities expand to balance private with public concerns.

In recent years, a few scholars have reconceptualized and relabeled the participatory-republican perspective in an attempt to breathe new life into our faltering democracy. One of these scholars, Benjamin Barber (1984) at Rutgers University, has proposed the notion of “strong democracy.” Strong democracy is defined by Barber (1984) as the resolution of conflict “through a participatory process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation and the creation of a political community capable of transforming dependent, private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests, into public goods” (p. 132).

Transformation is at the heart of strong democracy. Barber does not ignore the presence of personal interest and ensuing conflict in public life. Instead, he argues that strong democracy aspires to transform conflict through inventiveness and discovery. Thus, human nature is envisioned as both benign and malevolent, both cooperative and antagonistic.

The hallmarks of strong democracy include activity, commitment, obligation, service, common deliberation, common decision, and common work. Strong democracy is self-government by citizens, not just representative government in the name of citizens. “In strong democratic politics, participation is a way of defining the self, just as citizenship is a way of living” (Barber, 1984: 4). Thus, the “good” citizen in a strong democracy participates directly in the democratic process, both locally and nationally, and is transformed in the process of doing so.

Lappe and DuBois (1994) proposed a similar type of participatory republicanism they labeled “living democracy.” Their proposal for active citizenship involves reconceptualizing the notions of public life, self-interest, and power. Although many Americans view public life as an unnecessary and time consuming involvement, Lappe and DuBois assert that we each have a public life that often enhances our private lives. Every day, at work, school, in civic and
social groups, our behavior shapes the public world. Like other proponents of the participatory-republican perspective, the authors believe that public life fulfills a deep human need, to know that one’s life counts and makes a difference in the world. While in public life we often encounter conflict with others, Lappe and DuBois join Barber in the assertion that this conflict can be healthy and informative and can lead to new insights about ourselves and new solutions to community problems.

Rather than working in a self-sacrificial manner for the “common good,” Lappe and DuBois propose that lasting solutions depend upon meeting the needs of others along with our own needs. They maintain that this “relational self-interest” expands possibilities for many people at once while trying to serve others alone may defeat the goal of healthy communities. To effectively work for common goals involves the exercise of power in the public sphere.

WHAT ARE SOME PROBLEMS WITH PARTICIPATORY REPUBLICANISM?

While these contemporary models of citizenship hold potential for revitalizing civic education, they cannot absolve participatory republicanism from its share of criticism. One of the most common critiques of this perspective is that its proponents are vague or unrealistic about what needs to happen to bring about a society informed by communal values (Burtt, 1993; Neal, 1990; Wolfe, 1986). Neal (1990) asserted that advocates of a participatory citizenry should be able to explain and justify an alternative vision of society that would guarantee individual freedom and rights.

One problem with this task is the large scale in which participatory decision-making would need to take place. While modern states can offer their citizens opportunities to engage citizens through referenda or reorganization of local government, the overwhelming cognitive complexity of modern government keeps them from subjecting the continuing exercise of state power to a truly democratic decision-making procedure (Dunn, 1986). Barber (1984) offered an ambitious agenda for local to national participation through technological means, local community meetings, national referenda and other “imaginative” ideas (Mansbridge, 1987). Yet to some critics, they seem implausible and idealistic (Burtt, 1993; Dunn, 1986; Wolfe, 1986), given the current state of society.

Burtt (1993) criticized Barber’s proposal on yet another count, that purely public virtue asks too great an abstraction from the self. Burtt’s views are more in line with Lappe and Dubois’ (1994) “relational self-interest.” Burtt argued that self-interest should not be seen as an obstacle to civic virtue, but rather as the source of individuals’ contributions to the public good. Perhaps then citizens
could be brought to civicly virtuous activity through reflection on matters of importance to them. Indeed, it is likely that liberalism prevails over participatory republicanism because individuals' interests for their own gains and interests predominate over concern for others.

While these are not the only criticisms of participatory republicanism, they are frequently cited and legitimate concerns. It seems obvious then that the optimal approach to civic education will draw on both liberalism and participatory republicanism in a way that promotes their strengths and cautiously addresses their limitations. The vision of civic education presented here affirms both individual rights and communal vision. Some of the ideas presented here—notably those that deal with participatory skills and direct involvement in schools and communities—may seem more consistent with a participatory republican perspective. Others, such as basic knowledge of our governmental system and attitudes supportive of individual rights, may appear to be aligned with the liberal view.

Together these and other civic education practices have the potential to enhance the development of citizens who can both work for their own individual interests and promote the common good in society as a whole. While there will always be some conflict between these two pursuits, Lappe and DuBois (1994) and Burtt (1993) pointed out that these goals do not have to stand in opposition. Through expanding rather than subduing personal interest, citizens can engage each other in the public sphere and work toward both mutual goals and personal satisfaction.

Spotlight on Views of the Democratic Citizen
Summarize both the liberal and the participatory-republican views of the citizen in a paragraph on each. Which view do you personally feel is most important? Why? What experiences in your life thus far have led you to think as you do?

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF DEMOCRATIC CIVIC EDUCATION?

Plato believed that if people intellectually understood the good, they would be good. Aristotle, on the other hand, felt that people would become good only if they engaged in the practice of just and virtuous actions. Many advocates of civic education assert that we should heed both of these sages' advice, lest we risk action without conviction or reasoning that does not carry over into action (Lickona, 1991). The broad recommendations here for civic education focus on (1) intellectual understanding, (2) skills for participation, (3) civic attitudes, and (4) direct participation in schools and communities.
All democratic citizens should have a foundation of basic knowledge about civics. Pratte (1988) emphasized the importance of understanding our democratic processes and institutions. Battistoni (1985) maintained that approaching civic education through an integrated curriculum is vital; students should study the conflict and content in U.S. history, for example, as well as explore civic concepts in lessons on natural communities in science. Barber (1984) also recommended formal instruction in civics, history, and citizenship.

Yet all of these educators, and many others, assert that knowledge alone will not suffice in efforts to develop active citizens. A second essential component of civic education concerns the skills citizens need to participate effectively in public life. Battistoni (1985) recommended communication and rhetorical skills; critical thinking; verbal reasoning; skills in persuasion, bargaining, and compromise; and the ability to recognize common interests. This list is very similar to Barber's (1984) skills needed for strong democratic talk.

Yet even if we were to teach American young people all of these skills and the knowledge of our democratic institutions and history, there is still the matter of engendering the will to act in the public sphere. Thus, a third critical component of civic education is the development of civic attitudes. Civic attitudes taught in schools should affirm both individual rights and the common good. One of the goals of civic education should be to reduce ethnocentrism; citizens should develop tolerance if not appreciation for diversity and sincere empathy for others. Pratte (1988) described the development of a civic disposition as

a willingness to act, in behalf of the public good while being attentive to and considerate of the feelings, needs, and attitudes of others. Civic virtue has an internal landscape reflected in the obligation or duty to be fair to others, to show kindness and tact, and above all to render agreeable service to the community. (p. 17)

He further asserted that the self-development of citizens in identity, self-esteem, and autonomy should be balanced with "the particular conditions of democracy via the ethical obligations of concern, care for others, tolerance, civility, humaneness, esteem, respect, compassion, benevolence, fairness, and integrity" (Pratte, 1988, p. 64). Lappe and DuBois (1994) maintained that while it is important to develop these qualities, citizens should not do so in a sacrificial manner. Rather, they should balance individual and public concerns through "relational self-interest."

The knowledge, skills, and attitudes discussed here comprise the "what" of civic education. The last critical dimension is concerned with the "how." As mentioned previously, the means through which civic education is presented to
students is probably a more powerful teacher than any formally taught facts or principles. Thus, educating students for democratic participation must entail their active involvement in the life of the school and community.

Pratte (1988) asserted that students don’t need isolated civics lessons, they need opportunities to practice civic behaviors. Dewey advocated building community in public schooling through students’ participation in the planning process and their active contributions to doing good works for the school (Beninga, 1991). Citing research supporting participatory modes in the classroom, Battistoni (1985) recommended a student-centered pedagogy that stresses knowledge through self-discovery and the incitement of interest in one’s learning along with the overall context of group learning.

While students can practice democracy within the school community, educators contend that involvement in the community can reap rich rewards for civic learning as well (Barber, 1984, 1992; Battistoni, 1985; Lappe and DuBois, 1994; Pratte, 1988). When students work on complex community problems, they have the potential to learn not only the skills and knowledge necessary for civic action, but also democratic attitudes—the will to participate and the ability to care for others.

Battistoni (1985) noted that educators who have initiated programs involving students in community projects, community research, social service organizations, and government agencies have observed a number of positive benefits. When students work on common goals and have others depend on their actions, they learn the cognitive and affective knowledge of democratic citizenship better than through classroom instruction alone. Classroom discussion about broad political and social issues is also enhanced by participation. Student participation in the community can also provide important benefits for the community: services provided, solutions found, and an improved image of the role of youth in society.

While youth can have many varied and positive experiences working in the community, civic education can be most effective when it includes experiential learning of the kind offered by community service (Barber, 1992). The remainder of this chapter focuses on the role of service-learning as a key component in civic education for a participatory democracy.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE-LEARNING IN CIVIC EDUCATION?

Community service-learning integrates school or community-based service projects with academic skills and content and provides opportunities for structured reflection on the service experience (Cairn and Kielsmeier, 1991).
Service-learning projects address a diversity of environmental and social issues. For example, elementary students might design and build a bird sanctuary in conjunction with science units on birds and trees. As part of the social studies curriculum, older students might publish a history of their community, drawing on oral testimonies from senior citizens and documents from the local historical society. Other service-learning projects involve cross-age tutoring, environmental clean-up efforts, and meeting the needs of the homeless or hungry. Effective service-learning activities address a need or problem in the community or school and at the same time incorporate curriculum-based learning objectives for students. (See chapter 2 for a further description of the essential components of quality service-learning.)

Barber (1992) maintained that service is central to the civics curriculum in order for students to realize the obligations engendered in democratic citizenship. "Service is something we owe to ourselves or to that part of ourselves that is embedded in the civic community. It assumes that our rights and liberties are not acquired for free; that unless we assume the responsibilities of citizens, we will not be able to preserve the liberties they entail" (Barber, 1992, p. 246).

Both Barber (1992) and Lappe and DuBois (1994) cautioned that service should not be seen as a form of charity or be completed in a self-sacrificial manner. Instead, citizens should work alongside those in need, recognizing our common purpose, and enabling those being served to become more empowered in the process. Service is not a matter of sacrificing private interests to moral virtue. "The language of citizenship suggests that self-interests are always embedded in communities of action and that in serving neighbors one also serves oneself. Self and community, private interest and public good, are necessarily linked" (Barber, 1992, p. 249).

Community service-learning has the potential to reveal that personal fulfillment and public contribution are not antithetical. Through carefully structured service-learning experiences, students can come to realize that individualism alone will lead to a vacuous life (Pratte, 1988) and that helping others in the community results in a great deal of personal satisfaction (Lappe and DuBois, 1994). Through civic service, students fulfill an obligation to the community through the outward expression of civic virtue aimed at promoting the public good (Pratte, 1988).

Community service-learning can bring together all four essential components of civic education: intellectual understanding, participation skills, civic attitudes and direct participation in schools and communities. Through working alongside others to address common concerns and problems, students have a purpose for learning about the history of our democratic institutions and the legacy of citizens' social action efforts. Participation skills and civic attitudes become more than topics for class discussion or items on a test; students learn
skills in collaboration and communication by practicing them in their service work. Service-learning provides students with a means for self-development as well as the development of civic attitudes such as concern, care for others, tolerance, respect, compassion, fairness, and integrity. Finally, community service-learning is one form of direct and active participation in the school and community. Clearly, service-learning has the potential to be an effective means for civic education in a democratic society.

Will we reach this potential in the practice of service-learning in our nation’s schools? If we do, it will only be through working together—as educators, community members, parents, and students—with common purposes, open minds, enthusiastic energy, and caring hearts. In the early years of America’s history, civic education was the province not only of the school but of the whole community. Perhaps through service-learning, we can return to the roots of our heritage, teaching our youth the ways of democratic citizenship, and, in the process, creating healthy communities and a vibrant national life.