

NEW RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR MEASURING EFFECTS OF K-12 CIVIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

CIRCLE has released two new Working Papers containing assessment tools for measuring the effects of civic education programs. The first Working Paper (#48), "Developing Indicators and Measures of Civic Outcomes for Elementary School Students," contains two sets of instruments designed to be used at the elementary school level. The measures include a student survey of civic knowledge, skills and attitudes and a set of corresponding grade level observation checklists of student skills and behaviors. The tools were created by Bernadette Chi of the East Bay Conservation Corps, JoAnn Jastrzab of Abt Associates Inc., and Alan Melchoir of the Center for Youth and Communities at the Heller School, Brandeis University. They were advised by a national group of civic education leaders including Joseph Kahne, Constance Flanagan, Judith Torney-Purta and Mary McFarland. The tools can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site at www.civicyouth.org.

According to Bernadette Chi, the lead author of CIRCLE Working Paper #48, "While content standards and assessments readily exist to articulate the academic and artistic development of students, youth civic development, especially at the elementary level, has been under-conceptualized. We found that there was a real need for a more robust, comprehensive developmental framework for citizenship education that begins with younger ages and addresses civic skills and dispositions to the same degree as civic knowledge."

The second Working Paper (#49), entitled "Assessing School Citizenship Education Climate: Implications for the Social Studies," focuses on the middle- and upper-grade levels. It presents the *School Citizenship Education Climate Assessment*—a self-assessment tool developed to help schools evaluate their citizenship education strategies and policies—and examines its implications for social studies classes. The tool was created for the Education Commission of the States (ECS) by Gary Homana, Carolyn Barber and Judith Torney-Purta of the University of Maryland and is available at <http://www.ecs.org/qna>. The ECS Web site also contains a set of items for assessing outcomes of civic education in the areas of knowledge, skills, and dispositions across the elementary, middle, and high school grades.

THE CHALLENGE OF MEASURING CIVIC EDUCATION AT THE ELEMENTARY GRADE LEVEL

Despite the recent growth of standardized testing within schools, there are very few assessment tools available for measuring the effects of civic education at the elementary school level. According to Bernadette Chi, the lead author of CIRCLE Working Paper #48, "While content standards and assessments readily exist to articulate the academic and artistic development of students, youth civic development, especially at the elementary level, has been under-conceptualized. We found that there was a real need for a more robust, comprehensive developmental framework for citizenship education that begins with younger ages and addresses civic skills and dispositions to the same degree as civic knowledge."

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In developing their assessment tools, Chi and her co-authors came across several measurement challenges. First, in elementary school, reading levels vary drastically. The authors developed a student survey that is appropriate for grades three and above. To help teachers of younger students with more varied reading abilities (Kindergarten through second grade) the authors also developed a student observation checklist. Chi cautions, however, that while the checklist can help teachers to document skills and behaviors that are relevant to civic development, there is more work to be done to verify the validity and reliability of the observation checklists.

Despite the measurement challenges, Chi and her colleagues created a set of tested, reliable measures of civic education for use at the elementary school level.

Additionally, the authors faced a conceptual challenge when developing their measurement tools. Chi notes, "In elementary grades, there is a tendency to award 'good citizenship' grades based on obedience to classroom and school rules and demonstration of good work habits (neat handwriting, homework completion, etc.). Yet other conceptions of citizenship and civic engagement also exist and ultimately may be deemed desirable, such as active participation in one's community or a principled position from which individuals question unjust rules, laws or circumstances."

Despite the measurement challenges, Chi and her colleagues created a set of tested, reliable measures of civic education for use at the elementary school level. Staff and faculty at the East Bay Conservation Corps Charter School in Oakland, California were key to the development of the conceptual framework and instruments. The instruments were then tested for reliability across a wide variety of elementary schools in a national pilot. Both assessment tools—the student survey of civic knowledge, skills and attitudes and the set of corresponding grade level observation checklists of student skills and behaviors—can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site at www.civicyouth.org.

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CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects that we support have practical implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 and is funded predominantly by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Pew Charitable Trusts. It is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy.

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FOCUSING ON SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM CLIMATE

The second CIRCLE Working Paper (#49), "Assessing School Citizenship Education Climate: Implications for the Social Studies," explains the development of another assessment tool, the *School Citizenship Education Climate Assessment*. This tool was designed to be used by teachers and school administrators, mainly at the middle- and upper-grade levels. According to the lead author, Gary Homana, "Among other things, we wanted to create a self-assessment tool to help members of the school community focus on the relevant characteristics of a positive school and classroom climate in order to better promote good citizenship education. Looking at the bigger picture, we also wanted to develop a tool to help school administrators create workable strategies to increase and sustain policies and practices that enhance students' knowledge, skills and dispositions relating to competent citizenship."

In CIRCLE Working Paper #49, the researchers explain that the *School Citizenship Education Climate Assessment* was derived from a variety of research fields including civic education, educational psychology and service-learning. Based on the literature, the authors created a theoretical framework for the assessment consisting of seven characteristics of school climate that they believe are critical to civic education (see the text box, below, for a list of the seven characteristics). The assessment


contains questions relating to each of the seven characteristics. For example, a question about characteristic #7 (Engagement in and Learning about the Community) is as follows:

The statements that follow relate to your school's support for service-learning. (Answer Choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree Strongly, Agree, I Don't Know/ Does Not Apply)

- 1) *This school formally recognizes service-learning as part of its mission and/or vision.*
- 2) *This school has written policies designed to support service-learning.*
- 3) *Service-learning is incorporated into the school's curriculum guidelines.*
- 4) *Service-learning at this school is linked to content standards.*

In addition to the assessment tool and the CIRCLE Working Paper, the authors provide a short narrative report explaining how to use the assessment tool (both the assessment tool and accompanying narrative report can be found at <http://www.ecs.org/qna>).

Homana states, "We tried to make the assessment tool as user-friendly as possible. We provide instructions on how to properly use the assessment, including a description of how to compute composite scale scores, recommendations of who should complete the survey, and suggestions for using assessment results."

CIRCLE Working Paper #49 concludes with suggestions for future research and can be downloaded from www.civicyouth.org. 

SEVEN KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

1. **Official recognition and community acceptance of the civic purpose of education that is communicated to all teachers, students and administrators**
2. **Meaningful learning of civic-related knowledge that builds on and enhances academic and participation skills**
3. **Cooperation and collaboration in approaching civic related learning and problem-solving**
4. **Mutual trust and positive interactions among diverse students, faculty and administrators**
5. **Students' input in planning and skills in participatory problem-solving that is valued**
6. **Deliberation and dialogue about issues that are thoughtful and respectful**
7. **Engagement within the school and commitment to learn about and interact with the broader community**

Source: CIRCLE Working Paper (#49) "Assessing School Citizenship Education Climate: Implications for the Social Studies"