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# Developing Civic Literacy and Efficacy: Insights Gleaned Through the Implementation of Project Citizen

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# Developing Civic Literacy and Efficacy

## Insights Gleaned Through the Implementation of Project Citizen

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Concern exists regarding the state of civic education and civic involvement among youth in the United States (Bedolla, 2010; Branson, 1999; Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2004; Carnegie Corporation and Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE], 2003; Carnegie Corporation, 2011; Gibson, 2001; Goehring, Kurtz, & Rosenthal, 2000; Hahn, 2008; Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Pasek, Feldman, Romer, & Jamieson, 2007; Richardson, 2003; Vontz & Nixon, 1999). While schools were historically intended as a means for students to receive the civic education necessary to support the democracy our country was founded upon, civic education has received declining attention in the American classroom and civic participation is at an all-time low (Carnegie Corporation, 2011). Although there are places where the necessary civic education has managed to survive and even thrive, this unfortunately is not commonplace. Priority in the form of instructional minutes and funding is lacking, and the instructional approaches used are not providing the meaningful opportunities to apply knowledge gained, which research has shown is critical to ensure future civic engagement (Carnegie Corporation, 2011; Goehring et al., 2000). The young are our future, and the future of our democracy is in their hands. As such, civic education needs to prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and desire to participate successfully in the democratic process.

Programs such as Project Citizen have been shown to successfully develop civic knowledge and skills and encourage the development of civic literacy and efficacy (Vontz, Metcalf, & Patrick, 2000). However, Project Citizen and programs like it are not currently employed widely enough to serve all students. Given these challenges, the purposes of this study were to provide analysis of the Project Citizen program components and identify which were most impactful to the growth of civic literacy and efficacy. This was done from a quantitative and qualitative perspective with the quantitative approach measuring growth within the program components, and the qualitative approach giving voice to student beliefs about how the program influenced their feelings of civic literacy and efficacy. Taken together, this information could help inform classroom teachers as they make decisions about which teaching strategies and activities provide the most impact in the face of time restrictions and lack of access to resources, such as a preprepared curriculum like Project Citizen (Liou, 2004).

### **Purposes of Study**

As stated previously, the study intended to inform teacher practice through the evaluation of Project Citizen at a program component level. In addition, this study documented student feelings about which activities had the greatest impact on their feelings of civic efficacy. Finally, this study would add to the body of research on Project Citizen effectiveness as a whole. To realize these purposes, the following research questions were devised:

- In what ways does Project Citizen increase efficacious feelings for competent civic action?
- Which components of Project Citizen are most impactful in developing feelings of civic efficacy?
- How do students feel Project Citizen influences their feelings of civic literacy and civic efficacy?

### **Definitions**

*Civic literacy:* The knowledge and skills to participate effectively in civic life through knowing how to stay informed, understanding governmental processes, and knowing how to exercise the rights and obligations of citizenship at local, state, national, and global levels. Individuals also have an understanding of the local and global implications of civic decisions (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2009).

*Civic efficacy:* The perceived belief someone has about their ability to participate in civic life, assume citizenship responsibilities, and make a difference (Miller, 2009).

*Project Citizen:* A curricular program for middle, secondary, and postsecondary students, youth organizations, and adult groups that promotes competent and responsible participation in local and state government. The program helps participants learn how to monitor and influence public policy. In the process, they develop support for democratic values and principles, tolerance, and feelings of political efficacy (Center for Civic Education, 2012).

*Self-efficacy:* “People’s beliefs in their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance which exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1994, p.1).

## **Literature Review**

### **Civic Education: Then and Now**

Successful and lasting democracies are dependent on informed, engaged, and active citizenry (Atherton, 2000; Bedolla, 2010; Branson, 1999; Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2004; Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003; Carnegie Corporation, 2011; Gibson, 2001; Goehring et al., 2000; Hahn, 2008; Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Pasek et al., 2007; Richardson, 2003; Vontz & Nixon, 1999; Vontz & Patrick, 2000). The founders of the United States envisioned such a populace and recognized participation in such a society was not inherent, but rather required civic education (Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003). From the founding of the United States' educational system, schools have been entrusted with the crucial task of providing such an education (Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003; Carnegie

Civic education as it stands is not delivering on its intended purpose: preparing youth to be knowledgeable, productive, and engaged citizens (Carnegie Corporation, 2010).

Corporation, 2011). Civic literacy and efficacy were the intended products of civic education, but despite the historic interest in civic education, the emphasis placed on it has declined over the past 50 years (Carnegie Corporation, 2011).

Today's youth are not being adequately prepared for the challenges of citizenship, and even more alarming, they do not seem concerned by this (Carnegie Corporation, 2011). Despite the fact that

public education has been identified as the institution most likely to instill civic learning due to the number of young people it reaches, civic education as it stands is not delivering on its intended purpose: preparing youth to be knowledgeable, productive, and engaged citizens (Carnegie Corporation, 2010). Kahne and Westheimer (2003) suggested, "If schools are to fulfill their historic ideal of laying the foundation for a democratic society, these goals and curricular components must be given more attention" (p.35). Changes to the importance civic education is afforded by the Department of Education in the form of funding, instructional minutes, and what instruction is deemed important are steps in the right direction; but while the struggle at the state and federal levels continue, there are changes that can be made immediately to improve civic education. These changes can be addressed at the school and classroom level (Bedolla, 2010; Branson, 1999; Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2004; Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003; Carnegie Corporation, 2011; Gibson, 2001; Goehring et al., 2000; Hahn, 2008; Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Pasek et al., 2007; Richardson, 2003; Vontz, & Nixon, 1999).

### **Instructional Methodology**

The Carnegie Corporation and others have funded research to identify the most effective approaches for developing civic literacy and engagement (2011). Out of this research, debate arose over which approach is most effective. Should content knowledge, or a "back to basics" approach, be given priority, or should developing the 21st Century skill set necessary for active civic participation in today's world be the central focus (Carnegie Corporation, 2011, p. 26)? Others believe primary importance should be placed upon exposure to and experience with the civic process, ultimately developing the motivation and efficacy for sustained civic involvement (Carnegie Corporation, 2011; Goehring et al., 2000). Although the research showed agreement that all aspects of civic education are important and deserve attention, given the lack of time and funding for civic education, it is not surprising that the argument over how to prioritize what is taught and how has emerged.

Of all the discussion and debate, the most highly contested issue had to do with the use of civic discourse in the classroom (Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003; Carnegie Corporation, 2011). Levine suggested that some schools and districts are shying away from the discussion of controversial issues, which is a critical part of a rich civic education, because they are afraid that exploring such topics may cause discord (Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003; Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2004). Levine (2011) points out that civic education can be "divisive" because it addresses the kind of people we want our children to be (Carnegie Corporation, 2011). Others are concerned that middle-school-aged students may not be mentally

and emotionally ready to handle controversial issues, and that core content knowledge should be taught as a foundation which citizenship can be built upon at a later point (Vontz, & Nixon, 1999).

While contention exists about what should be taught, when it should be taught, and how it should be taught, no disparity exists regarding the belief that civic literacy needs to be given priority for the good of the country's future (Bedolla, 2010; Branson, 1999; Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2004; Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003; Carnegie Corporation, 2011; Gibson, 2001; Goehring et al., 2000; Hahn, 2008; Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Pasek et al., 2007; Richardson, 2003; Vontz, & Nixon, 1999).

Where schools and districts still emphasize the importance of civic education, too often focus is placed on the acquisition of factual knowledge at the expense of civic engagement and efficacy development (Goehring et al., 2000). Although we are living in a time of high stakes testing and accountability, where teaching methodology tends to be structured around state content standards and test preparation, we must endeavor to do more to see change (Bedolla, 2010; Branson, 1999; Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2004; Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003; Carnegie Corporation, 2011; Gibson, 2001; Goehring et al., 2000; Hahn, 2008; Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Pasek et al., 2007; Richardson, 2003; Vontz, & Nixon, 1999). To meet the goal of developing civic efficacy, which is necessary for students to act upon their knowledge and skills, teaching methods should be utilized that develop knowledge and skills in a manner that will also develop the efficacy to put knowledge and skills to work (Carnegie Corporation, 2011).

Taken together, the literature suggests that simple acquisition of factual knowledge may possibly translate into the competencies necessary for civic participation, however, knowledge alone is not indicative of ultimate efficacy development. In fact, knowledge can be acquired without developing efficacy if the individual does not believe that they themselves are capable of acting on what they know (Richardson, 2003; Shunk, 1987). To increase participation in civic life, students need to be prepared with instructional practices and content knowledge likely to develop the knowledge, skills, desire, and belief that they can successfully participate in the democratic process.

### **Efficacy**

Albert Bandura (1994), a leading mind in the field of efficacy, defines perceived self-efficacy as "people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce effects" (p.1). In relationship to civic involvement, his definition refers to the belief that one's civic action can produce an effect (Bandura, 1997). According to Shunk and Pajares (2002), "learners obtain information to appraise their self-efficacy from their actual performances, their vicarious experiences, the persuasions they receive from others, and their physiological reactions" (p. 2). The beliefs they develop about their capabilities influence the likelihood of future efforts. Efficacy ensures the motivation and perseverance to see goals through to fruition.

Of these types of learning experiences, mastery experiences are most likely to facilitate efficacy development. Mastery experiences focus on growth and emphasize what students have mastered. They also provide opportunities for students to work cooperatively and collaboratively, instead of competing against one another (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Competitive practices can

undermine students' feelings of competence, therefore lowering their efficacy. The National Council for Social Studies (1991) suggested instructional practices best suited to developing civic literacy and efficacy should be experiential in nature, provide opportunities for cooperative learning, engage students in controversial issues, be issue- or problem-based, and allow students to expand their learning beyond the classroom and into the community. Project Citizen has been shown to develop the skills and dispositions of an engaged efficacious citizen.

### **Project Citizen**

Project Citizen, a curricular program developed by the Center for Civic Education, was piloted in 12 states between 1995 and 1996 (Center for Civic Education, 2012; Tolo, 1998). This program was developed in an effort to promote educated, responsible, and active participation by middle school students in local and state government (Center for Civic Education, 2012). The program's goal was to develop support for democratic values and principles, tolerance, and feelings of political efficacy (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2004). More specifically, participants learn to monitor and influence public policy, develop the concrete skills necessary to become responsible participating citizens, develop effective communications skills, and develop a more positive self-concept and sense of efficacy relative to exercising the responsibilities of citizenship (Liou, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

Through a comprehensive review of the literature, it has become clear that competent and capable citizenship does not just happen; it must be nurtured and developed. Although the educational system was designed as a means to meet this goal, it has lost its way in recent decades (Carnegie Corporation, 2011). As a result, the youth of today are unprepared and unmotivated to fulfill their civic responsibilities (Carnegie Corporation, 2011).

To address this issue, changes to the priority afforded civic education along with instructional practices are needed (Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003). Instruction needs to go beyond teaching facts and utilize methods and activities focused on developing civic literacy and civic efficacy. While substantial research on the effectiveness of Project Citizen in its entirety exists, the need to assess the effectiveness of each curricular component is lacking, and has been recommended in previous research on Project Citizen (Liou, 2004).

This research can provide educators without access to prepackaged curriculum or limited time with which types of instruction prove most impactful. Additionally, this research allowed students an opportunity to voice their feelings about which aspects of Project Citizen they believed were most useful in developing their feelings of civic literacy and efficacy. This study sought to address this gap in research.

### **Methodology**

This research employed both quantitative and qualitative measures. Quantitative research methods were used to measure efficacy growth within the program components of Project Citizen, and qualitative measures were used to document student beliefs about how the program influenced their feelings of civic literacy and efficacy.

For the purposes of this study, success—or effectiveness—was measured by a posttest efficacy response of "I probably can" or "I definitely can."

### **Participants and Context**

The participants in this study included 12 middle school students (seven female and five male), three female freshman college mentors, one teacher/researcher, and two guest speakers involved in animal rescue and spay/neuter initiatives. Middle school students attended an urban elementary school in the California Central Valley. The college mentors were students at a local private college and participated in the project to earn hours required for a survey course. Project Citizen team members met a total of 17 times over four months between January 2012 and May 2012. The project was open to all interested 7th and 8th grade students attending the school who were able to commit the required time to participating in the project.

Prior to the initial comprehensive meeting, information was disseminated to all 7th and 8th grade students via a detailed handout, morning announcements, posters placed around campus, and visits to all 7th and 8th grade classrooms by the researcher to explain the program. At the January 16, 2012 comprehensive informational meeting, 22 students attended. Potential members received oral and written information on Project Citizen, previewed the curriculum, had questions answered, and if interested, were given a schedule of meeting times, consent/assent forms, and a photo release form. All documents were read aloud and explained by the researcher. Those who were interested, and able to participate and attend follow-up Wednesday meetings were directed to bring all completed forms to the next meeting. For this study, the researcher acted as the curriculum instructor and advisor for the project. The researcher had no prior experience implementing the program.

In this particular study, the program was offered as an extracurricular after-school program, but it should be understood Project Citizen is not simply an after-school program. Project Citizen is an approved curriculum in the state in which the study was done. In the case of this study, the project was implemented as an after-school program due to issues with administrative consent, ability to allow both 7th and 8th grade students the ability to participate, and instructor concerns with time as this was the first time the researcher had utilized the program.

### **Instrumentation**

**Efficacy scales.** Pretest and posttest efficacy scales were used to assess individual program component impact. The efficacy scale used to measure efficacy for various aspects of civic activity derived from the components of Project Citizen was taken from *Civic Measurement Models: Tapping Adolescents' Civic Engagement* (Flanagan, Syversten, & Stout (2007). The program components were assessed with an efficacy scale adapted from the aforementioned scale. The adaptation utilized the objectives of the program component as what would be measured on the aforementioned scale.

**Participant journals.** Students were asked to journal about their feelings and experiences during the project. Near the completion of the project, students were asked specifically to respond to the research questions to identify which activities they found most useful in developing their civic literacy, and cooperative and collaborative skills.

**Reflections of college assistants.** College assistants were asked to reflect on their experiences working with the students and their observations of the Project Citizen participants' growth in the areas of civic literacy, and activities the assistants felt encouraged the greatest amount of cooperative and collaborative behaviors amongst the participants. Observations of the assistants increase the validity of the qualitative research, by showing consistency between observers.

### Data Analysis

The data collected from this study were categorized for analysis as quantitative or qualitative. Pre- and posttest efficacy scales were analyzed quantitatively to identify growth (Flanagan et al., 2007). The Efficacious Feelings for Civic Action Scale was adapted from Flannagan, Syversten and Stout's Competence for Civic Action Scale. The only change made was the addition of the word *efficacy* to each of the nine measures. This change was made as this study was interested in not only if participants felt they could, but if they had the belief they would be successful in their endeavors. The component scales used the same measurement scale, but the measures were taken from each component's objectives and worded in reference to feelings of efficacy for that objective.

### Quantitative Measures

**Civic efficacy scale.** Pretests and posttests were completed with both the control group and the Project Citizen group. The data was considered by looking at growth within each group as well as between the groups. A control group was created for this efficacy scale to provide additional credibility for the findings related to the effectiveness of the program. For the purposes of this study, responses were ranked accordingly:

- "I probably can" and "I definitely can" were qualified as *showing efficacy* for the civic task.
- "Maybe I can," "I probably can't," and "I definitely can't" were qualified as *lacking efficacy* for the civic task.

Table 1

#### *Efficacious Feelings for Civic Action*

Measure	Pretest treatment group (showing efficacy)	Posttest treatment group (showing efficacy)	Change	Pretest control group (showing efficacy)	Posttest control group (showing efficacy)	Change
1. Efficacy to plan and address the problem	7	11	+4	7	6	-1

2. Efficacy to get other people to care about the problem	8	12	+4	6	5	-1
3. Efficacy to organize and run a meeting	8	9	+1	5	5	0
4. Efficacy to express views in front of a group of people	6	12	+6	4	5	+1
5. Efficacy to identify individuals or groups who could help you with the problem	7	12	+5	6	7	+1
6. Efficacy to write an opinion letter to a local newspaper	7	11	+4	5	6	+1
7. Efficacy to call someone on the phone whom you had never met before to get their help with the problem	7	12	+5	4	5	+1
8. Efficacy to contact an elected official about the problem	8	11	+3	4	4	0
9. Efficacy to organize a petition	7	11	+4	4	5	+1

**Component efficacy scale.** No control group was created or used for the components of Project Citizen as these components measured growth specific to the Project Citizen curriculum. These scales were quantitatively assessed to identify if the components increased specific feelings of efficacy for skill sets necessary for civic action, and if so, to what extent. Components were ranked based on the amount of growth, with the greatest amount of growth being identified as the most effective.

Table 2

*Component 1: Public Policy Efficacy*

	Pretest (showing efficacy)	Posttest (showing efficacy)	Growth
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1. Efficacy to define public policy	4	9	+5
2. Efficacy to compare and contrast public policy issues and community issues	5	7	+2
3. Efficacy to explain how government officials gain their authority	8	10	+2
4. Efficacy to explain how government officials use their authority to make public policy	8	10	+2
5. Efficacy to explain ways citizens participate in the public policy process	8	10	+2
<b>Total Growth</b>			<b>+2.6</b>

Table 3

*Component 2: Gathering Information Efficacy*

	Pretest (showing efficacy)	Posttest (showing efficacy)	Growth
1. Efficacy to know how and where to begin your research	8	12	+4
2. Efficacy to use a library to research your issue	6	10	+4
3. Efficacy to contact local individuals, professional individuals and groups, or news media to obtain	6	10	+4

information on an issue			
4. Efficacy to use multimedia methods to obtain information on an issue	6	12	+6
5. Efficacy to use interpersonal communication skills to obtain information about your issue from individuals, professionals, or organizations	6	10	+4
6. Efficacy to recognize quality information from questionable information	7	12	+5
<b>Total Growth</b>			<b>+4.5</b>

Table 4

*Component 3: Developing a Presentation Efficacy*

	Pretest (showing efficacy)	Posttest (showing efficacy)	Growth
1. Efficacy to collaborate with others to develop a project portfolio	10	12	+2
2. Efficacy to communicate your ideas clearly to others	10	12	+2
3. Efficacy to identify research items that best demonstrate your ideas to use for project board	11	11	0

4. Efficacy to organize your ideas in a visual display	10	12	+2
5. Efficacy to create an oral presentation to defend your project board and portfolio	10	12	+2
<b>Total Growth</b>			<b>+1.6</b>

Table 5

*Component 4: Presenting and Defending a Public Policy Efficacy*

	Pretest (showing efficacy)
1. Efficacy to collaborate with others to create a 4-minute oral presentation of your project	0
2. Efficacy to articulate your public policy to a panel of judges	0
3. Efficacy to defend statements of positions that may be questioned by judges	2
4. Efficacy to articulate what you learned throughout your experience with Project Citizen	2

*Note.* Due to time restraints, a posttest wasn't given.

**Qualitative Measures**

Student journals and mentor reflections were coded according to three prescribed themes pertaining to the research questions: (a) the development of efficacious feelings, (b) attainment of civic knowledge and skill sets, and (c) collaborative and cooperative tendencies. For both the quantitative and qualitative measures, the data was considered from a whole group perspective rather than on an individual basis.

**Student journals.** Sample responses are shown below color-coded.

Table 6

*21st Century Skills: Civic Literacy/Collaborative Skills (Student Journal Sample Responses)*

Expressions of efficacy	Civic knowledge and skill set	Collaborative skills
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<p>"I was able to do my part, so I feel like I can be successful with a goal."</p> <p>"Project Citizen is very important to our students, and also our community because it helps us see our standpoint and reflect on what we have learned."</p> <p>"It isn't just the government's responsibility but we equally need to take responsibility of 'we the people.' If 'we' want things changed for the better, than 'we' need to speak up. We can do this!"</p> <p>"Project Citizen improved my confidence...I know I can do what needs to be done."</p> <p>"As I go through these experiences, I have had more opportunities and abilities to think about the issue and plan what I can do."</p>	<p>"The activities I found most useful were when my Project Citizen group contacted people for help and information."</p> <p>"PC (Project Citizen) gave me more chances and opportunities to learn ways to deal with the problems of our community."</p> <p>"I learned a lot about helping the community by taking notes, doing research, interviewing people, and organizing the information."</p> <p>"Doing research was such a help to solving our issue. I know now how to do it better than before."</p> <p>"I know that everyone can influence policy if they know how government works and that there are many ways to do it."</p>	<p>"PC (Project Citizen) is a huge project. However, there is more than one person working on it, so we work in groups together to meet our common goal."</p> <p>"I could learn from others, hear their opinions. Working with others was helpful and fun."</p> <p>"I liked that I was able to help other people with their tasks."</p> <p>"I was able to produce interaction skills from it. I am proud to be part of Project Citizen. Working together made me feel comfortable. Everyone was working together as a team, which is the way I like to work."</p> <p>"It was helpful when my partner and I went online together and researched information that we needed."</p>
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**College assistant reflections.** Sample responses are shown below with their coding colors.

Table 7

*21st Century Skills: Civic Literacy/Collaborative Skills (College Assistant Reflection Sample Responses)*

Expressions of efficacy	Civic knowledge and skill set	Collaborative skills
<p>"I was amazed to see how the kids transformed from being somewhat unsure of themselves to individuals confident in their abilities."</p>	<p>"I think that the kids' interest in civic life has also grown as a result of knowing how to effectively make change."</p>	<p>"They communicate effectively with one another, work well together, and are determined to see their project through."</p>

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<p>"I remember when they were scared to make phone calls to shelters, and now they all quickly volunteer to contact authority figures in the Stockton community."</p>	<p>"Project Citizen gives them the chance to learn important skills when it comes to civic engagement. When it comes to civic literacy, I feel that the children in your class have gone above and beyond."</p>	<p>"The program also helped the students work well together because they had to each take a part of something leading to a common goal and meet that part of the project."</p>
<p>"They are now confident in themselves and their skills, and it is wonderful to see the kids so passionate about a cause."</p>	<p>"I was pleased to know that I helped them develop some of their newfound skills."</p>	<p>"The students used their time well. They always knew what the day's objectives were and helped each other to meet those objectives."</p>
<p>"I feel that all of them now have the ability to achieve the goals they set for themselves. Better yet, they know how to go about reaching those goals."</p>	<p>"This was the perfect platform for these students to gain some valuable skills."</p>	<p>"The students became very skilled at expressing their views to the other students, and even better, they became very skilled at listening to the others' views."</p>
<p>"They were ready to tackle any necessary part in conducting this project."</p>	<p>"They gained experience in different ways of approaching and researching a topic, through resources such as using the Internet, calling local shelters, and actually visiting the local animal shelter."</p>	<p>"The farther they got along in the project, the more effective their communication and collaboration. You couldn't complete a project like this without excellent collaborative skills."</p>
<p>"The students were really interested in their project and want to continue with the issue after the project is done."</p>	<p>"An important skill they learned was organization. In each of my visits, the students knew what needed to be done, and they were always in separate groups working on their parts of the project. It is an important lesson that I feel they have mastered pretty well."</p>	
<p>"The students know they are making a difference and that they can achieve what they set out to achieve."</p>		

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## Findings and Discussion

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- In what ways does Project Citizen increase efficacious feelings for competent civic action?
- Which components of Project Citizen are most impactful in developing feelings of civic efficacy?

- How do students feel Project Citizen influences their feelings of civic literacy and civic efficacy?

Both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data reinforced previous research findings: Project Citizen has a positive impact on the development of civic literacy and efficacy (Atherton, 2000; Liou, 2004; Root & Northup, 2007; Tolo, 1998; Vontz & Nixon, 1999; Vontz et al., 2000). On the Efficacious Feelings for Civic Action Scale, the treatment group had an average growth of four students moving from not indicating feelings of efficacy on the pretest to showing efficacy on the posttest. When comparing the growth from the pretest to post with that of the control group, the findings are especially notable. The control group had an increase of .34 points showing efficacy from the pretest to posttest, which reinforces experts' claims that current practices are not meeting the needs of developing civic literacy and efficacy (Carnegie Corporation, 2011). This finding supported the assertion that there was a need for improvement in curriculum and instruction methods in civic education (Carnegie Corporation, 2011).

While the quantitative data showed the significant impact of the program, the qualitative data was particularly impactful from a teacher/researcher perspective. The students' responses, the college mentors' responses, and observations of the researcher all showed the same thing: students improved their civic efficacy and collaborative skills, and gained the knowledge and skill sets necessary for effective participation in civic life. Students not only developed the knowledge and skills that contributed to their civic efficacy development, but they developed a passion for improving their community.

Students improved their civic efficacy and collaborative skills, and gained the knowledge and skill sets necessary for effective participation in civic life.

This research also explored which Project Citizen components and activities most contribute to the overall development of civic literacy and efficacy. This question was of particular interest from the standpoint that not all teachers are afforded the time or ability to implement curriculum outside of the core during the instructional day. From this perspective, knowing which activities had the greatest impact might allow for modifying the program to meet time constraints, and to help with integration of the components during other parts of the day. The component that had the most significant growth was Efficacy to Gather Information (component 2). This component included knowledge of how to begin research and how to evaluate the validity of information found, skills such as using a library or multimedia methods to gather research data, and communication skills in contacting individuals and groups to obtain information. The average number of students growing from a lack of efficacy in the pretest to expressing efficacy in the posttest was 4.5.

Project Citizen was shown to develop collaborative skills and self-efficacy among its participants as evidenced by the growth in each component of the program, and reinforced by the expressions of efficacy for collaboration. Project Citizen was notably effective in developing collaborative skills and efficacy among its participants. Many of the students' responses showed efficacious feelings for the particular task as well as the collaborative skills they developed while working on the task. The responses were mirrored in the quantitative data. These responses were also

repeated through the reflective notes from the students of building collaborative skills while working on research and collecting data. Efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to produce a desired result, is evidenced by the growth in each component of the curricular instruction. Additionally, each of the college assistants mentioned the effective collaboration among the project members and the growth in efficacy when it came to specific tasks, namely contacting people by phone and e-mail and working to research information on their topic.

### **Limitations of Research**

Several issues existed within this research, which impacted the strength of the findings. Among these were threats to external validity because of the small sample size. The final group only included 12 students, which causes difficulty with generalizing results to the greater public. The 12 members of Project Citizen were not chosen by random selection that could be compared to the greater population of students, but rather they chose to join the group as an extracurricular activity once they knew it would include a considerable commitment of time and energy. As this study looked at the development of efficacy—the belief in one's ability to successfully accomplish a goal—it is reasonable to assume that a greater number of students possessing leadership traits would be inclined to join an extracurricular activity of this nature, and therefore the individual is more relevant in developing said efficacy than the curriculum itself.

In addition to questions regarding the students who chose to participate in the program as a confounding variable, the prior experience of the teacher must also be considered. This was the first time the researcher/teacher used the curriculum, so the teacher's ability and experience could potentially impact the results. Being unfamiliar with the time requirements and actual breadth of the work to be completed, time was a variable that may have influenced outcomes.

### **Implications of Research**

Both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data support previous research claims that Project Citizen has positive impacts upon civic literacy and efficacy (Atherton, 2000; Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Liou, 2004; Root & Northup, 2007; Tolo, 1998; Vontz et al., 2000). Students involved in the project identified the collaborative, research-focused, project- and issue-based nature of the program to be key in the development of their knowledge, skill, and efficacy development. The findings also show that knowledge-driven instruction alone neither prepares students for the responsibilities of active citizenship, nor does it provide the mastery experiences or vicarious learning experiences that Project Citizen affords (Bandura, 2004).

Analysis of the individual components supported the importance of collaborative learning experiences, research skills instruction, and public policy instruction on the development of civic literacy and efficacy. Future studies should be conducted with larger samples, ideally during the regular instructional day, so that the data can be generalized to the larger population.

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