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On Civil Education:
Beginning A Dialogue

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The "End of Work" As We Know It

In his recent book, *The End of Work*, economist and political activist Jeremy Rifkin describes the dramatic shift the global economy is undergoing as we enter the next century. Rifkin documents the move from a mass worker economy to a high technology global economy that thrives on the innovations of labor-saving technology and corporate downsizing. "In the agricultural, manufacturing, and service sectors," he writes, "machines are quickly replacing human labor and promise an economy of near automated production by the mid-decades of the twenty-first century." Rifkin argues that government is also offering fewer employment opportunities, and that the rising high-tech industries are likely to increase the job pool only for a relatively small number of elite workers (1995).

With these changes underway, Rifkin pins his hopes on the nonprofit sector. He writes, "Today, with the formal economy less able to provide permanent jobs for the millions of Americans in search of work and with the government retreating from its traditional role of employer of last resort, the nation's nonprofit sector--the Third Sector--may be the best hope for creating new kinds of employment for the millions of displaced workers cast off by corporate and government reengineering." He argues that this demands a renewed commitment to civic engagement through the various volunteer, nonprofit organizations that comprise the "civil society" (1997).

The benefits of bolstering the civil society are far-reaching. The various local and national nonprofit organizations that comprise much of the civil society create "social capital" that advances the interests of the larger community. "Community activity is substantially different from market activity, in which exchanges between people are always commercial in nature and based on the supposition that the well-being of the rest of society is best secured by each individual pursuing his or her own material self-interest," Rifkin says. "Unlike market activity, community service stems from an understanding of the interconnectedness of all of life. It is first and foremost a social exchange, although often with economic consequences to both the beneficiary and benefactor" (1997).

The Third Sector is facing increasing demands to provide social services in the wake of diminishing government programs. At the same time, people are spending fewer hours volunteering their time because of the increased need to take on part-time jobs (Rifkin 1996). Public Agenda reports that only 34 percent of Americans say they spend their time with volunteer organizations as more women enter the labor force and workers spend more time commuting. Perhaps more striking, the study found that most people have simply lost faith in their ability to have a positive impact in their community (Farkas et al. 1997). Rifkin argues that the civil society will have to become a more organized social force in every community.

Rifkin's ideas have sparked a dialogue among nonprofit leaders and educators on how education can build a lifelong commitment among citizens to the civil society. These talks have evolved into an ambitious partnership that seeks to redirect public education towards the practice of "civil education." This involves educators and community members taking active steps to help young people develop the civic knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active engagement in the civil society and democratic life.

One need not look far for reasons to rebuild community and create a new mission for American education. Today, communities suffer from increased crime, low voter turnout, racial and ethnic tensions, disengagement from the political process, and heightened disillusionment with government. We are faced with a widening economic gap between rich and poor that threatens to undermine our democracy. Research on the nation's youth is particularly alarming, with a recent poll of college freshmen finding student interest in political life at its lowest level in 32 years and commitment to community action lagging (Sax et al. 1997).

The Partnering Initiative on Education and Civil Society, a new coalition of educators and community-based organizations, views civil education as a means to reignite active citizenship and rebuild a sense of community by weaving a seamless web between communities and schools. Rifkin writes, "Advancing the goals of a civil education requires that educators look to the nonprofit sector, in addition to the marketplace and government, to inform curriculum development, pedagogy, and the organization of schooling" (1997). Components of a civil education include service learning, character education, civic education, and democratic schooling. Current efforts in these areas are scattered and fragmented. The Partnering Initiative's goal is to develop a coordinated campaign to bring the elements of civil education together into a coherent whole, integrating civil education into the very heart of the school experience to transform schools and communities.

Democracy and the Civil Society

We are witnessing a resurgence of interest in the civil society as a vital component of democracy. Rifkin argues that "the effectiveness of our democratic form of government [has] always depended on the vitality of America's civil sector." He distinguishes the civil society, or the Third Sector, from the marketplace (the First Sector) and government (the Second Sector). "The Third Sector is the bonding force, the social glue that unites the diverse interests of the American people into a cohesive social identity" (1997). While definitions of civil society vary, Rifkin points to various nonprofit and voluntary organizations--schools, hospitals, social service organizations, religious organizations, social justice groups, environmental groups, libraries, museums, fraternal orders, and volunteer fire departments--as the lifeblood of this sector. Jean Bethke Elshtain, in her recent book *Democracy on Trial*, says that civil society is the "many forms of community and association that dot the landscape of a democratic culture. . . . In the associational enthusiasms of civil society, the democratic ethos and spirits of citizens are made manifest (1995).

The role the civil society has played in eastern Europe in helping to overthrow communist governments and fashion democratic societies has helped to rekindle a focus on the Third Sector in the United States. John Patrick, education professor and director of the Social Studies Development Center at Indiana University-Bloomington, argues that the central place of civil society in the global resurgence of democracies in the 1980s and 1990s "has brought this long-neglected idea back to the center of theoretical discourse and public life at the end of the twentieth century" (1997).

The linkage between the civil society and democracy is fundamental. Civil society organizations are "public guardians that empower citizens to take responsibility for their rights and hold public officials accountable to their constituents," Patrick says. "Through participation in organizational activities, members acquire knowledge, skills, and virtues of democratic citizenship." The roots of civil society run deep in the United States. Alexis de Tocqueville was among the first to note the vital role that civil society plays in this nation. Observing America in the 1830s, he writes:

> Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they found hospital, prisons, and schools. If it is proposed to inculcate some truths to foster some example, they form a society. Wherever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government of France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association. (Patrick 1997).

Political writer William Greider maintains that throughout the U.S. experiment in democracy, people have engaged in the political process in two ways: first, through a structured representative government; and second, through self-government by means of civic or neighborhood associations (1992) "Politics from above" includes the use of our judicial system and elected officials to ensure individual rights. "Politics from below" includes the diverse actions directed by community groups to influence change based on a shared interpretation of the common good. This dual approach to democracy has ensured proper balance between individual and community needs.

The trouble, Greider says, is that fewer people today are engaged through these democratic channels of the political process, that civic faith has declined. Greider maintains that behind the "formal shell" of self-government in this country exists "a systemic breakdown of the shared civic values we call democracy." Democracy, he says, is not a fixed way of life, but rather one with "correcting mechanisms" that help to define, shape, and guide its evolution (1992). The correcting mechanism, however, cannot work unless civic faith is restored, he argues.

Evidence of depleted "civic faith" can be seen in many places, such as declining voter turnout

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and the increasing public resentment and distrust of government. It also is revealed in the decline of civil society activity some political philosophers have noted in this nation. Robert Putnam, director of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University, argues that while "America still outranks many other countries in the degree of our community involvement and social trust . . . . American social capital in the form of civic associations has been significantly eroded over the last generation." To cite just a few examples, Putnam notes declining participation in labor unions, parent-teacher associations, civic and fraternal organizations. While he says some types of civic organizations have emerged that have enjoyed increasing membership, such as national environmental organizations, foundations, and even support groups, he concludes that overall the civil society appears to be diminishing (1995).

Restoring civic faith is critical to strengthening democracy, and it must begin at the community level. Greider argues that the hope for democracy is found in the vibrant arena where citizens exhibit civic behavior and act upon their interpretation of the common good. It is this arena where self-government flourishes and where people are able to engage in decisions beyond individual needs, he suggests (1992). This arena must be a dominant force in order to restore democracy by elevating the role of the public in the process of change. Democratic citizens must be exposed to the challenges faced by their community early on, and quickly learn the skills necessary to overcome these challenges.

Greider suggests that democratic solutions will emerge "only from the trial-and-error of active citizens who learn for themselves how to do politics." He says this requires of people "the patience to accumulate social understandings that they have tested against reality and then to pass on their knowledge freely to others. A democratic conversation will require a spirit of mutual respect--people conversing critically with one another in an atmosphere of honesty and shared regard" (Greider 1992). Elshtain adds that the road to reviving the civil society "is a return to a more thoroughly social understanding that rights are always transitive, always involve us with others, cannot stand alone, and cannot come close to exhausting who and what we are." While stressing that government plays a crucial role in democracy, she warns, "the citizen of a democratic civil society understands that government cannot substitute for concrete moral obligations; it can either deplete or nourish them" (1995).

Civil Education: The Road to Strengthening Democratic Civil Society

Education's role in elevating the civil society and strengthening U.S. democracy is essential, and holds tremendous opportunity. In the following sections, we will attempt to outline several critical components of civil education: service learning, character education, civic education, and democratic schooling. Some schools and communities offer powerful examples of one or another component of civil education, and these provide valuable lessons. A handful of special places have gone even further in integrating several or all aspects of this approach. While there is no simple blueprint, we believe the most powerful form of civil education finds ways to infuse all of these elements throughout the school curriculum and the school and community climate.

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Service Learning: The Community as Classroom

Service learning is a fundamental component of civil education, perhaps the most obvious since it so directly makes the link between schools and communities. Service learning is about finding meaningful ways to integrate community service activities into the curriculum. Examples include building a nature trail, volunteering at a soup kitchen, reading to the elderly or younger students, and helping with a voter registration drive. Carol Kinsley and Kate MacPherson attempt to define service learning in their book, *Enriching the Curriculum Through Service Learning*. They write, "It began as a way to provide young people with a sense of civic and social responsibility and support them in their growth and development. It has mushroomed into a process and methodology that helps connect young people to their communities and inspires teachers to bring school-reform initiatives to life" (1995).

Rutgers University Professor Benjamin Barber argues that service is intimately tied to the democratic notion of citizenship. "Service to the neighborhood and to the nation are not the gift of altruists but a duty of free men and women whose freedom is itself wholly dependent on the assumption of political responsibilities." He adds, "When sited in a learning environment, the service idea promotes an understanding of how self and community, private interest and public good, are necessarily linked" (1992).

Service learning also helps young people take knowledge from the abstract and hypothetical realm and bring it to life. This can greatly enhance the learning experience. "Humans are more social learners than they are abstract learners," says Barry Scheckley, education professor at the University of Connecticut. "We actually think much better in context than we do using abstractions. . . . That's one of the things service learning does well. It sets up learning as a social process" (Stack 1997). By making courses more relevant to the lives of students, students invest more in their core subjects. Recent research from Brandeis University on "well-designed" service learning programs documents improved academic performance in participants. In addition, the research indicates that student participants were more committed to service, more aware of the needs of their community, and more personally and socially responsible (1997).

Participation in service learning is growing rapidly. According to an April 1997 study from the National Center for Education Statistics, of the more than 8,000 students surveyed, more than half reported that they had participated in some type of community service activity during the year. Of the students who regularly participated in such activities, more than half responded that the activities were integrated into the curriculum (1997). Data from the Education Commission of the States finds that only one state, Maryland, requires community service to graduate, but that ten others--including Minnesota, Oregon, and Pennsylvania-- allow districts to award credit for service. And at least ten more states have taken measures to "encourage" student service, such as Hawaii's inclusion of service learning in the curriculum framework for middle school students and a new law in Kentucky that includes among its goals the development of students' ability to "demonstrate effectiveness in community service." Some school systems are also taking action. For instance, officials from Chicago Public Schools announced in 1997 that 60 hours of

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Community service will be required for high school students to graduate (Washburn and Martinez 1997).

The trouble is that not all community service efforts can be considered "service learning." Simply requiring young people to participate in service in no way ensures a meaningful connection to community or an understanding of why such efforts are important. In fact, even programs touted as "service learning" often fall short. James and Pamela Toole, co-directors of the Compass Institute, have found through several years of staff development that "the connections between service projects and formal learner outcomes are often underdeveloped." They explain, "If students are going to learn from service, it will not be instant or effortless. They will be required to organize and construct their own understanding from the rich content embedded within these experiences" (Toole and Toole 1995).

What does an effective approach to service learning look like? Clearly there is no one clear path, but a comprehensive approach seeks to find ways to build service activities into various aspects of the curriculum, as well as including non-curricular school-wide components. An analysis of comprehensive service learning at the Harmony School in Bloomington, Ind., identifies three critical characteristics: "1) an ongoing effort to place the service education program within a social context; 2) the establishment of a service education school culture; and 3) the existence of student-initiated service education projects" (Goodman et al. 1994). Harmony's focus is on developing an "ethos of community values" to counter the overwhelming emphasis on individualism in society.

Rob Shumer, director of the National Service Learning Clearinghouse at the University of Minnesota, offers some insights based on existing research concerning what makes an effective program. Shumer says that both school-based and community-based programs require strong leadership from individuals and strong administrative support. Administrators, he says, can play a key role in providing time for planning and staff development to supporting flexible schedules and adequate time for community collaboration. Not surprisingly, other research suggests that the more the activity is connected to the "core curriculum, the greater the chance for effective and high quality academic learning." Shumer says research suggests that exemplary programs "integrate evaluation processes throughout the entire effort." He also stresses the importance of collaboration among service learning partners. "Teachers, community members, students, and other personnel do not learn to do something as complex as service learning in a day, a week, or a year. It involves regular, ongoing meetings to constantly refine the process and work out kinks in the program" (1997).

Shumer says that student responsibility is also an important element. "The more responsibility given to students to do things that have real consequences, the more likely they are to take the tasks seriously and learn effectively." Research suggests that student involvement in selecting the service experiences, as well as student engagement in developing curriculum and evaluations, are important to good learning and long-term effect. At the same time, Shumer stresses that adequate supervision is vital to ensure that the "nature of the work is productive and educational" (1997).

Character Education: Developing a Moral Compass
for Democratic Life

Clearly, there is overlap between service learning and character education. Many teachers and principals who practice character education view service learning as simply one tool (though a powerful one) in their arsenal. On the other hand, service learning advocates can point to the broader democratic skills, knowledge, and experience that service helps to instill, and might view character development as a component of this approach. The reality may be that such a dichotomy exists more at the policy level than the practical level in schools. Perhaps a useful way to view the interrelation is as overlapping arenas that share some vital links but also have distinctive strengths that bolster the need to have both in place.

Developing young people's character is vital to building a more vibrant, engaged democracy. The "habits of the heart," as Alexis de Tocqueville called them 150 years ago, provide a moral compass for the knowledge and skills young people attain. A school principal sends the following note to teachers at the beginning of each year:

> Dear Teacher:
> I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness. Gas chambers built by *learned* engineers. Children poisoned by *educated* physicians. Infants killed by *trained* nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by *high school* and *college* graduates.
> So I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane (Shapiro 1995).

Developing a meaningful approach to character education involves reassessing all aspects of school life. Character is not simply "taught" to children through lectures in the classroom. Young people learn about character in a variety of ways, both curricular and non-curricular. In fact, a school that seeks to embed character in its essence rethinks all relations in school. Thomas Lickona, director of the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (respect and responsibility) at the State University of New York at Cortland, argues that a comprehensive approach to character education focuses on the "total moral life of the school" by capitalizing on the many opportunities to develop good character. "From this perspective, the way adults treat students, the ways students treat adults, the ways students are permitted to treat each other, the way the administration treats staff and parents, the way sports are conducted, conflicts resolved, and grades given--all these send moral messages and affect character" (1997). This requires deliberate consideration and actions from school leadership. Schools need to dedicate time and energy to exploring and reevaluating the school climate to determine what lessons are explicitly and implicitly taught to children, and how this can be improved.

One of the challenges in building character education into a larger approach to civil education is

determining what type of character traits schools and communities want to promote. In other words, whose values do we teach? Amitai Etzioni, founder of the Communitarian Network at George Washington University, argues that this question need not paralyze us. "The challenge 'Whose values will you teach?' can be readily answered by starting with the myriad values we all share. . . . Nobody considers it moral to abuse children, rape, steal (not to mention commit murder), be disrespectful of others, discriminate, and so on" (1993). Etzioni boils his approach to character education down to two fundamental skills: empathy and self-discipline.

Critics suggest that discerning core values is not a task to be underestimated. Education writer Alfie Kohn argues, "[I]t is entirely appropriate to ask which values a character education program is attempting to foster. It is quite different to promote loyalty and obedience as opposed to, say, 'empathy and skepticism.'" (1997). David Purpel, an education professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, worries that much of the character education rhetoric is not about engaged democratic participation. "My sense is that the values taught in the schools are very much in the line of Puritan traditions of obedience, hierarchy, and hard work, values which overlap nicely with the requirements of an economic system that values a compliant and industrious work force, and a social system that demands stability and order" (1997). In developing an approach to civil education, educators and community members need to think carefully about finding the shared, core values that will promote a stronger vision of active, participatory democracy.

Diane Berreth and Sheldon Berman, two leaders in the character education movement, have articulated a series of principles for creating a "moral school community" where character education can flourish. To name just a few of these principles, they mention:
--the school community collaboratively develops and celebrates core moral values;
--adults exemplify positive moral values in their work with one another and with students;
--the school functions as the hub of the neighborhood community;
--students are involved in decision making within their classroom and school; and
--school communities provide opportunities for service--within and outside the school.
"At heart, character education is helping young people develop a sense of social responsibility--a personal investment in the well-being of others and in the future of the planet," Berreth and Berman say (1997).

Expanding the Civics Curriculum

There is no shortage of information on the low levels of political knowledge the majority of U.S. citizens possess. This is especially true of young people. The *Civics Report Card*, issued in 1990 based on the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress in civics, found that only half of high school seniors reached a level of competence described as "understanding specific government structures and functions." Further, the report says that only 6 percent of students assessed achieved a "broader and more detailed knowledge of the various institutions of government" (Anderson et al. 1990). Other data finds that not only student knowledge, but also student interest in political knowledge is declining (Sax et al. 1997).

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While civil education is about much more than obtaining knowledge in the classroom, clearly this cannot be neglected in efforts to create a more sustainable democracy. While much research has indicated that civics and American government courses have little or no impact on political knowledge, new research from political scientists Richard Niemi and Jane Junn finds that such courses may have some effect after all. They write, "The most important message to come out of our study of the political knowledge of high school seniors is that the school civics curriculum does indeed enhance what and how much they know about American government and politics." They argue that how civics is taught in the classroom should be reexamined, with more emphasis given to "politics in the real world," especially as political lessons are revealed in current events. In addition, they argue that civics courses should be structured to "put less emphasis on rote learning and more on analytical and critical understanding of problems of democracy" (Niemi and Junn 1998).

But from the perspective of civil education, a fundamental change needed in the content of school curricula is to take more seriously teaching the role of the civil society in democratic life. "Strangely enough, we rarely examine this central aspect of the American character and experience in our classrooms," according to Rifkin. "Instead, our children learn about the virtues of the marketplace and the checks and balances built into our representative form of government. The Third Sector, if it is mentioned at all, is usually glossed over as a footnote to the American experience. . . (1997). John Patrick argues that the concept of civil society belongs in the core of the school curriculum. "If our students know, analyze, and appraise democracy in their country or elsewhere, then they must know the concept of civil society, assess the activities of civil societies organizations, and connect their knowledge of civil society to other core concepts in the theory and practice of democracy" (1997).

There are some encouraging indications that the current inattention to civil society in school curriculums could be changing. Patrick points out that the voluntary national standards for civics and government developed in 1994 by the Center for Civic Education include some attention to the civil society. In addition, several items about civil society will appear in the newly-developed framework for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress. "These items on civil society in the civics national assessment will send a strong signal to textbook publishers, curricular guide developers, teachers, and parents of students about the importance of civil society in education for democracy," Patrick says (1997).

Making Schools More Democratic

A final link in the civil education chain is making schools themselves more democratic places. This can mean many things. Linda Darling-Hammond, an education professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, argues that the U.S. education system remains profoundly undemocratic."Unfortunately, many schools and classrooms, especially those serving less-advantaged students and students in lower tracks, are distinctly nondemocratic in their approaches to teaching and learning: they are characterized by a noninvolving autocratic

atmosphere, passive activities, and few opportunities to discuss real questions, work cooperatively, and engage in decision making," she says. "Organized for conformity and compliance at the expense of intellectual habits of mind, these classrooms undermine the development of skills needed for enlightened and responsible citizenship." Tracking and unresponsive approaches to teaching create unequal classes of citizens, according to Darling-Hammond (1997). In *Democratic Schools*, Michael Apple and James Beane say democratic schools should have a "democratic curriculum" that emphasizes access to a wide range of information, allowing a variety of viewpoints to be heard (1995). John Patrick argues that a fundamental component to a democratic education is ensuring that schools create an equivalent of the "open society" where there is a free exchange of ideas.

A democratic school also seeks ways to give an authentic voice to faculty, parents, community members, *and* students. In some respects, this may be the toughest component of civil education, since it begins to fundamentally shift the power structure of education in the United States. This element is infused across character, civic, and service education. Parents and community members are given voice through helping to shape service learning programs. Students too can play a role in designing, arranging, and assessing service experiences. The same is true for character education. Proponents insist that the process of developing shared values and determining how best to educate for character is necessarily a community-wide effort. And this can involve students as well. For instance, many character education programs involve students working with the teacher to develop a classroom constitution to govern acceptable behavior. (*See next section for more discussion of community involvement*).

Active student involvement in decision making in the classroom and beyond is a potentially powerful component of civil education. This does not mean student-run schools. Such an approach is itself fundamentally undemocratic. But many educators have found that giving students a voice in their schooling is a powerful form of education for democratic life. Carl Glickman, education professor and head of the League of Professional Schools at the University of Georgia, says, "until we understand that democracy is the best way to learn to make individual and collective choices--and until we put that understanding into practice in our classrooms, schools, and communities--then the word *democracy* will continue to be more a rhetorical device that obscures true lack of belief in and commitment to it." Glickman argues that democratic learning in schools is "a set of purposeful activities, always building toward increasing student activity, choice, participation, connection, and contribution." While stressing that this does not mean giving students free license, that teachers still play a critical role, he says democratic learning aims for students--individually and collectively--to take on greater responsibility for their own learning (1998).

Tony Arenella, director of the Scarsdale Alternative High School in New York, argues that giving students a voice in their school lives is the best way to prepare them for engaged democratic living. "To teach kids democracy, you need to let them practice democracy," he says. "You really need to turn over important decisions to a democratic vote. The skills develop out of that: listening skills, debating skills, compromise skills." Finding ways to give students a voice in

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their schools can take many paths. Some democratic schools hold all-school meetings where students and faculty deliberate over issues of concern to the entire school community. Many have ongoing advisory groups where a teacher and students meet regularly to work on school and personal issues. Some have developed deliberative bodies or fairness committees that include student representatives (Sperry and Lehman 1997). Of course, such approaches must be developed carefully and age-appropriately.

For most young people, school is one of the first shared public spaces they encounter. The lessons students learn from the "hidden curriculum"--the implicit lessons derived from how students are treated in all aspects of their schooling-- are surely as powerful as the academic component in the formal curriculum. Sheldon Berman says "classrooms and schools are microsocieties that teach children about the way the world works and about their place in it. Authoritarian classrooms and schools nurture authoritarian values. Democratic classrooms nurture democratic values." According to Berman, "Nurturing social responsibility in young people means creating environments where children can live the challenges of a democratic society and, from an early age, learn about our civic culture" (1997).

The Role of Communities in Civil Education

Civil education is tied to a notion of school reform contingent on mobilizing local communities into action. This is vital but difficult work. Dave Mathews, president of the Kettering Foundation, maintains that the public no longer believes in the idea that public schools can benefit the entire community. The public is dissatisfied with its schools, and average citizens no longer communicate their concerns to school officials or try to impact school policy, he says. Furthermore, community concerns are not being articulated to schools because in many parts of the country there is not a strong enough sense of shared community to even identify and communicate collective needs (Mathews 1996).

Historically, communities have driven the mandate for public education. According to Mathews' critique, communities are now largely disconnected from the process of directing school goals and policies. Although he attributes some of this to the professionalism of schools, Mathews is also concerned with the inability of communities to operate as a public and articulate collective needs (Mathews 1996).

There is some evidence, however, that communities are starting to work together for change in education. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform earlier this year unveiled the findings from an 18-month study on public engagement--efforts to bring parents, educators, business and community leaders together as partners to reshape their local schools. The Annenberg report argues that "the idea of public engagement is being discussed, developed, and put into practice on a significant scale." Key characteristics for effective public engagement in education include involving citizens from all segments of the community, focusing on changes that will improve the life of the local community, and building broad consensus (Annenberg Institute 1998). By returning the school to the public, overall support for public education will increase. Too often, it

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is the alienation that many parents and community members feel from their school systems that prompts them to seek alternatives.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) offer a powerful structure for rebuilding community and honing the civic skills necessary to develop a public. According to Mathews, a public can be formed when members of a community come together and connect with each other around an issue or problem. Essential to agreeing upon the direction of change and inventing solutions is the understanding of different perspectives through continuous interaction among diverse people in a community (Mathews 1996). Historically, CBOs have provided an environment for people to come together to identify problems, understand different perspectives, and agree upon the direction of change.

CBOs play an especially powerful role in the civil education context through their many efforts in "youth development." This work holds great promise for restoring democratic communities by honing civic skills critical in the development of a public (Carnegie 1992). CBOs are helping to build an infrastructure of young people who can come to play a leading role in re-engaging communities. Many CBOs, and specifically youth organizations, provide enriching and rewarding learning experiences, usually referred to as "informal education," that emphasize civic skills like the ability to communicate, make decisions, solve problems, make plans, and set goals (Carnegie 1992).

Youth organizations typically place young adults in small groups with a mentor, or community leader. Programs emphasize cooperative learning, peer leadership, and education through hands-on experience. Youth programs also model a democratic environment. For example, community-based learning programs tend not to label students as advanced or slow in terms of their academic achievement, and emphasize the social, physical, emotional, and moral development of the individual. As CBOs begin to emphasize their role in the informal education of young people, and as schools increasingly adopt reforms consistent with youth organizations' traditions and practice, the two may reach a common ground that meets the overall needs of youth (Carnegie 1992).

The Carnegie study emphasizes ensuring a key role for young people in helping to design and develop service activities. "Community programs should involve young people in decision making on all levels, from choices about program activities to organizational governance." Bringing a refreshing approach to societal problems, many CBOs are now leading youth in building neighborhood parks for younger children, planting trees, cleaning waterways, providing child care, and working to ban tuna fishing to ensure the safety of dolphins.(Carnegie 1992). Informal education can also tackle societal issues instead of replicating them. Many youth programs incorporate specific strategies to assist youth in overcoming negative effects of racism, prejudice, and discrimination. One approach is for mentors and community leaders to act as role models of fairness and nondiscrimination. Moreover, "explicit programs in racism and oppression awareness can help youth develop the communication skills in a multicultural context," the Carnegie report says. Ultimately, CBOs help youth learn how to use their

community as a resource for the benefit of all members of the community. Through youth development programs, young people can learn to reflect on the underpinnings of problems they face in their communities and respond through coordinated action (Carnegie 1992).

The effort to promote civil education should be directed by schools and communities, mutually reinforcing each other in a collaborative effort. The Partnering Initiative involves many CBOs, and hopes that through civil education, students can learn to build community and continue to define and express the mandate for public education based on common needs. Ultimately, the Partnering Initiative works in both spheres--the community and the school. As part of school reform, it reinforces the importance of community life and the process of change.

Civil Education--Towards a Synthesis

While the current political climate in the United States often seems to discourage participation, and disengagement of citizens appears rampant, a new mandate is building momentum to restore civic faith by engaging young people in the very process of democracy. School and community educators are beginning to lend a hand in helping students understand that they can and should improve their communities and their democratic society. Through civil education, students can build the skills, knowledge, and character traits necessary for engaging in community life.

The traditional approach to democratic education, simply focusing on lessons in civics and American history, clearly is insufficient. Students become disengaged from collective action when conventional politics is taught. A study conducted by the Kettering Foundation reveals that the basic civics education does not offer an effective vehicle for students to learn how to act. Since much of the traditional civics curriculum does not apply to their own lives, students learn quickly to disengage from the political system altogether (Mathews 1997).

Civil education embraces an active, participatory form of democracy. There is a grave danger if the role of citizens is relegated to the strictly political realm. According to American philosopher John Dewey, "Democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living" (1966). Civil education promises students a rich, cross-cutting experience of this broader notion of democratic life. Service learning gives students entrance into the public sphere and their first experience with the practice of a democratic way of living that embraces collective action for the common good. Service also makes the direct link between students and community-based organizations, a foundation of the civil society. Character education seeks to develop the "habits of the heart" that build a lifelong commitment to the civil society. Through building a climate of caring in schools, making service and reflection a regular component of schooling, and finding deliberate ways to discuss and practice good character, students will develop a set of shared values and dispositions that promote social responsibility. Civic education helps to foster the political tools and knowledge for engaged democratic life.

And a more democratic approach to schooling itself teaches students that their voice matters, empowering students to build skills and habits in active participation. Democratic schools

reinforce a sense of community, as students work with their peers and their adult counterparts to take responsibility for fostering a collective good in the school environment. This empowerment, coupled with the empowerment students gain through service experiences, builds an arsenal of attitudes, skills, and understanding to improve their lives and their communities. Ultimately, this is a step towards restoring civic faith and renewing a commitment to collective responsibility, as our young citizens learn how to function as a "correcting mechanism" to revitalize our nation and make it more democratic.

Civil education is rooted in the notion that schools and communities together can help young people understand the vital importance of the civil society and foster the qualities essential for engaged democratic life. Civil education holds the promise of transforming society by seizing on the spirit and enthusiasm of the nation's young people and helping to direct it towards the worthy goals of rebuilding community, strengthening ties among citizens, and striving together for the common good.

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