

## DEVELOPING CIVIC VALUES IN YOUNG PEOPLE

### TEACHERS' CHOICES MATTER

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This study concerned the association of teaching practices and school climates with adolescents' beliefs about justice in America and with their civic values. Nine hundred middle-school and high-school students from urban and rural communities were asked about their views of the climate and teaching practices at their school. The young people were from African-, Latino-, European-, and Arab-American backgrounds.

Students' views about the school climate and teaching practices were significantly related to their beliefs that America was a just society and to the teens' personal goals of public service and the promotion of inter group tolerance and understanding.

Inclusive climates at school where caring transcended the borders of cliques, where teachers insisted on a civic ethic (intervening to stop acts of intolerance or bullying, insisting that students listen to and respect one another) and where teachers held the same high academic expectations for everyone were positively related to:

- Adolescents' beliefs that America was a just and equal opportunity society
- Adolescents' intentions to serve their communities and country
- Adolescents' intentions to promote equality and inter group understanding

One of the main purposes of public education is to enable full participation of the people in the life of democracy. Our research suggests that, by the kind of public space they provide, schools are a place where children can develop an understanding of what it means to live in a Civil Society and how members of such a society treat one another. To achieve those ends the choices of teachers, administrators, and fellow students are pivotal.

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