

**Evaluation of *We the People: Project Citizen* Summer Institutes:
How Professional Development Translates into Classroom Instruction**

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Graduates of the six regional 2007 **We the People: Project Citizen** professional development summer institutes were surveyed to determine how useful they found their institute experience, and to the extent to which their participation at the Center-sponsored institutes influenced their teaching of civics and government. The study was designed to capture the aspects of the institutes that proved most valuable to teachers, and to improve future institutes. The study was conducted in the fall of 2007, only allowing for a partial semester since the teachers had attended a Project Citizen institute, in an effort to increase response rates. To complete the report by February of 2008, it was necessary to contact participants in the fall although many teachers were not finished with the program in full.

Key Findings Among Respondents

A total of 132 summer institute participants were contacted and 67 participants responded to the survey questions, 51% of the population. All findings are based on those that responded to the survey. A battery of questions was developed to measure the extent to which professional development improved the quality of teacher instruction after teachers returned to their respective classrooms. Ninety-seven percent of teachers demonstrated an improved quality of instruction after attending a Project Citizen summer institute in 2007. Results of the study include the following.

- 97% of teachers demonstrated an improved quality of instruction
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the institute was a valuable professional development experience
- 98% agreed or strongly agreed that the institute was intellectually stimulating
- 98% agreed or strongly agreed that they have used knowledge gained from the institute during the school year
- 98% agreed or strongly agreed that the training they received at the institute improved the quality of their instruction
- 91% agreed or strongly agreed that they now use more interactive teaching methods in their classroom
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the institute increased their knowledge of public policy
- 97% agreed or strongly agreed that the institute improved their understanding of how public policy decisions are made
- 97% agreed or strongly agreed that the institute increased their knowledge of how to monitor and influence public policy
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the institute increased their knowledge of and increased their confidence in teaching students how to influence the policy process
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the institute improved their ability to facilitate classroom discussions and debates about public policy issues in their communities
- 97% agreed or strongly agreed that the institute provided them with the skills needed to facilitate cooperative teamwork
- 96% agreed or strongly agreed that the institute gave them new ideas on how to teach students about citizens rights and responsibilities
- 97% agreed or strongly agreed that the institute inspired their teaching of civics and government
- 100% indicated that they would recommend the institute to other teachers

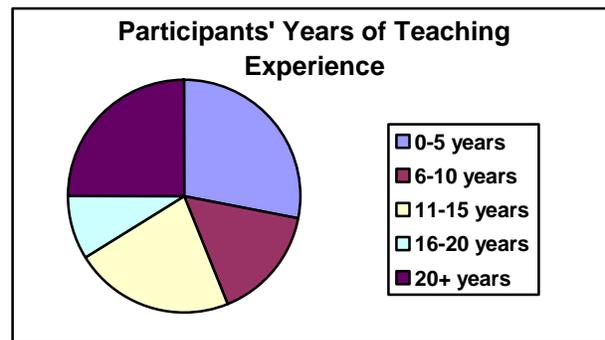
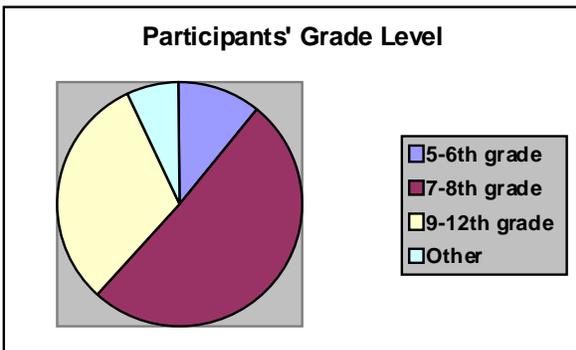
Evaluation Design

Beginning in November 2007, participants of the Center-sponsored institutes were contacted by email for this online survey. In an effort to increase response rates, the survey was administered in the fall of 2007, allowing for only a partial semester since the teachers had attended a Project Citizen institute. Out of a total of 132 participants, 67 responded to the survey following three waves of contact attempts. Graduates from the following regional institutes were surveyed:

- Rural Institute (Clinton Presidential Library, Arizona)
- Northeast Regional Institute (Salve Regina University, Rhode Island)
- Southeast Regional Institute (Clemson University, South Carolina)
- Central Regional Institute (Indiana Historical Society, Indiana)
- Mountains/Plains Regional Institute (University of Colorado, Colorado)
- Western Regional Institute (Yavapai Community College, Arizona)

Most Respondents Teach Middle School; More New Teachers Attended

Most respondents, 51%, teach 7th or 8th grade, while 31% teach 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grade classes, and 15% teach the program in elementary school. Participants tended to be a better mix of new and experienced teachers than previous years: 24% have taught for more than twenty years, while 27% have taught for less than five years. Nearly all the participants of the summer institutes were new to Project Citizen: 91% have taught Project Citizen from 0 to 2 years before having attended the institute.



Institutes Found Interesting and Rewarding

Most participants found the summer institutes thoroughly interesting and rewarding. One hundred percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the institute was a valuable professional development experience; 98% found the institutes to be intellectually stimulating; and 98% indicated that they used the knowledge they gained when they returned to their classrooms.

Ninety-two percent of respondents rated lectures and discussions as either valuable or very valuable. Ninety-five percent found the sessions on lessons and instructional strategies as either valuable or very valuable. Ninety-four percent found developing and presenting a portfolio to be either a valuable or very valuable experience. After attending the institute: 94% found defining public policy for students to understand to be either easy or very easy; 86% found assisting students in selecting a topic by consensus to be easy or very easy; 83% found helping students structure interviews to be easy or very easy.

Portfolio Preparation and Presentation

The top priority of the institute is to adequately prepare teachers to assist their students with the preparation and the oral presentation of their portfolios. The Center considers this one of the most crucial components of its program as it allows students an opportunity to develop and apply skills while demonstrating the knowledge they have acquired about their public policy topic. This component requires the teacher to be comfortable utilizing interactive methods in their teaching. Institutes help develop these skills by guiding teachers through the process of choosing a public policy problem, researching and addressing it by preparing a portfolio, and presenting it during their training. The Center believes that the best way for teachers to seamlessly apply the interactive methods of the curriculum is to model the institute on those very methods.

Importantly, 98% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the training they received at the summer institute improved the quality of their instruction; and 91% agreed or strongly agreed that they now use more interactive teaching methods in their classroom. Many participants, 48%, did go on to have their students prepare portfolios after their experience at the institute. Fifty-three percent indicated that their students contacted public officials as part of their research; 43% indicated that their students presented their policy proposal before a panel of evaluators in the classroom; 25% indicated that their students presented their policy proposal at a school event; 21% indicated that their students presented their policy proposal at a congressional district, statewide, or national level showcase; and an impressive 27% indicated that their students went beyond the scope of the program by attempting to implement their public policy proposal.

Factors Enhancing Full Program Implementation

The Center considers the completion and oral presentation of the portfolio to a panel of evaluators to be a crucial aspect of the overall curriculum. Hence, the program is considered fully implemented only when students taught with the Project Citizen curriculum participate in a portfolio showcase. Participant responses show that follow-up support is crucial to their completion of the program:

- 58% of those teachers that reported being contacted by their district and/or state coordinator reported their class prepared a portfolio compared to 39% of those that did not receive follow-up contact.

Obstacles to Program Implementation

A variety of factors impacted their ability to implement the program in full, according to responding participants. One important obstacle was the timing of this study: many teachers had not started Project Citizen in their classrooms. Of the 35 responding participants that reported being unable to complete the program in full, 10 stated they had yet to begin the program. Other problems cited were:

- Time: 25% of participants cited time management as the greatest obstacle to implementing the program in its entirety. Fifteen teachers commented that they underestimated how long the project would take, and did not allot adequate time for completion.
- Many teachers did not have the opportunity to implement the program in full. One-third reported in their comments that they had not yet implemented the program, but were

planning to in the spring. Many teachers were concerned with how Project Citizen addressed their state standards. Nine teachers reported that testing and/or curriculum requirements were obstacles in their implementation of the program. Student apathy was also frequently cited as an obstacle.

- Three teachers noted the difficulty of having a single project per class with mixed academic abilities.

Considerations for Future Institutes

- The need for sustained, systematic follow-up support: nearly one-third of those who provided comments focused on the need for continuing support. Additionally, participants expressed a desire for ongoing communication with a mentor or their group leader at the institute regarding the details of the portfolio project.
- The need for a follow-up institute: five participants specifically asked for a follow-up institute of some kind. Many participants felt they had questions that arose only after they had attempted Project Citizen in their classrooms.
- The need for Project Citizen to be directly related to individual state standards and how to incorporate assessment: many teachers asked for more detailed and targeted links to their state standards.
- Other requests included: lists of portfolio topics students chose throughout the state, region, and country; participant lists so teachers can keep in contact after the workshop; an organized network for colleagues to discuss and share experiences; information on future workshops and follow-up institutes; information on Center materials and programs; and explicit timelines for portfolio completion.

Recommendations

The Center should consider options to serve participants of its summer institutes, either through email updates or through its website. Periodic follow-up trainings can be used as a means to address questions teachers may have *after* implementing the program and to reinforce what they learned during their time at the institute. A collaborative network of teachers may prove invaluable in establishing and/or maintaining continued support for participating teachers after the institutes, or, in the absence of such a network, district and state coordinators should consider recruiting multiple teachers from each school to allow for a built-in support system at each site. Additionally, the Center should consider the viability of allowing for concurrent projects or academic levels within the same classroom, or discuss the reasons why the program is modeled on a single class project.