
Many Seek To Encourage Civic Participation in N.C. and the U.S.

While Argentina and Chile make a strong impression with their efforts to increase citizen participation and civic education, many organizations in the U.S. and North Carolina continue to encourage civic activities as well. These include the National Civic League in Denver, Colo., the Center for Civic Education in Calabasas, Calif., the National Council for the Social Studies in Washington, D.C., and the Center for Participatory Change in Asheville, N.C. All have developed and piloted programs similar to those operating in Argentina and Chile, according to Debra Henzey, executive director of the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium, a program of the Institute of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Many of these programs focus on promoting youth involvement, which is viewed as planting the seeds for future civic involvement. The National Civic League, for example, offers small grants to cities and counties that more effectively involve young people in meaningful activities, says Henzey. Closer to home in North Carolina, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation has had a long-standing commitment to civic education and involvement, as have the Institute of Government, the N.C. City-County Management Association, Students Against Violence Everywhere, and the Mediation Network.

These North Carolina efforts led to the founding of the Civic Education Consortium, the first organization in the nation doing such work at the state level. With funding from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, the consortium has helped fund civic participation efforts across the state. It also is helping students in more than 20 high schools inventory public concerns of their classmates and develop ways to engage them in service-learning projects to address those concerns.

However, Henzey notes that the consortium's efforts have not generated strong support from public officials, education leaders, or the business community. "Thus, our ability to reach large numbers of people is limited." Another important point, says

Henzey, is that too many civic engagement initiatives in North Carolina are led by government officials rather than the broader public. "This means the parameters of these programs are determined by people already in power and often do not open the doors to those who have the least power."

A growing arena for encouraging civic participation in the United States is the service-learning movement. According to a 1999 survey by the U.S. Department of Education, 64 percent of all public schools and 83 percent of all public high schools organize some form of community service for their students. Research has shown significant results from this movement. The positive findings include development of civic and social responsibility and citizenship skills, enhanced ability to make a positive social contribution, and even stronger academic performance.

An important component of service learning is that students not only serve by addressing a social problem such as hunger in a nation that produces a surplus of food, but learn about the social context in which the social problem has developed.¹ Thus, students would not merely serve meals in a soup kitchen, but study the broader issues of poverty and hunger. The movement also carries a sense that the poor not merely receive services but be actively engaged in the process that meets their needs with the hope that they can maintain their dignity and move toward self-sufficiency where possible.

However, the strongest beneficiaries may be the students who participate. A well-run program can impart the lesson that their efforts can make a difference. There may be no greater motivator to citizen participation and public service.

—Mike McLaughlin

FOOTNOTE

¹ For a list of principles of good practice in combining service and learning, see Jane Kendall and Associates, *Combining Service and Learning: A Resource Book for Community and Public Service, Volume I*, National Society for Internships and Experiential Education, Raleigh, N.C., 1990, p. 40.

⁹ Fundación Ciudad, *Uso Sostenible de la Ribera Metropolitana: Propuestas Consensuadas 1998-2000-2001*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, pp. 5 ff.

¹⁰ See Tom Mather, "Civic Journalism: Strengthening the Media's Ties with the Public," *North Carolina Insight*, Vol. 15, No. 4/Vol. 16, No. 1 (March 1995), N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, Raleigh, North Carolina, pp. 70-87.

¹¹ As quoted in "A Boy Scout's Attitude," *Apertura* magazine, special edition on the social, or third sector, October 1999, Buenos Aires, Argentina, p. 26 (English) and p. 97 Spanish.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Alicia Cytrynblum, "Mass Circulation Solidarity," *Apertura*, note 11 above, p. 18 (English) and p. 85 (Spanish).

¹⁴ Both Argentina and the United States also have academic journals focusing on the nonprofit sector, such as *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, and *Voluntas*.

¹⁵ As reported in Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, *Manual on Public Participation in Environmental Decisionmaking*, 1994, p. 48.

¹⁶ North Carolina Session Law 2001-363 (House Bill 195), now codified as N.C.G.S. 115C-81(g)(1).

¹⁷ Kathleen Kennedy Manzo, "28-Nation Study: Students' Grasp of Civics Is Mixed," *Education Week*, (Washington, D.C., March 21, 2001), pp. 1 and 14.

¹⁸ *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, U.S. Department of Education, National Commission on Excellence in Education, Washington, D.C., April 1983.

¹⁹ As quoted in "A Step That Led the Way," *Apertura* magazine (Buenos Aires, Argentina: October 1999), p. 17, note 11 above.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ "Approach (perspective) to learn Ethics and Civic (Citizenship) Formation (Education): seven questions," from the Ethics and Citizen Formation Program, Ministry of Education, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

²² From "Service-Learning in Argentina," School and Community Program, Ministry of Education, Buenos Aires, Argentina, pp. 1-2.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "Confidence in Different Institutions in the Resolution of Social Problems, Gallup Poll for the Foro del Sector Social, September 1998, as reprinted in the *Guide for Undertaking a Service-Learning Project*, Part 1, National School and Community Program, Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 12. For the 2001 poll, see Marita Carballo, "The Social Sector: An Opportunity for Growth—The Argentine Case," Gallup Argentina, poll sample of all Argentinians over 17 years old, p. 3.

²⁵ As reported in Diane Ravitch, "Now Is the Time To Teach Democracy," *Education Week*, (Washington, D.C.: October 17, 2001), p. 48.

²⁶ Mate is the national drink of Argentina, a sort of bitter tea.

²⁷ Both Pereira quotes as reported in Marysol Antón, "Puente de afecto que enlaza generaciones," in *La Nación's* special Solidarity Schools supplement (Buenos Aires, Argentina: March 18, 2001), p. 5.

²⁸ This story is reported in "Service-Learning in Argentina," note 22 above, pp. 3-5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁰ Gabriela Mistral, "Chile," in Marjorie Agosin, editor, *A Gabriela Mistral Reader*, White Pine Press (Fredonia, NY: 1977), pp. 173 and 175.

³¹ Interview with Benito Baranda, Paulo Egenau, and Veronica Monroy at Hogar de Cristo's offices on July 5, 2001, Santiago, Chile. Also see Judith Salinas and Giorgio Solimano, "Chilean Health NGOs," in Charles A. Reilly, editor, *New Paths to Democratic Development in Latin America*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. (Boulder, CO: 1995), pp. 153-154.

³² "Index of Perception of Corruption of 2001," press release issued June 27, 2001, by Transparency International, based in Berlin and London.

³³ *Annual Report 2000*, Transparency International, Berlin, Germany, p. 1.

³⁴ Minister Secretary General of the Government's Office, Government of Chile, *Plan for Strengthening Civil Society*, Santiago, Chile, May 2, 2001, p. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.



A demonstration in favor of "pluralism of information" in front of the Presidential Palace in Santiago, Chile

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