

**Keynote Address to
We the People... Project Citizen
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at the
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I am sure that many of you, like me, enjoy returning to childhood classics you once loved and are surprised to discover how accurately they address the human condition. As children we read or listened to them for their narrative quality, never questioning whether animals could talk or witches could cast spells. But we failed to appreciate fully the wisdom and the philosophy which lay beneath their surface. What is more, we delighted in those tales because their wisdom and the philosophy was much more readable and comprehensible than, say, the dry and difficult prose of a Hegel or a Habermas.

And so it was that in preparation for our meeting tonight I reread—and appreciated anew—*The Wizard of Oz*. In many ways, its messages are uniquely appropriate to a fuller understanding of **Project Citizen**.

You will recall that Dorothy, the heroine transported from Kansas by a cyclone to the mythical Land of Oz, first meets the Scarecrow. He tells her that he believes himself to be a failure, because he could not intimidate the birds. Then, one day, a bird said to him “Any crow of sense could see that you are only stuffed with straw.” However, the bird continued, “If you only had brains in your head, you would be as good a man as any of them—and a better man than some of them. Brains are the only thing worth having in this world, no matter whether one is a crow or a man.”

Taking that message to heart the Scarecrow pined for the brains he lacked.

Dorothy next encounters the Tin Woodman. He had been a successful wood-chopper. But, alas, his axe kept slipping. He lost one leg, then the other; one arm, then the other—and finally even his head. A clever tin-smith made him a whole new body. Unfortunately, the tin-smith forgot to give him a heart. That was his greatest loss, he confided to Dorothy. “No one can love who has not a heart.”

Finally, Dorothy came upon an unhappy lion. When he, the purported “king of the beasts,” confessed that he lacked courage, he wept so hard that he had to wipe away his tears with the tip of his tail.

At the end of the story, after the four companions and Toto have marvelous adventures with enchanted mice, winged monkeys, and wicked witches, they arrive at the moment when the Wizard of Oz is expected to grant their respective wishes:

- for brains
- for a heart
- for courage, and
- for a return trip to Kansas

The Wizard—humbug that he was—imparted advice to Dorothy’s friends that has meaning for us as educators.

To the brains-seeking scarecrow, the Wizard says

Experience is the only thing that brings knowledge and the longer you are on earth the more experience you are sure to get.... I will stuff your head with brains. I cannot tell you how to use them, however. You must find that out for yourself.

The Wizard was about to cut a hole in the left side of the Tin Woodman’s breast so that he could insert a heart when the Woodman halted him. He asked “Is it a kind heart?” Assured that it was, the Tin Woodman happily consented to the implanting of a red silk heart.

In response to the Lion’s request for courage, the Wizard advised:

You have plenty of courage, I’m sure. All you need is confidence in yourself. There is no living thing that is not afraid when it faces danger. True courage is facing danger when you are afraid, and that kind of courage you have in plenty.

Although the students who come to us, their teachers, may not express their needs and desires in words, their needs and desires are remarkably like those articulated by the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Lion.

Our students need and want “brains” or knowledge. The knowledge they seek is—and should be—a composite of “book learning” and experience which is reflected upon under a competent teacher’s guidance.

Our students also are desirous of heart or the capacity for empathy, compassion, and understanding.

Our students wish for courage born of self-confidence. Savvy political scientists of today would call that efficacy.

Just as there was no magic the Wizard could command, no elixir he could prescribe to give brains, heart, or courage to his petitioners, neither can educators. We can, however, engage our students in programs which make possible the acquisition of knowledge and self-confidence and which kindle empathy and compassion.

Project Citizen is just such a program—and I’d like to talk briefly with you this evening about its potential for helping young people acquire all three of those qualities essential to informed, effective, and responsible democratic citizenship.

Let me share with you some telling findings from recent research and the recommendations generated by those findings which have particular bearing on **Project Citizen**.

First, let's turn to *The Political and Civic Engagement of Young Adults in America*, a national survey of 1,500 fifteen- to twenty-five-year-olds conducted in January of this year (2002). One of the key findings of this survey was that “trust in government, and a sense of efficacy—that one’s actions can make a difference—are two core beliefs that drive political engagement.... However, while trust in government is up (since 9/11) feelings of efficacy in helping to solve problems have remained relatively unchanged; noticeably in the same time period, voter registration and community engagement rates have also declined slightly. The critical question for politicians and others interested in boosting youth participation is how to increase levels of efficacy among young adults who do not currently feel they can have an impact.”

An additional key finding that has bearing on **Project Citizen** is that “More young adults strongly agree that politics and elections are about politicians competing to get elected (49%)... than strongly agree that politics and elections are the way that average people get their say in government (32%) or that elections are a way a democratic community tries to solve its problems (30%). Young adults with high levels of efficacy see the two goals—giving people a voice in their governance and addressing community problems—as having a more equal place in politics and elections, while those with low levels of efficacy believe politics and elections are dominated by politicians competing with one another to get elected.”

I'd also like to call your attention to conclusions reached by William Damon whose Center on Adolescence at Stanford University is recognized for its excellence throughout the world. Damon reminds us that:

Virtually all the classic theories of human development—of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Jane Loevinger, and Harry Stack Sullivan, among many others—portray adolescence as a period when young people formulate their personal, social and civil identities. A *civil identity* is an allegiance to a systematic set of moral and political beliefs—a personal ideology of sorts—to which a young person forges a commitment. The emotional and moral concomitants to the beliefs are a devotion to one’s community and a sense of one’s own responsibility to the society at large. The specific beliefs and commitments, of course, may change over the subsequent years, but the initial formulation of them during adolescence has always ranked as a key landmark in human development.... It is still the case that neurological and cognitive growth around the time of puberty, combined with the expansion of social roles and educational experience that the secondary school years bring, sets the stage for the adolescent’s formulation of civil identity.

Based on his own research and that of others, Damon warns us that:

There is reason to believe that a young person’s crucial orientations to life incubate during adolescence. If civic concern is not among them, it may never arise.

Given the salience of the early adolescent years for the formation of civic identity and a sense of personal responsibility for the welfare of the community, the recommendations of the Aspen Institute Program on Education in a Changing Society should come as no surprise. One Aspen recommendation in particular sounds like a rationale for and a description of **Project Citizen**. The recommendation is that secondary schools “require participation in community-based activities that promote positive youth development.” Justification for that recommendation is that

Promoting healthy personal and social development is an important objective of schools and an integral part of their academic missions. Helping young people develop the skills, attitudes, and dispositions necessary for a successful transition to adulthood can't be accomplished solely within the walls of the school. Those skills, attitudes, and dispositions include a sense of personal identity and civic responsibility, personal habits of persistence and reliability and a commitment to the community and a sense of their place in it.

States therefore should consider requiring students to participate in at least some community-based activities that can contribute to personal and social development. Those activities might include service learning, structured internships, field-based investigations or other community projects. Ideally, the Aspen Institute insists, these activities would involve:

...Projects that are grounded in or address real-world problems, take extended effort and persistence, have an external audience, and are integrated into the school curriculum.

Project Citizen is a program which comports with recommendations made by both the Center on Adolescence at Stanford and the Aspen Institute.

- In **Project Citizen** students themselves identify a real world problem—one that literally is in their own backyard—a problem which they feel they, as young citizens, should address
- **Project Citizen** requires extended effort and persistence in working with one's peers, in doing research, in conducting interviews, in evaluating alternative solutions, in agreeing on a preferred solution and devising an advocacy strategy for their policy preference
- **Project Citizen** takes students out of their classrooms and into their communities—into the “real world,” if you will. It puts students in contact with external audiences ranging from school boards to city councils to environmental agencies to state legislatures
- **Project Citizen** is integral to the school's curriculum. It is in complete accord with national, state, and district standards for the social studies and language arts. **Project Citizen** also is applicable to some standards in other curricular domains.

There is, however, another and perhaps more consequential reason for engaging students in **Project Citizen**. That is because **Project Citizen** addresses those human needs and desires so beautifully expressed in the story of *The Wizard of Oz*:

- for knowledge and experience
- for heart or the capacity for empathy, compassion and love
- for courage or self-confidence, a requirement for effective citizens in a democracy

In closing, I want to express thanks to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). Its members have long been concerned about the education of young citizens. In the early 1990s they decided to redouble their efforts. Casting about for an appropriate vehicle, they heard about the Center for Civic Education and its fledgling **Project Citizen** program. NCSL's Executive

Committee, meeting in Austin, Texas, invited a Center for Civic Education staff member to come for an exploratory conversation. The conversation was scheduled to last about an hour. But when the Committee's interest was piqued, the discussion was extended into a second day.

From that beginning emerged an enduring partnership that has enabled about half a million students in the United States, as well as thousands more students in some thirty countries, to acquire knowledge, develop skills, and forge dispositions essential to informed, effective, and responsible citizenship in a democratic society. That is no small feat—and we hope and expect to see many more young people throughout the world engaged in **Project Citizen**, not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the societies of which they are members.

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