

**Free Spaces and Craft Cultures:
Civic Education as a Force
for Democratic Reconstruction**

Harry C. Boyte
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota

“Citizenship is tackling problems and taking things into your own hands, not just sitting back and watching.”

Chou Yang, Sixth Grade, St. Bernard’s

Overview: The following describes the roots, development, and lessons in theory and practice of Public Achievement, a civic education initiative of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship that began in 1990. Public Achievement is now in seven communities and is beginning in Northern Ireland. Over the last decade it has involved more than 10,000 young people, ages 8-18, in what we call public work projects designed, developed, and implemented with the aid of adult coaches. These are usually undertaken over the course of a school year. Young people choose the issues they work on, within a framework -- they need to be nonviolent, legal, and make a public contribution. Moreover, Public Achievement has involved young people of strikingly different cultural, income, racial, and economic backgrounds in public schools, parochial schools and different geographic locations. Thus, it furnishes a window into the civic interests and concerns of children and teenagers in our time. It has also proven a fertile laboratory for the development of theory about citizenship and civic education.

Roots and early history

Public Achievement is a chance for kids to do something they love. We get into groups for different problems. We work together to solve the problems. The reason why I did Public Achievement is because things in the world are wrong. Public Achievement and Dr. King are alike because we both made a difference in the world peacefully. We both look at the problems and solve them instead of blaming people.

Matt Anderson, 4th Grade, St. Bernard’s School
from his essay in response to an assignment for Martin Luther King Day

Public Achievement has its roots in the freedom movement of the 1960s, especially in the Citizenship Education Program of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in which I worked as a young man. CEP sponsored what were called citizenship schools -- informal training and discussion groups organized in clubs, beauty parlors, church basements and other settings. In these, I often saw profound changes in outlook and identity among kids younger than myself. Moreover, when black youth in the south, suffering the abuse of generations, developed courage and hopefulness about the possibility of change, they often transformed adult patterns of fatalism and hopelessness. Taylor Branch captures this in *Pillar of Fire*, suggesting that the movement’s very success may have turned on Martin Luther King’s agreement with the arguments of field staff members James Bevel and Diane Nash to allow young people to participate in the demonstrations in Birmingham, in May, 1963. Most of the African American community had become opposed to continued demonstrations for fear of retaliation. After King agreed, thousands of children began to participate, with dramatic results:

On the first day, nearly a thousand marching children converted first the Negro adults. Not a few onlookers...were dismayed to see their own disobedient offspring in the line, and the conflicting emotions of centuries played out on their faces until some finally gave way. One elderly woman ran alongside the arrest line, shouting, Sing, children, sing!

The citizenship schools taught a philosophy of nonviolence and skills of citizen action. They were also infused with a deep, albeit critical, belief in the resources of American democracy, what Frederick Harris has called the combination of “ruly and unruly” civic commitments that have historically characterized the

African American freedom tradition. “We are redeemers, not revolutionaries,” said Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood, an African American minister schooled in this tradition. “We love America. We love democracy. We are just critical lovers.”¹

In Public Achievement these themes have been translated into a set of criteria for the issues young people choose to take up. Issues must be 1) nonviolent; 2) legal; and 3) make a public contribution. The SCLC experience also informs the framing of Public Achievement as both about developing active citizenship essential for a flourishing democracy, and about challenging the inadequacy of conventional meanings of “democracy” and “citizenship.”

Finally, Public Achievement embodied the concept of free spaces (Sara Evans and Harry Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America*, Harper & Row, 1986; Chicago, 1992), and also lessons of the most successful community organizing, especially elaborated in my *Commonwealth: A Return to Citizen Politics* (Free Press, 1989). From our treatment of free spaces, we drew the importance of places in community and institutional contexts which youth “owned,” where they could have wide latitude for experimentation, creation, and self-definition. From community organizing, we drew our original core repertoire of concepts and also the stress on development of public talents and leadership, themes that had seemed to me dynamic elements in networks like the Industrial Areas Foundation. Core concepts included the idea of public life as a space of practical action on common tasks and difference (IAF has conceptualized public space like Hannah Arendt’s notion of action by distinctively different persons around the things of a common world); power and self interest as relational and dynamic. We framed these with a notion of politics itself as a key dimension of the fabric of every environment, and called the framework “citizen politics of problem solving.”

From its outset, Public Achievement stressed cooperative action; it was organized as teams coached by adults (usually young adults) who serve as democracy guides. Young people choose projects around issues they are concerned with, and develop strategies for action usually over the course of a school year.

Public Achievement was launched by the Humphrey Institute’s Project Public Life (soon to be the Center for Democracy and Citizenship), in 1990, with a series of discussion groups among teenagers. Although conventional wisdom in the US held that youth were apathetic and unconcerned, we soon discovered that young people -- every group talked with -- had deep concerns and problems they worried about. These ranged from violence, teen pregnancy, school relationships, and racial prejudice to the environment. Many expressed anger at school policies they felt were unfair, or at teaching approaches that failed to recognize their interests and intelligence. What youth in all the groups said, virtually unanimously, was that adults had rarely asked the opinions of young people on such issues -- and almost no one had ever imagined that young people could actually do anything about the problems and issues they were concerned about. Other key themes of Public Achievement came out of this period, such as the concept of “coach” (young people liked the idea of adults as coaches, more than any other role -- advisor, teacher, mentor). We also found that young people like the idea of “public,” especially the idea of a public world where they can interact with different kinds of people outside their own community.

The flagship school for Public Achievement became St. Bernard’s K-8 elementary school in St. Paul, Minnesota. There, the principal, Dennis Donovan, now national organizer for Public Achievement, saw it as a way to teach students hope, courage, and skills of effective citizenship. He also wanted to change the way teachers taught and schools thought about education, to include a central focus on young people’s interests and concerns, and a large vision of schools as seedbeds of democracy. Donovan, St. Bernard’s, the

¹ Frederick Harris, “Will the Circle be Unbroken? The Erosion and Transformation of African American Civic Life,” *Report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy*, 18:3, Summer, 1998, pp. 20-26.

Center for Democracy and Citizenship, and Jim Farr at the University of Minnesota (who soon began to have all his students coach at St. Bernard's) created a strong partnership approach, which has continued to be the basic model for Public Achievement's expansion.

The early experiences in the school made visible the desire of young people for serious work on issues of importance to them. One group of seventh grade girls, led by a girl who had previously been seen as having acute emotional disturbances and learning disabilities, developed a project which significantly changed the culture and behavior patterns of the school around sexual harassment issues. In the course of the year's organizing, she personally underwent a striking change in her own behavior and motivation, becoming poised, confident, and academically successful. A group of third and fourth graders organized their parents, churches and neighborhoods in a large peace march against neighborhood violence. Teams of fifth and sixth graders worked for several years to build a neighborhood playground. They overcame opposition from residents, gained support from city officials and local businesses, raised over \$60,000, and completed the park (Public Achievement Works park, or PAWS) in the fall of 1998. In 1999, Jesse Ventura recognized the project as the outstanding example of youth citizenship "against all odds," in his first State of the State governor's address (for the story of St. Bernard's, see the public work web site, www.publicwork.org; for other stories of Public Achievement see www.publicachievement.org).

Lessons of theory and practice

Public Achievement continued to develop its theory and practice. We soon learned, for instance, that young people need to be able to "map" the political cultures and traditions of the settings in which they were taking action; otherwise, they are liable to become simply angry protestors, unable to act with effectiveness, sometimes ending up more disillusioned than when they started. We learned, especially from a partnership between Humboldt high school, one of our school sites with a large immigrant population, and the Jane Addams School for Democracy, a community-based education and action center with Hmong and Latino residents, and from St. Gregory's, a rural school in Maryville, Missouri, the usefulness of strong connections between students and communities. In Humboldt, teachers, parents, and neighborhood groups have taken on large issues like reading levels and school-family relationships in a campaign to create a working partnership with the school district, and make Humboldt (which was on academic probation) a "number one school." We learned from Dakota Middle School in Mankato the helpfulness of "master coaches," coaches who had coached before who serve as guides for first time coaches. We learned from schools like Holy Cross, in Kansas City, Missouri, the importance of what we call a "site coordinator," someone within the school setting whose job it is to integrate Public Achievement in school cultures and practices; and from Eisenhower in Kansas City, Kansas, the importance of sustained and extensive use of the Public Achievement's civic language.

The guiding concept of Public Achievement came to be public work, meaning the visible effort of a mix of youth, in relation with adults, to create some real outcome or product that makes a lasting difference in their community or the larger world. Public work is a far more powerful concept than "citizen politics" for youth to think with as they consider what kind of long term or even life-long contribution to the world they want to make. Public work also turns out to have rich, if not before elaborately theorized, resonance and history in American political culture, with strong traditions in such settings as settlement houses, land grant and other colleges, and New Deal work and cultural programs like the CCC, YPA, and WPA (Harry Boyte and Nan Kari, *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work*, Temple, 1996).

Civic agency

"When I was first invited to participate in Public Achievement, what impressed me was that these students believed they had the power to change the world around them. At 22 years old I didn't

think that I could do that. They had actually changed their communities. I heard stories of murals that had ended a school's graffiti problem, campaigns against chemical abuse, playgrounds being erected...Children without jobs, money, or influence proved that they could indeed have influence. Meanwhile, there I sat feeling powerless."

Joseph O'Shea, Coach, Hartford Middle School, Milwaukee

Public Achievement (and other partnerships of the Center, with groups like the Jane Addams School for Democracy, the College of St. Catherine, Augustana Nursing Home, Cooperative Extension, and colleagues concerned with recasting professional practice in public work terms like William Doherty) has proven a fertile ground for theorizing civic agency.²

Recent studies (e.g. the NAEP Report on the 1998 Civic Education Assessment; the Mellman Group poll of college students in November, 1999), according to conventional wisdom, have demonstrated widespread civic apathy among younger Americans. I would argue, in contrast, on the basis of our experiences that such findings are instead functions of the relatively weak conceptions of civic agency that structure the questions. A more robust conception of civic agency -- such as that which implicitly structured the citizenship schools of the freedom movement -- helps illumine the civic interests and energies of a generation that, far from apathetic, is deeply worried about the public problems of our time, and eager to have their energies enlisted in addressing them. The experiences in Public Achievement over the last decade can be conceived of as a research base that demonstrates the point.

Moreover, Public Achievement has been an important seedbed for our Center's work in developing a conceptualization of different traditions and frameworks of citizenship: the idea of citizen as a voter, associated with liberal political theory, embodied in civic education approaches like civics; the idea of the citizen as volunteer, associated with communitarian theory and the modern service learning movement; and the concept of the citizen as civic producer or co-creator of a common world, what we call the public work or commonwealth framework. None are wrong -- and indeed, discussing these traditions is a way to highlight distinctive and different dimensions of citizenship. But without the commonwealth approach, concepts of civic agency remain sharply bounded (see chart).

This framework is useful in thinking about historical constructions of citizenship and the challenges of expressing a robust civic agency in our time. The background of SCLC's Citizenship Education Program was the civic ferment the followed *Brown V. Board of Education*, and especially the widening understanding that a new legal regime in the south, outlawing segregation, by itself could not achieve far-ranging social transformation required for real desegregation. Only a broad movement that enlisted civic talents and energies of ordinary citizens could accomplish such a social reconstruction. To effect such a reconstruction in civic terms, required, moreover, attention to, and deepening of, the very meaning of citizenship and democracy. This was M. L. King's clear sense in his description of the movement (in *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*) as "bringing the entire nation back to the great wells of democracy that were dug deep by the founding fathers." It was also the structuring theme of the citizenship schools sponsored by CEP. "What is a citizen?" CEP leaders like Dorothy Cotton would ask those assembled in

² For a description of the work at the Jane Addams School and the College of St. Catherine, see essays by Nan Skelton and Nan Kari in Boyte et. Al, *Creating the Commonwealth* (Kettering, 1999). Scott Peters, a leader in partnership efforts to renew the civic mission and practices of the cooperative extension system, has also unearthed a vast and remarkable, though largely submerged, history in this vein. See Scott Peters, "Mission Drift or Renewal? Recovering an Historical Grounding for Assessing Cooperative Extension's Civic Work," in the www.publicwork.org site, under civic mission; forthcoming in *Inquiry in Action*. William Doherty gave an account of his pilot efforts, in theory and practice, to develop a civic approach to family professional practice in "Family Science and Family Citizenship: Toward a Model of Community Partnership with Families," the Presidential Address to the National Council on Family Relations, November 1999, to be published this year.

church basements, beauty parlors and elsewhere. Discussions would inevitably produce a sense of first class citizenship as involving an ongoing responsibility for community problem solving and public life (see *Building America* and also Harry Boyte and Jim Farr, "The Work of Citizenship and the Problem of Service Learning," in Battistoni, *Experiencing Citizenship*, AAHE, 1997).

It turns out that young people are deeply engaged by a similar conception of civic agency today. They *want* to feel like powerful public actors on the issues of their world, even if they have had few chances, usually, to learn the skills of effective public action. Even though conventional wisdom is that there is no issue like segregation, I would argue that the profound technological transformations and associated social changes we are undergoing create an analogous period of social upheaval that forms a background for renewed civic agency. There are many positive possibilities associated with these changes, but also great dangers, ranging from an almost unbridled global capital flow and market culture to a pervasive segmentation and privatization process, as public spaces erode and private spaces become dominant. The Stanford study on internet use, which shows "the more hours people use the Internet the less time they spend with real human beings" ("A New, Lonelier Crowd Emerges in Internet Study," *NYT*, February 16, 2000), underlines these dynamics.

In our time -- and I believe this is an implicit civic response to such trends -- "world-shaping" has strong local and community-building dimensions, as well as society-wide implications. We call it "building the commons," meaning public settings where people gather for civic work, conversation, and socializing that strengthen public life and express local public identities. In the age of the internet, this tie between community renewal and the politics of place and civic engagement is a strategic imperative: it is a profound mistake to allow "virtual community" to become severed from living places, actual communities, and real work with others. We see the interest in such projects in Public Achievement, where young people tend strongly to choose environment-shaping projects -- or what we would call commonwealth projects -- that suggest the notion of the citizen as a co-creator of the commons. Indeed the term youth have chosen for the PA handbook is *Building Worlds, Transforming Lives, Making History*. A breakdown of projects of the 1000 or so kids in Minnesota, 8 to 18, doing Public Achievement in 1999-2000 showed 55 percent to have chosen projects with a commonwealth, environmental shaping character, from reducing crime and teen pregnancy to building playgrounds to impacting school policy. Thirty one percent chose advocacy type projects (which are related to distributive conceptions of politics), such as fighting for teen rights or against racism. Fourteen percent chose service projects, such as helping the homeless, associated with voluntarism.

Even assuming a selection bias built into the culture (Public Achievement, after all, has an explicitly co-creative conception of citizenship), the evidence suggests strong youth inclination away from simply the protest politics of earlier years, or the service politics of the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, even advocacy and service projects in Public Achievement tend to become environment-shaping efforts as they develop.

This is a civically anxious generation, worried about problems that no one seems to be acting on, angry at the ways their talents are rarely enlisted. Their civic energy is evident in the statistics of involvement: often over 90% of kids choose to do Public Achievement, when we have coaching capabilities. We have seen such civic interests elsewhere, such as the expansion of restorative environmental projects, or the ferment of what we are calling the "new information commons" (or e-commons), in which young people use internet tools in projects with community building and public work dimensions (see www.publicwork.org, new information commons).

Building on such experiences, Public Achievement's core theme is that young people are not simply citizens in preparation. They are citizens today. The culture of Public Achievement -- wedding an everyday politics of environment-shaping work and the relational qualities of service -- turns out to be a medium for

the reconceptualization of politics generally. When Angela Mathews, a young leader in Public Achievement/Northern Ireland, asked an assembled cross section of more than 100 PA members last fall whether they like politics, the majority (with no prompting or preparation) raised their hands. "It's because we are doing politics," Angela observed. "It's not simply something politicians do."

Other major themes

"Our kids generally come into Public Achievement feeling hopeless about the tremendous problems they see in their communities -- drugs, crime, prostitution. Public Achievement unleashes hope in kids that they can actually take action to change things."

Joe Groves, Teacher, Minneapolis

Over the last two years, two teams of researchers have been undertaking in depth evaluation of Public Achievement participants, including team members, coaches, teachers, principals and others in the environment. The Kauffman Foundation, a major funder of PA, has conducted extensive focus groups, survey research and other forms of evaluation of public and Catholic schools implementing Public Achievement in the Kansas City region (both Missouri and Kansas). A second evaluation process coordinated by Nan Skelton, Associate Director of the Center, consists by Michael Baizerman, professor of youth studies at the University of Minnesota and an internationally recognized authority on youth subcultures and youth evaluation, and Robert Hildreth, a political theory graduate student who has been a leader in coach training and materials preparation for several years. This process involves qualitative interviews at six Public Achievement schools, including three in the Twin Cities. Finally, the overall culture of Public Achievement itself -- including regional meetings several times a year; annual retreats and leadership meetings, and a national working group -- constantly stresses lessons learned and discussion of findings.

We know from these diverse forms of assessment, evaluation, and theory building that Public Achievement "works" in the sense of having often profound impact on children and young people involved, evident in such outcomes as self-confidence, ability to discuss and understand civic themes and use civic language, public skills such as public speaking, and often academic motivation. Moreover, young people are able to describe how they translate civic skills and outlook from Public Achievement to other areas of their lives. Public Achievement also impacts coaches and often teachers and school cultures as well. The Kauffman Foundation evaluation found that coaches report much higher assessment of young people's public capacities and potential than before their experiences. In schools, 53% of teachers report significant changes in their own behavior as a result of Public Achievement, reflected in as higher expectations for kids; talking more about public affairs; offering more experiential and service opportunities.

Three features of Public Achievement appear as especially significant to its impacts:

Public Achievement creates a free space, a counter-space, in which young people have possibility to experience themselves as co-creators of a common world, and also to step out of normal roles and expectations. In Public Achievement, they experience the world as radically open, conceptually and practically.

Public Achievement is better conceived as a "craft" than as a program.

Public Achievement is beginning to generate a distinctive culture built around its philosophical approach and "language world," as well as its practices. One major challenge is developing ways to deepen and grow this culture across different settings.

1) Public Achievement as a Free Space

From the beginning, we conceived of Public Achievement as, in part, a "free space," understood as a setting where young people would have the freedom to experiment, design their own work, and have a lively, open intellectual life, using in part civic concepts. Public Achievement's quality as a free space is reinforced by several elements: young people choose to participate; they choose the issues they want to work on; they create their own rules (one of the first acts of every team) and learn to hold each other accountable for them; they develop the strategies and methods of their work and, with the guidance of coaches, they do the work themselves, like making phone calls or writing letters or making public presentations.

Public Achievement is also a free space in two other senses. In the first instance, it offers a sharp contrast with the normal phenomenology of young people's lives. Young people live in a world of others' making, with rules, procedures, classes, structures that often seem pre-set, like granite mountains. Moreover, they are besieged by public problems often experienced in their everyday lives, from racial conflict and violence to teen suicide or teen pregnancy. These typically seem overwhelming and intractable. Public Achievement breaks the omnipresent messages that reinforce fatalism -- "nothing can be done about this"; or "you can't effect that; you're just a kid." Our assessment studies indicate that the very invitation for young people to take action on such issues, with accompanying practical skills, strategies, methods and coaching, often has a tremendous impact on young people's sense of the possible. "Adults won't take us seriously unless we take ourselves seriously," said Katlin Connor, a seventh grader. "What Public Achievement does is teach us about how to deal with the real world."

Secondly, we have come to understand, especially from the assessment project of Skelton, Baizerman, and Hildreth, the importance of Public Achievement's being a space where normal roles and identities are partly suspended. The importance of such a civic space is helpfully illustrated by historical antecedents such as the early settlement house movement.³

Thus, for instance, Diliberto's recent biography of Jane Addams, *A Useful Woman*, makes vivid the importance of such civic space in the history of settlements like Toynbee Hall in London and Hull House in Chicago. People from all backgrounds could interact, work and learn together in ways that aimed at general advancement, and also importantly suspended pre-existing boundaries and roles. "The distinctive reform spirit of the Victorian era -- an earnest combination of self-improvement and duty toward others...a conviction that all people, regardless of class, birth, or wealth, have the capacity and indeed the duty to 'evolve' into their best' selves...was epitomized by Toynbee Hall," Diliberto writes. Jane Addams, said Diliberto, "was throwing in her 'lot' with the rest of the population... struggling with them toward "salvation"" that was as much in the interest of college educated settlement workers as of poor immigrants. Gertrude Himmelfarb describes "civic community" at Hull House in these terms:

It "implied no denial or even denigration of the distinctions of wealth, occupation, class or talent. It was rather meant to be a civic community based upon a common denominator of citizenship in the largest sense of the word...that made tolerable all these other social distinctions...which should not be exacerbated and should not be permitted to obscure the common humanity of individuals.

Himmelfarb misses the transformative quality of this space -- the intense desire for education and development that was reflected in the myriad of courses that Hull House undertook, the many projects for

³ Hildreth describes their assessment findings in an article that shows the power of PA as a "free space" where young people have the opportunity to "make meanings" and "become themselves" in new ways, learning skills of effective action and becoming theorists of their everyday lives in "Theorizing Citizenship and Evaluating Public Achievement," forthcoming in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 2000.

change in the larger environment, from labor organizing to child welfare legislation and garbage removal, that emerged. Civic community, in short, was a dynamic space with capacities to democratize and equalize relations and structures in the world. But Himmelfarb's idea of civic community nonetheless depicts a core element in the approach of Addam's that we also see in Public Achievement. When young people suspend for a time their normal groupings -- jock, nerd, geek, gothics, African Americans, Asian, rural, inner city, upper middle class; and even to some degree differences in age -- they experience a new freedom to create the world, and to develop new dimensions of themselves in the process.

2) Public Achievement as a Craft

Secondly, Public Achievement has illustrated what can also be concluded from the most effective citizen organizing experiences, and their contrasts with more conventional mobilization approaches (the contrast becomes dramatic comparing, say, the Industrial Areas Foundation with issue mobilization technologies like direct mailings or door to door canvassing). Citizen education and action are far better understood as democratic crafts than as programs. A craft approach stresses practice wisdom, and training and preparation based on apprenticeship, experiential learning, and decentralization of the learning process.

Program approaches in youth development resemble what has been called the bureaucratic administration of work. Analysts such as Arthur Stinchcombe have detailed the differences between craft and bureaucratic approaches based on a comparison between mass production industries and craft industries in ways that have relevance to civic education.

In bureaucratic approaches, both product and process of work are highly controlled and pre-planned. Such approaches involve detailed, pre-set outcomes and the removal of decision making about key elements of the work process from the work crew itself. Procedures, tasks, distribution of work, scheduling and arrangement of work activities, and the criteria used to evaluate particular operations all are determined by people outside the work crew. Decisions are made by experts using criteria from academic theory, as opposed to practice wisdom.

In contrast, craft approaches found in construction (or sports or music or arts or entertainment), decentralize decision making about product and process. In construction, for instance, craftsmen carry the burden of much decision making, and hiring, firing, and specification of tasks are resolved at the level of subcontractor. There are high standards for work that are based in significant measure on empirical lore, or practice wisdom, taught through an apprenticeship system which socializes new workers. Stinchcombe argues against the classic theory that bureaucratization is inevitable. Building on such work, Walter Powell has proposed that features of the global economy -- including the need for local knowledge and products based on local or particular identities, reciprocal norms that last over time, and learning cultures that are rich and multidimensional -- are generating new network forms of organization and administration. These are different than hierarchical firms or market transactions: With network forms of organization, new forms of craft work have also begun to reappear.⁴

It is useful to apply these distinctions to civic education, and they also have analogies in education and youth development broadly. Thus, reformers such as Theodore Sizer have observed the correspondence of education to factories. This is because of the resemblance of education to bureaucratic administration. Reformers like Sizer, Deborah Meier, and Howard Fuller have argued for what can be called craft approaches to education. Their reforms couple calls for thinking of teaching in craft terms with measures

⁴Arthur L. Stinchcombe, Bureaucratic and Craft Administration of Production: A Comparative Study, in *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Walter Powell, Neither Market Nor Hierarchy: network forms of Organization, *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vo. 12 (1990), pp. 295-334.

such as decentralization of authority for educational decisions, smaller schools, and relational, co-creative, and contextual approaches to education that connect schools to parents and communities.⁵

The Public Achievement/public work approach, building on and deepening civic education, as a democratic craft, has these elements, among others:

* Public Achievement decentralizes much decision making to the team level, while it also passes on knowledge in apprenticeship-type patterns. Although some measure of pre-training in approaches to group work are helpful, mainly Public Achievement is learned through doing. Coaches, in the best of cases, also have help and guidance from "master coaches," people who have coached before.

* Public Achievement stresses a process of reflection, evaluation, and development of intellectual skills and public talents, in ways that are not possible with program approaches or learning too tightly tied to preset curriculum. It creates multiple spaces for young people to take public leadership on public and community issues of concern to them. There are opportunities for young people to play diverse roles, and to develop many different talents from public speaking to writing letters to team work and strategic research to holding each other accountable. Public Achievement is attentive to arts of politics such as social and cultural context, preparing youth teams to understand the politics, power relations, culture and rules of their setting, and developing relationships.

* Public Achievement is also craft-like in its stress on the expression of distinctive and particular public "signatures" or identities, not uniform outcomes. It emphasizes team work of originality, creativity, and distinctiveness (and creates multiple public stages where such work is on display, and in which young people interact with others). Public Achievement also has come to reflect different cultures of different schools and communities; indeed, in the strongest of cases it has become a vehicle for the deepening and development of local public identities and cultures.

3) Public Achievement as a culture of democratic intellectual life

Finally, we have come to understand that Public Achievement is a powerful "language world," with meanings that expand considerably beyond team projects. Public Achievement began with a strong focus on the importance of political concepts (e.g. politics, citizenship, power, self-interest, public space, democracy) for the creation of meaning and the development of civic identity and leadership. This emphasis drew both from the power of the freedom movement, with its central themes of citizenship and democracy, and from observation of the most successful training in networks like IAF, which have a "conceptual" approach rather than a predominant focus on techniques and skills. Over time, we learned that the use of concepts not only helps young people (and others) to name the world around them in civic and public ways. Such concepts also provide tools for a more integrated sense of "self" and life direction, in a world of radical fragmentation and conflicted messages. They provide a way, in particular, to develop a sense of citizenship as an identity and a lived practice, against the grain of what our colleague Mishkat Az-Zubair calls "the gimme culture" of pervasive consumer messages.

Concepts provide rich materials for teams and coaches and others to make meaning from their practical activity in Public Achievement. There is an inherent excitement in discussing and thinking with ideas like power or public (indeed, a number of youth groups have made up Public Achievement games, using the

⁵ Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, Houghton Mifflin, 1984; Deborah Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas* (Boston: Beacon, 1995)

language). The use of terms like “citizen” gives a dignity and station to young people, in a world which sharply delimits their talents and capacities. People clearly like the largeness of the task of “building democracy.” Participants generalize beyond the Public Achievement experience. For instance, coaches often want to talk about the implications of their experiences in PA for their own lives and future careers.

Challenges

“Everything our kids hear is ‘What can I get?’ Public Achievement teaches, ‘What can I contribute? How can I shape the world around me’”

Jamie Suek, Teacher, Anderson Open School, Minneapolis

There are challenges to sustaining and deepening the Public Achievement culture. Concepts such as the citizen as co-creator, or power as relational and interactive, or public life as an arena of difference and practical work with others on significant tasks are powerful tools for civic education and citizenship. But they also go against the normal structures and practices of a highly commercialized and bureaucratized society. Few spaces or experiences exist which prepare people to think broadly about the "why" of their efforts. Schools are dramatic examples.

When the Kauffman Foundation recently brought together a group of leaders in Public Achievement to discuss the most important skills coaches should know, all agreed that the essential knowledge is the "history and vision" of Public Achievement -- that it is deeply rooted in American freedom and democratic movements; and that it expresses an expansive understanding of citizenship and of democratic possibilities. Yet at present, it is hard to sustain or deeply engage such knowledge in the fabric of everyday life in schools and communities.

Two things may address these challenges. In the first instance, we are giving thought throughout the Public Achievement world to building an association or organization aimed at deepening the craft of civic education. Such an organizational form would allow the growth and sustenance of a robust public culture across various sites, a collective process of coach development, and wider ownership in the governance and practices of the network.

I also see Public Achievement as an important strand of larger ferment that potentially weds internet and other technology uses to public work practices and community-building efforts. Indeed we have discovered in recent months, building from a conference we organized with the Civil Society/Community Building Initiative at Maryland at Wingspread in January on the civic uses of the internet, a tremendous amount of environment-shaping and community building work undertaken by young people across the country around these themes. Libraries for the Future, Project for Public Spaces, community technology centers communications centers in colleges, parks, youth groups like Boys and Girls Clubs and 4-H, and other settings form a wide potential base for explicit language and discussion of civic engagement. There is also the beginnings of a "democracy movement" in higher education (see www.compact.org, and www.publicwork.org, civic mission of higher education). I believe that multiple possibilities will develop for linking Public Achievement sites to such efforts in the future.

We may well be at the threshold of a broad "democracy movement." If we see a new movement emerge in the next several years, young people again will play critical and energizing roles. In this context, we will need civic education that deepens and spreads understandings and practices of citizenship, with free spaces and craft cultures at the heart of the process.

Public Achievement will furnish resources and lessons.