The Roots of Engaged Citizenship: How Youth Build Character and Civic Skills

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The opinions expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the values of the John Templeton Foundation.
• **Civic Engagement and Character Development**

• **Promoting Civic Values and Behaviors**

• **Resources**

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**What is civic engagement?**
POLL

What is the very first thing you think of when you hear the term civic?

Civic engagement is comprised of behaviors, values, attitudes, and knowledge related to political and social issues.

Civic engagement is rooted in young people’s day-to-day lived experiences.

Today’s Focus:  Volunteering
Environmental Behavior
Following the News
Social Responsibility Values

(Ammi, 2013; Sherrod & Louckhardt, 2009; Youniss et al., 2002)
Why study this in children and adolescents?
Why do we care about civic engagement?

- Healthier individuals
- Fewer problem behaviors
- Higher school achievement
- Establish good habits for civic life in later adulthood
- Stronger communities
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Where do character strengths fit?

Defining character strengths:
• Positive individual attributes/skills
• Vary across individuals
• Arise through experiences
How do we promote civic values and behaviors?
Strategies

- Discuss Civic Issues
- Provide Opportunities
- Model Civic Behaviors
- Build Supportive Relationships

Mixed Methods

- Participants:
  - 2,475 youth, 865 parents
  - 8 to 19-year olds
  - 56% Female
  - 51% White
  - 30% Hispanic
  - 10% Black
  - 9% Asian

Diverse geographic
Youth civic engagement is enhanced when socialization agents such as teachers and parents discuss:

- Current events
- Problems facing their community
- Injustice

**POLL**

Who talks to kids more about politics/current events: parents or teachers?
### Parents Discuss

**Best not to get involved in political issues**

- 2.7
- 2.8
- 2.9
- 3.0
- 3.1

**Protests never accomplish anything**

- 2.8
- 2.9
- 3.0
- 3.1

**People in the community should try to help themselves**

- 3.0
- 3.1
- 3.2

**Note.** Parent data. Percent who agree or strongly agree.
STRATEGY 1 | DISCUSS Civic Issues

- Finding the right time
- Choosing the right words
- Being open to youths’ opinions

STRATEGY 2 | PROVIDE Opportunities

Youth engagement in organized activities

- Involved Youth
- Civic Engagement
- Character Development

?
When you spend time in activities outside of normal school hours, how often are you...

**Civic Experiences**
- Making important changes in your community?
- Learning about political or social issues?
- Volunteering to help others?

**Personal Growth Experiences**
- Learning about yourself and what is important to you?
- Learning new skills that are useful outside the activity?
- Doing something that you are passionate about and that gives you joy and energy?
• Quality matters
• Inject the quality
• Provide diverse opportunities
Modeling is when youth emulate the behaviors that adults are doing.

- **23%** Parents volunteer
- **56%** Parents vote
- **31%** Parents follow the news
- **28%** Parents actively improve the neighborhood
To Effectively Model Civic Behavior:

**Volunteer with your child**

**How to find volunteer opportunities?**
- Local organizations
- Pick a project that matters to your family!
- Check out Generation On
- Be spontaneous!
To Effectively Model Civic Behavior:

Capitalize on the little moments

“My momma, she's helped people at her work...she stood up to her work...her boss was treating them really bad.”

POLL

Why don't some kids emulate their parents' civic behaviors?
Supportive relationships are **NECESSARY but INSUFFICIENT** for fostering civic engagement.
HIGH SUPPORT from PARENTS and TEACHERS

LOW across other three strategies

LOW levels of Civic Engagement

Supportive relationships enhance the effectiveness of other strategies
**BACKGROUND**

**DATA**

**APPLICATION**

**STRATEGY 4: BUILD Supportive Relationships**

- Volunteering
- Social Responsibility Values
- Following the News
- Environmental Behaviors

Parents’ Modeling

Parents’ Support
Parenting and Environmental Behaviors

- Low Modeling, Low Support
- Low Modeling, High Support
- High Modeling, Low Support
- High Modeling, High Support

Note. Full response scale ranges from 1 to 5.

**STRATEGY 4** BUILD Supportive Relationships

- Visit parentfurther.com
- Take the quizzes
- Get personalized feedback and strategies
How do these strategies work together?

4 STRATEGIES
Work Together & are Broadly Relevant

- DISCUSS Civic Issues
- PROVIDE Opportunities
- MODEL Civic Behaviors
- BUILD Supportive Relationships
Where can you learn more?
Roots of Engaged Citizenship Project

www.civicroots.org

The ROOTS OF ENGAGED CITIZENSHIP Project

Questions?