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The MicroSociety® model: An assessment of civic engagement outcomes amongst fourth and fifth grade students

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The *MicroSociety*® Model: An Assessment of Civic Engagement Outcomes
Amongst Fourth and Fifth Grade Students

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An Honors College Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Arts and Letters

James Madison University

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by Jewel Mackenzie Hurt

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Political Science, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at Madison Union 206 on April 25, 2019.

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Abstract

Despite existing as a democratic country, America has wavered in prioritizing civics education in schools. This thesis analyzes the work of *MicroSociety®* as one program that helps students 'learn by doing' in the enactment of a school-wide community simulation. To test the program outcomes, a reliable survey was administered to fourth and fifth grade students at two different *MicroSociety* schools. The results showed that *MicroSociety* students reported higher average levels of civic engagement when compared to a national sample. The positive results were also consistent across both *MicroSociety* samples despite stark differences in the demographic profiles of each school. This evidence suggests that *MicroSociety* is a working model for teaching civics that may translate to increased civic engagement later in life.

Introduction

There is an unavoidable relationship that exists between education and democracy. As John Dewey reasoned, every generation has a responsibility to renew the nation's democratic ideals by creating an informed and thoughtful citizenry (Dewey 1916). Unfortunately, it has been over 100 years since Dewey provided this challenge and America is still uncertain of how to educate young people to participate in society later in life. Turnout rates for the last General Election rested at just 59.2% of the voting-eligible population (United States Elections Project 2016). This percentage has been largely consistent with only slight fluctuations from election-to-election.

As the nation progresses, the changes in government priorities have facilitated shifts in civic education requirements. Today, civics and government curriculum is mostly decentralized with a focus on teaching history and U.S. constitutional principles (Every Student Succeeds Act 2015). One non-profit based out of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania yearns for a different approach for educating the future citizens of the world. *MicroSociety*® is a whole-school reform model that allows students to create and work in their own miniature society. Students have jobs, elect government representatives, create laws, use currency, and learn about real-world skills that aid in their development. From the surface, *MicroSociety* appears to have all of the ingredients necessary to mold life-long leaders and effective citizens; nonetheless, there has been very little research to track *MicroSociety* outcomes. This project attempts to analyze the civic engagement behaviors and attitudes of students who attend a *MicroSociety* school using a reliable national survey model. By using two distinctly different sample schools, this research hopes to provide a deeper understanding of the importance and need for new methods of teaching civics education in America.

Chapter 1: Educating 'Citizens' in America

From the ancient Greek city states to the Age of Revolution, the founding fathers were inspired by the pioneers who contemplated the relationship between individuals and the polity (Turner and Richardson 2000: 880). As affirmed in the Declaration of Independence, they believed that the government should assume its power through the people and that only an educated citizenry could protect against future attempts to obstruct sacred liberties. In an address to Congress, George Washington underscored these sentiments when calling for a national focus on government education asking, "In a Republic, what species of Knowledge can be equally important?" (Washington 1796). The founders understood education as a means of educating political leaders; however, they often maintained an elitist view that barred certain people from participating based on wealth and social status. Citizenship education was also considered a primary goal of education in America with Thomas Jefferson arguing that reading was the most important aspect for raising citizens. According to Jefferson, once men learned how to read they would be able to consume information from newspapers and form their own political ideals. In contrast, Horace Mann, known as the father of public schools, considered it necessary to teach pupils common values as well as how to vote to bring about social change (Spring 2006: 9). History was a viewed as a satisfactory medium and emerged as the main subject matter for teaching citizenship (Turner and Richardson 2000: 881).

Despite the early acknowledgment of the importance of teaching civics in America, the nation continues to struggle in developing programs that produce a more civically engaged society. This chapter will survey the literature surrounding civics education in America in order to understand the changing priorities of learning. This chapter will also provide an overview of

the meaning of 'civic engagement' and school programs that have been implemented to address weaknesses on this front.

History of Civics Education

Beginning in the 1900s, political scientists called for a wider breadth of citizenship education to go beyond the mere learning of history. A series of reports and recommendations lead to the establishment of 'social studies,' a field of study 'to develop effective, critically thinking, and participatory citizens through the study of history and the social sciences' (Turner and Richardson 2000: 881). This broad theoretical model was to be used as a guide for local school districts to produce their own curriculum instead of adhering to a national standard (Barr, Barth and Shermis 1977: 31). In the end, the effort to create a more valuable learning experience through social studies was scrutinized as unsuccessful when the New York Regents (1938) conducted an investigation of social studies outcomes. It was found that students were 'reluctant to assume responsibility for civic competencies and [had] the general attitude respecting civic participation, let George do it' (Barr, Barth and Shermis 1977: 39). The *New York Times* (1943) corroborated these findings in a similar study that reported on college freshman and their lack of basic history knowledge showing that social studies was struggling to produce results on either front.[1] The negative perception of deficient learning outcomes ultimately prompted a new restructuring of social studies.

The 1960s witnessed a shift from 'social studies' to 'social sciences' in an effort to reform a failed, but well-intentioned initiative. Several task forces were formed by both public and private entities to re-write curriculum. Few projects concentrated on curriculum for the

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[1] Fine, Benjamin, "Ignorance of U.S. History Shown by College Freshmen," *New York Times*, 4 April, 1943.

purpose of citizenship education; instead, a rejuvenated focus on history and an untried

application of social sciences became widespread. This new conception aimed "to teach students

both the concepts and the methods of inquiry used by historians and social scientists to generate

knowledge" (Barr, Barth and Shermis 1977: 45). What was once seen as two distinct scholarly

areas were now understood to have interdisciplinary correspondence. Nonetheless, mixed results

from the National Assessment of Citizenship Education and a survey by Education Testing, Inc.

(1969) suggested minimal changes in student achievement (Barr, Barth and Shermis 1977: 48).

Yet another unsuccessful attempt to improve civic knowledge lead to a push to retreat back to

'the basics' by teaching facts and desired civic values. This style of teaching citizenship

education is most common when analyzing past and current trends (Turner and Richardson 2000:

883).

In 1989, 50 state governors attended an education summit in which citizenship education

was described as necessary and 'a new standard of an educated citizenry is required' in which all

students 'must understand and accept the obligations of citizenship' (Turner and Richardson

2000: 884). Along with state governments, think tanks and other private agencies also began to

explore ways to generate a more enlightened and engaged populace. Two groups were most

notably dedicated to revitalizing a curriculum for civics: The Center for Civic Education and the

Council for the Advancement of Citizenship. After researching over 40 state curriculums

containing civic education, it was concluded that several fundamental issues remained. The

findings showed a disconnect related to goals of citizenship education, how to conceptualize

citizenship, and why this material was relevant for students (Turner and Richardson 2000: 884).

From here, the Center for Civic Education and the Council for the Advancement of Citizenship

formed a working group to create a series of guidelines for public and private schools alike in

order to enhance civic education. The effort resulted in *Civitas: A Framework for Civic Education*, a comprehensive document to better define themes and nuances in civic education. In 1994, the National Council for the Social Studies developed their own definition and standards for social studies with a main objective of teaching citizenship (Turner and Richardson 2000: 885).

The turn of the century was met with an extensive shift in public education. Passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) established federal testing guidelines in an effort to ensure educational accountability amongst states. Under the new stringent system, reading and mathematics instruction were reaffirmed as a top priority in comparison to other subjects that did not require standardized testing to track proficiency (Hinde 2008: 77). One result of this was the marginalization of social studies in terms of instructional time. A longitudinal study by Gail McEachron (2010) revealed an average of less than two hours per week of social studies in the elementary level with non-academic activities receiving more devotion. McEachron predicts that social studies will continue to diminish in stature so long as standardized testing remains only for other core-subjects (McEachron 2010: 215).

Recent Changes

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools released a report in 2003 and an updated version in 2011 to address the shortfalls related to civic education in America. The report highlights a decreased emphasis on civic learning in schools as well as the teaching of improper content that is unsuccessful in preparing students to be active participants in a democracy. In an effort to counteract the current trends, the report offers six "proven practices" that school officials may adopt:

> **Proven Practice #1**:
> Provide Instruction in government, history, law, and democracy.

Proven Practice #2:
Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events into the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.

Proven Practice #3:
Design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.

Proven Practice #4:
Offer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities.

Proven Practice #5:
Encourage student participation in school governance.

Proven Practice #6:
Encourage students' participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

In 2012, under President Barack Obama, the Department of Education (DOE) released their own recommendations for instilling more civic learning within schools. These recommendations included encouraging civic education as core requirements for all grade levels, developing outcomes related to civic learning, strengthening partnerships between schools and communities, furthering research related to public welfare, and increasing civic engagement efficacy by sharing stories via social media and other deliberative platforms. Currently, subpart 3 of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) authorizes "American History and Civics Education" with the intention to teach students "about the history and principles of the Constitution of the United States, including the Bill of Rights" (Every Student Succeeds Act 2015). With history of the Constitution and Bill of Rights as the only civic related material mentioned in the ESSA, it is up to each state to write curriculum that directly relates to civic education if they wish to

incorporate it in learning. This means that there are likely to be significant differences in civic education requirements.

Defining Civic Engagement

For the purpose of research, voting has been classified as the most usual measure of political participation (Ekman and Amnå 2012: 285). While this linkage may be partially due to readily available data on voting behaviors, participation in the electoral process has been emphasized as an indicator of effective political engagement since the 1970s. Such definitions describe political participation as legal acts "by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take" (Verba and Nie 1972: 2). Recognizing that there are more ways to influence political outcomes beyond the constitutional right to vote, definitions for political participation have been expanded over the years to cover protest behaviors and other civil activities that seek to influence the decisions of public officials (Ekman and Amnå 2012: 286). Nonetheless, even this broadened meaning restricts political participation to only those acts that "concentrate on governmental decisions" thus excluding civil pursuits that attempt to shape more general political outcomes (Verba and Nie 1972: 2).

Henry Brady, Dean at the University of California, Berkeley and former President of the American Political Science Association, builds on the concept of political participation by emphasizing the role of ordinary citizens. He argues that actions taken by political elites within their own realm of work does not constitute political participation. Additionally, Brady acknowledges that there is a difference between thoughts and actions with thoughts suggesting political engagement and actions denoting political participation. He writes, "Measures of political engagement, such as political interest, political efficacy, political information, strength

of partisanship, and intense concern about a political issue, only gauge the motivations or dispositions inclining people to become involved in politics; they do not tell us whether someone undertakes political activity" (Brady 1999: 737).

Drawing on the works of Brady, Teorell et al. offer a closer look at political participation using five comprehensive dimensions: *voting, consumer participation, party activity, protest activity, and contacting.* Consumer participation includes buying or boycotting certain market goods for political reasons, raising funds or donating money, and signing petitions (Teorell et al. 2007). This typology seeks to contrast 'exit'-based and 'voice'-based mechanisms for influencing politics. Key characteristics of exit-based activities include anonymity, a vague message, and a self-regulatory process. For instance, voting in an election would be considered an exit-based strategy because one's ballot history is not public, the vote is unconditional in the moment, and the individual engages in the practice on their own. Voice based options include making specific and public demands by means of coercion. Protest activity is an example of this type of mechanism (Teorell et al. 2007).

Although rich and extensive, this new development by Teorell et al. was met with skepticism. In 2012, political scientists Joakim Ekman and Erik Amnå published an article criticizing the typology for not accounting for "latent" or "pre-political" engagement as another form of political participation. Believing that "People of all ages and from all walks of life engage socially…outside of the political domain, but nevertheless in ways that may have political consequences," Ekman and Amnå created a new typology that separates latent and manifest forms of political participation (Ekman and Amnå 2012: 288). Manifest political participation includes measurable actions that intend to influence government, whereas latent political participation includes mere attentiveness and association with societal issues. Ekman

and Amnå label civic engagement under latent political participation distinguishing between individual and collective forms. They define individual forms of civic engagement as "activities based on personal interest in and attention to politics and societal issues" and collective forms of civic engagement as "voluntary work to improve conditions in the local community, for charity, or to help others" (Ekman and Amnå 2012: 292). In all, this new typology demonstrates a correlation between political participation and civic engagement as two distinct, yet connected concepts.

While Ekman and Amnå have generalized political participation to involve civic engagement, others have taken the opposite approach. First introduced in his book *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* (2000), Thomas Ehrich provides an understandable and popular definition of civic engagement. He writes, "Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes" (Preface, vi). This definition clearly signals that civic engagement *entails* political participation.

Community Activism

Conversations surrounding civic engagement have shifted away from the individual-level of thinking to encompass collective activities for a common cause. Robert Putnam, one of the most cited scholars pertaining to social capital, fails to provide a concrete definition for civic engagement in his book, *Bowling Alone.* The findings of Robert Putnam, one of the most cited scholars pertaining to social capital, suggests that participation in community level activities have been declining due to the "cooperative" nature that forces people to rely on others. While Putnam fails to provide a concrete definition for civic engagement, he contributes to this

evolving conversation by describing "civic disengagement" as "declines in club meetings, visits with friends, committee service, church attendance" and other group activities within the community (Putnam 2000: 185). In this sense, civic engagement relies on partnership with other individuals and includes any activity that may spur a crowd to come together (Putnam 2000).

In a 2005 article published in the American Journal of Sociology, Sampson et al. address the "theoretical disconnect" surrounding Putnam's research and what it means to be civically engaged in American society. The authors call to question whether individual membership in social groups like the Elks Club or PTA really matter if it doesn't eventually lead to collective civic action. Instead of measuring seemingly ordinary civic activities, they argue that civic engagement should be characterized by "nonroutine events that are not initiated by the state or by political professionals, but by collectivities motivated by a particular issue to act together in public space" (Sampson et al. 2005: 711). This new rationale has since been expanded on in other studies.[2]

While volunteer work has been included in several definitions for civic engagement, the concepts are sometimes reported as interchangeable. For example, "Volunteering for charities" was the sole example to describe civic engagement in a 2012 study examining correlations between social media use and individual social capital, civic engagement, and political participation (Zúñiga et al. 2012: 320). The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement report that "Civic engagement is generally understood to mean working for the betterment of one's community" (McIntosh and Munoz 2009: 5). This classification of

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[2] Ebert, Kim and Dina G. Okamoto. 2013. "Social Citizenship, Integration and Collective Action: Immigrant Civic Engagement in the United States." *Social Forces.* 4 (June): 1267-1292.

civic engagement is wide in scope and may encompass many different activities so long as the community is being improved in some way.

Conceptual Distinctions

When considering all of the various typologies, what constitutes an appropriate definition of "civic engagement" seems fairly unclear. In an effort to better understand the different forms of political and civic engagement and participation, the Processes Influencing Democratic Ownership and Participation (PIDOP) project make conceptual distinctions regarding the commonly used terminology. The first distinction is drawn between the words 'political' and 'civic' with 'political participation' referring to activities that intend or succeed at influencing government and 'civic participation' referring to voluntary activities that help others in a community. Following this contrast, a further distinction was made between 'participation' and 'engagement' with 'participation' referring to active behaviors and 'engagement' referring to psychological features. Psychological features include "having an interest in, paying attention to, or having knowledge, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, or feelings about either political or civic matters" (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014: 6).

Despite the many nuances of word choice, Peter Levine, Director for The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, seeks to present a simpler way of defining civic engagement. Instead of emphasizing distinct behaviors or attitudes, he suggests that civic engagement is a collaborative process for bettering one's community. This definition will be the focus of how civic engagement is defined for the rest of this research project. His exact thoughts are quoted below.

"Active citizens seek to build, sustain, reform, and improve the communities to which they belong, which range from small voluntary associations to the world. Active citizens deliberate

with peers to define public problems and then collaborate with peers to address those problems. In doing so, they honor certain virtues, such as equal respect for others and a degree of loyalty to their communities that does not preclude critical thinking and dissent. Collaboration—actual work—is just as important as deliberation. People who merely talk about public issues are ineffectual and often naïve or misinformed; we learn from acting together. By collaborating, citizens construct or build public goods: tangible goods like schools and markets, and intangible ones like traditions and norms. In doing so, they create civic relationships, which are scarce but renewable assets for civil society" (Levine 2012).

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Does Civic Education lead to Civic Engagement later in life?

As seen when reviewing the history, perceptions of civic education and how it should be incorporated into classroom learning has changed dramatically over the years. Such changes in practices that were often unstandardized makes it extremely difficult to determine whether civic education correlates with civic engagement later in life. With this being noted, there are studies that assess how civic education initiatives impact current students. A large-scale study by Kahne and Sporte (2008) found that civic learning opportunities offered by schools was the greatest predictor of students' commitments to civic engagement (Kahne and Sporte 2008).

When looking at different methods of teaching citizenship education, Lin (2015) finds that civic engagement outcomes vary. The study by Lin analyzed character education, political simulations, and service-learning, as three separate programs that may produce civic engagement outcomes. Results of the study suggested that character education improve students' civic engagement on a school level, political simulations improve students' civic engagement on a community level, and service-learning improves civic engagement on both the school and community level (Lin 2015). It is important to assess differences in program outcomes when making policies geared towards specific civic engagement outcomes. Different approaches to civic education may dictate how a student gets involved once he or she becomes a full member of the larger society.

MicroSociety is one educational program that combines classroom civic education with political simulations that mimic a real society. While this program is not entirely new, the perceived decrease in civic engagement in America calls for a more reliable approach to educating future citizens. By analyzing the *MicroSociety* model, we may have a better idea of what types of programs succeed or fail in developing a civic engagement mindset. If successful, this program may ultimately encourage more civic engagement later in life.

Chapter 2 - The *MicroSociety* Model

In 1967, George Richmond began his career as an educator in a high-poverty elementary school in Brooklyn, New York. A graduate of Yale University, Richmond was assigned to class 5-308, a class filled with defiant fifth-graders who were known to be among the worst-behaved in the school. Falling victim to petty power politics at the hands of the veteran students, the rookie teacher tried everything to regain control of his troublesome class- from strict seating charts to keeping students past instruction time. None of his strategies seemed to work. In a last ditch effort to control the class and save his sanity, Richmond launched a classroom experiment that would eventually develop into the *MicroSociety*® program (Richmond 1997: 3-23).

It started with a simple question: "How many of you want to know how the rich get rich?" Every student in the class raised a hand and Richmond proceeded to explain the real-world concepts of property, real estate, and interest. It was plain to see that the students were more captivated by the economics lesson than any other past subject for discussion. Phase one was complete and Richmond prepared to follow up with the discussion after the students returned from recess. This time, Richmond brought the economic concepts to life by implementing a set of class rules that resembled a game of monopoly. The students could buy and sell parts of the classroom with play money ("soul dollars") that was earned through good academic performance. Although initially hesitant, the class slowly began to understand and actually enjoy the Micro-Economy game. The game became more complex as Richmond introduced classroom jobs and the marketplace in which students could "…make deals, borrow money, sell land, buy houses, form partnerships, visit the bank, or pay and collect rent…" (Richmond 1997: 28).

Five months into the school year, word got around that teachers holding permanent certifications would be replacing the teachers with conditional licenses; Richmond was no exception. Despite the positive shift in behavior and learning in 5-308, as observed by both parents and administrators, Richmond was still scheduled to be transferred to a new district outside of Montrose Avenue. The neighborhood surrounding the new school was very different from the Brooklyn burrow that Richmond experienced. Most people were Greek and Italian Catholic who worked hard to be considered middle-class. Unlike class 5-308 that was filled with an excessive number of 'bad apples,' class 5-319 appeared peaceful and orderly upon Richmond's arrival. There was only one student who caused significant disruptions: Robert who was known for his extortions. Robert had a bad habit of taking lunch money and other personal items from the younger students in the school. Several parents wrote to the school about Robert's behavior and how it negatively impacted their children's livelihood and health. Determined to transform Robert's behavior and protect him from expulsion, Richmond set up a meeting with Robert and his parents. A school social worker was also present and proposed that Robert keep a diary that would require a daily entry from Richmond and a signature from Robert's mother. The diary promoted good behavior for about a week until Robert began reverting to his old ways.

Not even the Micro-Economy game, which Richmond had launched at his new school, was safe from Robert's extortions. Students complained that Robert was rich because he was stealing all of their money. Instead of lecturing Robert once again, Richmond decided to use what was happening as a learning opportunity. One day when Robert missed school, Richmond had the class write essays about how Robert mistreated them. After writing and reading the essays aloud, the students grew even more angry as they realized that Robert had stolen soul dollars from three-quarters of the class. Richmond shifted the heated discussion from classroom

etiquette to real-world litigation asking, "What do people do when they don't like something a person's doing to them, or to their property?" (Richmond 1997: 53). Students began to chime in with pleas to call the police. Richmond reminded class 5-319 that someone can't be arrested unless they break the law. From there, the students came up with a law, trial process, and job descriptions for attorneys and juries. Before trial was set, the school principal transferred Robert to another class for repeated assault. Nonetheless, the court system became a new addition to the Micro-Economy as a safeguard against future offenders.

When the school year ended, the Selective Service System reassigned Richmond as Assistant Director of the Transitional Year Program (TYP), a program affiliated with Yale that provided minorities with an additional year of schooling before heading to college. In his time working for TYP, Richmond met a dean at Yale who left the university to become the Director of Broad Jump, a program that collaborates with Boys' Clubs of New York to identify minority students between the ages of nine and thirteen from high-poverty areas who may benefit from a specialized summer camp. The previous dean was fascinated by Richmond's Micro-Economy and invited him to implement the game on a wider scale at Broad Jump's Trinity Campus. Richmond accepted the offer and the game expanded as a model for six other teachers. The students were rewarded for their academic efforts and the teachers reported each individual salary at the end of the week. Four afternoons a week, students were permitted to spend their Micro-Economy money at auctions for educational and recreational goods. The program proved triumphant in its ability to excite the young men, encourage extra work, and teach them valuable life lessons about collaboration and morality. Richmond was invited to return the following year with the power to speak to the teachers on opening day and offer tips on facilitating a successful and autonomous Micro-Economy. Along with many other pieces of advice, Richmond stressed

the importance of letting the kids be in charge and motivated the teachers stating, "If we want them to run the world, we must give them a world to run" (Richmond 1997: 63).

Many beginner Micro-Economy facilitators feared the unpredictability that the Micro-Economy game presented; however, Richmond knew that new issues and circumstances inevitably turn into significant learning experiences for both teacher and student. Richmond also wanted facilitators to understand that the program may be abused and create undesirable results if people were not careful. He believed students should not be forced to surrender to democratic and capitalist norms. Instead, students should be given the freedom to create their own economy and government that may be amended when it proves to be an unfit model. Additionally, while he urged the use of currency as a learning incentive, he did not believe that teachers should pay or fine students for behavior control. Money was for the sole purpose of awarding hard work whether that be in "academics, employment, [or] civics" (Richmond 1997: 84).

Over time, Richmond came to realize that the classic token economy scheme was backfiring and not necessary to run the program. He noticed that when more classrooms got involved in the game, there was a greater opportunity for students to create goods and services and then sell them at the Market Place. Some students decided to invest their money to start business ventures. Examples of these start-ups included a newspaper, a postal service, a loan agency, and a popcorn business. New disputes led to the creation of laws and the formation of Peace Officers. Through trial and error, Richmond found that students learn more when they are responsible for creating and running their school society. Instead of trying to instill good behavior and increased academic performance through an extrinsic reward system, Richmond encouraged teachers to act as facilitators and help students identify intrinsic motivations for attending school and learning. But beyond being intrinsically motivated by entrepreneurial

passion and creative curiosity, students noticed a need for unity through a government system (Richmond 1997: 137-144).

Civic Engagement in a MicroSociety

Students eagerly lined up to participate in a constitutional convention that was organized by a handful of teachers. Every class in the school elected two representatives and an alternative to represent their interests in this new organization. Instead of simply giving the children pre-established roles and tasks, the teachers facilitated a four-month-long process in which the students had the opportunity to create and establish a government from the ground up. Students debated questions on who should be allowed to attend the convention, who should be able to vote on the constitution, who can submit amendments, when and how to vote, and most importantly: should they have a communist government, democracy, or police state (Richmond 144-152).

The question asking which government structure would be best for the school to adopt took nearly a month to answer. In the end, a democracy won over a police state by just one vote. Following this initial stage in the political process, the convention spent the next two months drafting a constitution that would be voted on by all students in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The constitution was later accepted by the student body thus initiating the next step: selecting public officials. In all, the model that the students formulated resembled the democratic process that we see in America. The act of building the society required students to think critically about the government in which they live. This exercise continues to guide *MicroSociety* schools today with no government structure being completely the same.

The Spread of MicroSociety

Richmond helped establish the *MicroSociety* program at several New York City schools earning media coverage in *Saturday Review* and *Newsweek Magazine.* Richmond's dissertation, *The Micro-Society School: A Real World in Miniature*, was published in 1973 when he completed his Ph.D at Harvard. Richmond later became Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Economic Development in Hartford, Connecticut where he helped start *MicroSociety* programs in the Hartford school district. The idea was spreading as more people began to hear about the creative approach to classroom learning.

When a school in Lowell, Massachusetts fell under pressure from the courts to desegregate, they found that something similar to George Richmond's class experiment would be most promising for a smooth transition by encouraging voluntary enrollment in magnet schools. In 1981, Lowell introduced City Magnet School, the first ever schoolwide *MicroSociety* program educating kindergarten through grade eight. Characteristics of a school-wide model include all students having at least one job in the society, one hour of micro time per day in which students report to their jobs, and the incorporation of *MicroSociety* concepts into everyday lessons and curriculum. City Magnet School attracted attention from prominent news outlets including *Time Magazine.* Several schools became interested in adopting a model creating a need for a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the transition and creating a school network. Richmond and his wife, Carolynn King, established the nonprofit in 1991 and quickly got to work on organizing a national conference to train teachers and administrators. King, an attorney by trade, developed a passion for education reform by means of *MicroSociety* and attended Harvard to pursue a master's degree in education. Together Richmond and King wrote and published a 500 page *MicroSociety* Handbook to be utilized by program facilitators. MSI also created the *MicroSociety* curriculum and a three-year training sequence to help transition new schools (Cherniss 2006).

The federal government approved the *MicroSociety* program as a "comprehensive school reform model" in 1998; thus, allowing qualifying schools to receive compensation for incorporating the program. This facilitated growth and program support with nearly 200 schools amongst 40 different states beginning implementation shortly thereafter. As more schools participated, new revisions and refinements were made to the program. By 2011, *MicroSociety* had been acquired by nearly 300 schools impacting 250,000 students. While the program had its roots in an urban setting, both inner-city and rural areas adopted the program and "Its appeal seemed to cut across class, regional, and ethnic lines" (Cherniss 2006: 10).

The Challenges in Implementing MicroSociety

While several schools recorded positive results upon incorporating *MicroSociety*, other schools struggled with implementation. In 2002, during the annual *MicroSociety* conference, educators discussed the lack of "buy-in" from teachers. It was obvious that teacher commitment to the program fluctuated based on personal preference, teaching style, and concerns as to whether *MicroSociety* was the best use of school time. Because school-wide models require participation from everyone, the program appeared les effective when less teachers fully embraced the concept. Additionally, the lack of support often leads to interpersonal conflicts between teachers, coordinators, and administrators who disagree about the program and how it functions (Cherniss 2006).

In 2002, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act that established federal testing guidelines in an effort to ensure educational accountability amongst states. As described by Cherniss (2006), educational reform programs such as *MicroSociety* suffered to gain support from educators who feared they would take time away from instruction that is necessary to "pass the tests." Email correspondence with *MicroSociety* CEO, Carolynn King Richmond, provided

deeper context on how this legislation influenced their operations. According to Richmond, not only did the legislation impose stricter testing guidelines with little federal support for success, but the voids within public schools contributed to the booming Charter School movement. Instead of moving on to only support *MicroSociety* development within charter schools, the organization decided to work with both charter and public schools (Richmond Email correspondence).

The Modern MicroSociety

In recent years, *MicroSociety* has expanded their reach by working overseas as well as in after-school settings. Specifically, *MicroSociety* is growing in countries that place less emphasis on standardized testing. For example, in Canada the province in Alberta has a "Three E" focus for schooling: engaged students, ethical citizens, and entrepreneurship. Despite the geographical growth, MicroSociety has downscaled their operations to have more intimate relationships with current schools who are successfully implementing the program and looking for opportunities to grow locally (Richmond Email correspondence).

MicroSociety International is currently a non-profit organization that supports 120 schools in the United States and five other sites around the world. The current *MicroSociety* model follows seven core principles that help to explain the purpose behind the program. The seven Principles of *MicroSociety* include "Student Voice and Choice, Learning by Doing, Entrepreneurial Spirit, Real World Experiences, Teachers as Facilitators, Shared Responsibility and Authority, and Partners as Contributors" (Richmond & Richmond, 1996). In an effort to advocate for multiple intelligences, *MicroSociety* also utilizes the TEACH acronym that stands for technology, economy, academy, citizenship, and HEART (humanity, ethics, aesthetics,

respect and responsibility, and trust and tolerance). The HEART strand is the center of service-oriented projects for students involved with *MicroSociety* (Richmond Email correspondence).

The Outcomes of MicroSociety

The majority of program evaluations surrounding *MicroSociety* have assessed outcomes in academic performance. Only a handful of studies have been conducted and have provided evidence that the *MicroSociety* program increases academic performance and school attendance. Due to the lack of alumni information for research purposes, there is little to no longitudinal data depicting how the *MicroSociety* program correlates with achievement later in life. According to Co-Founder and CEO of *MicroSociety*, Carolynn King Richmond, tracking alums has been a difficult feat due to education privacy laws (telephone interview 2018).

City Magnet School, the first school-wide *MicroSociety* model, was at the center of speculation related to program outcomes. Lowell had a city-wide magnet program that encouraged each school to increase diversity quotas. City Magnet School managed to increase their diversity while also increasing academic success. An unpublished report specified that City Magnet School had the best school-wide performance and highest attendance rate relative to other Lowell schools in 1988. While the *MicroSociety* in Lowell was unique for being the first to develop and implement a school-wide model, later research suggested that City Magnet School was not the only *MicroSociety* to achieve impressive results.

Arete Corporation, an independent research organization evaluated seven different *MicroSociety* schools from year 1996 to year 2002. The average improvement of all of the schools per year was 29% in reading, 42% in writing, 35% in math, and 158% in science. A more in-depth study was conducted with two schools in which a control group was utilized. Both

schools reported higher improvements for the Micro group than the randomized control groups

who did not work under the *MicroSociety* program and curriculum (Cherniss 2006).

As noted on their website, *MicroSociety* has worked to broaden how schools define

"achievement" to contain measures beyond performance on standardized tests. Nonetheless,

MicroSociety does not currently conduct research to identify other "achievements" as evidenced

by more non-traditional measures. How students engage civically is just one example of a non-

traditional measure that our society could consider when looking at school performance and

outcomes.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study is to determine whether *MicroSociety* affects the civic engagement attitudes and behaviors of students who experience the program. Given the lack of alumni tracking and data, this study is a post-test only design with students who currently attend a *MicroSociety* school. The independent variable is the *MicroSociety* program and the dependent variable is civic engagement as measured by six different constructs: The null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in the reported levels for *MicroSociety* schools and the national sample. The alternative hypothesis is that there is a significant difference in the reported levels for *MicroSociety* schools and the national sample.

<div align="center">

Null Hypothesis: $H0 = \mu1 = \mu2$
Alternative Hypothesis: $Ha = \mu1 \neq \mu2$

</div>

Research Setting

The research was conducted at two different *MicroSociety* elementary schools: Jersey City Global Charter School located in Jersey City, New Jersey and MicroSociety Academy Charter School located in Nashua, New Hampshire. Both schools have been awarded "4 Stars" by MSI, the highest honor that may be granted on an annual basis through an extensive school-reported analysis of program operations and results. Both school have also recorded notable achievements through state-wide standardized test scores; however, there is no conclusive evidence to assume that good performance is a direct result of the *MicroSociety* program or a combination of other variables. The two schools are described in more detail below.

MicroSociety Academy Charter School (MACS)

MicroSociety Academy Charter School (MACS) opened their doors in 2015 after an extensive four-year process to obtain a charter from the state of New Hampshire. MACS enrolled

100 students during their first year operating which is maximum capacity for a first year charter school in New Hampshire. MACS has experienced rapid growth since then. They now have 215 students from kindergarten to eighth grade, with the state board approving a 50% increase by 2024. In an in-person interview, Amy Bottomley, Director of MACS, explained that this increase will be more than necessary to meet the high demand of applicants. The high demand is partly due to the school's reputation of excellence. (personal communication, February 25, 2019). MACS had the highest test scores amongst all charter schools in New Hampshire and placed fifteenth out of all elementary schools in New Hampshire (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2017).

Approximately 100 students apply for the blind lottery each year with approximately 25 available openings. Using data from summer enrollment, the MACS student population is 64% White, 25% Asian, 16% Hispanic, and 0.5% Black. Fourteen students have a disability that requires an individualized education program. Currently, 14% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch (Susannah Williams, personal communication, February 25, 2019).

Jersey City Global Charter School (JCGCS)

Jersey City Global Charter School (JCGCS) officially opened in 2013 with the *MicroSociety* model as their guiding philosophy. Beginning with Kindergarten through Second grade, JCGCS has expanded each year and now serves Kindergarten through Seventh grade. JCGCS has a relatively strong performance record in the state of New Jersey. In an unpublished report by independent researcher Steve Kramer, JCGCS was evaluated in comparison to demographically similar schools across the state. Test scores for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), a test that is administered to students in Grades

3-8 in the state of New Jersey, showed that JCGCS was outperforming demographically similar schools in 3rd, 4th, and 5th Grades (Kramer 2018).

As reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Elementary and Secondary Information (ELSI) system, the most current records show that JCGCS is approximately 44% Asian, 38% Hispanic, 12% Black, and 6% White (U.S. Department of Education 2016-17). Data from the New Jersey Department of Education reported that 43% of students enrolled at JCGCS receive free or reduced lunch (New Jersey Department of Education 2017-18).

Procedures

All research was approved in advance by the Institutional Review Board at James Madison University. Parental consent forms were sent home with all fourth and fifth graders attending the schools in the sample two weeks prior to survey administration. As stated in the parental consent form, there were no direct benefits to students or parents for participating in the study. Parents were given a choice to opt their student out of the study if indicated on a signed and returned consent form. Students who opt-out by returning a signed parental consent form were not allowed to take the survey. Additionally, only students who signed an assent form on the day of the survey were allowed to participate in the study. Students completed the survey electronically using a computers and tablets as provided by the schools. The survey was administered solely by the researcher without teachers present in order to reduce the perception of coercion.

Measures

Students were asked to complete a survey that was first developed in 2006 by The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). The CIRCLE

conceptual framework for civic development was constructed to correlate to several different grade levels. The following measures were identified as the civic components deemed most salient for elementary grade levels:

> 1) "*Personal Responsibility*: The student demonstrates responsible behaviors and good judgment and accepts responsibility for one's own behavior. The student also demonstrates responsible work habits such as staying on task, working independently and showing best effort.
>
> 2) *Caring for Others and Community*: The student shows courtesy and respect for others and finds ways to help others. The student also shows respect for and is able to identify needs and solutions for group and community.
>
> 3) *Leadership*: The students takes initiative and acts as role model to help group, class or school to make a positive difference" (Circle 2006)

Additionally, each grade-specific category also contains other measures as advised by the National Center for Learning and Citizenship at the Education Commission of the States. These measures include Civic Knowledge, Civic Thinking Skills, Civic Participation Skills and Civic Dispositions. For the purpose of this study, the survey was condensed to contain only the measures deemed most salient for elementary grade levels with the inclusion of an additional measure: *School as Community*. This measure was kept in the condensed version due to its similarities to the definition from Peter Levine as discussed in the review of the literature. The survey constructs and questions are below:

SURVEY CONSTRUCTS AND QUESTIONS

Personal Responsibility:

Moral
1) If I break something, I try to fix it.
2) I put things away when I am done with them.
3) I always ty to do my best work.
4) If I do not do a good job, I try to do better the next time.

Conventional
5) I usually do what I'm supposed to do.
6) It is important for me to follow the rules even if no one is watching.
7) I think it is important for people to follow the rules.

Civic Responsibility

Concern for Others
8) I try to help when I see people in need.
9) When I make a decision, I try to think about how other people will be affected.
10) I try to be kind to other people.
11) I apologize when I hurt someone's feelings.
12) I want to help when I see someone having a problem.

Value of Group Work
13) To solve most problems, I have to learn how to work with others.
14) I can learn more from working on group projects than from working alone.
15) I like working with other people on group projects.

Caring for Community
16) I spend time on projects with other people to help the community.
17) I think it is important to change things that are unfair in society.
18) I have done things to help people in my community.
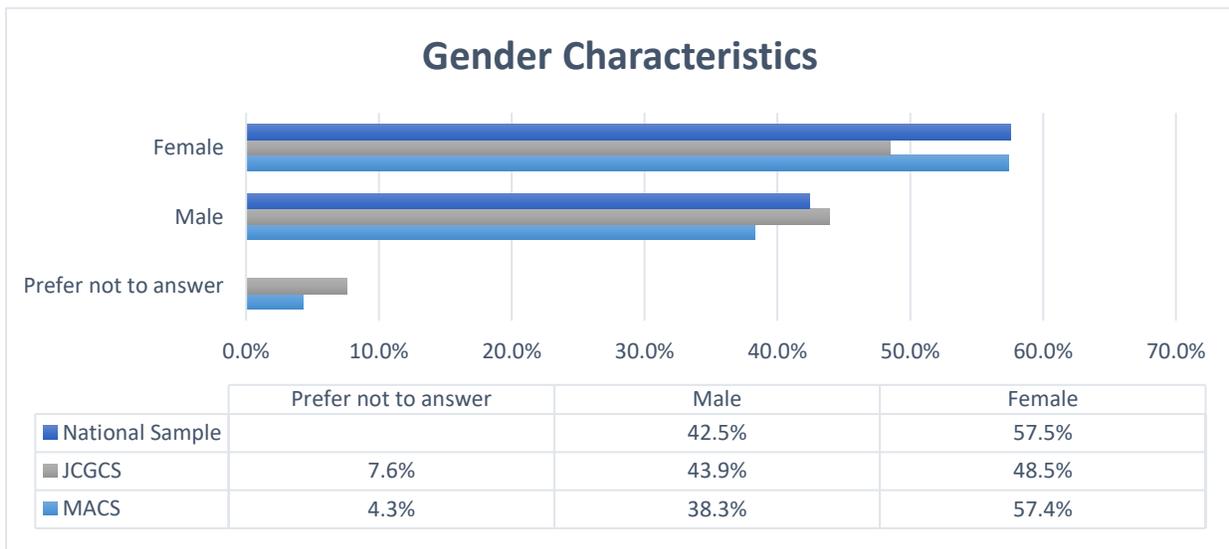19) I believe that I can make a diffrence in my community.

Leadership Efficacy:

20) Once I know what needs to be done, I a, good at planning how to do it.
21) When I see something that needs to be done, I try to get my friends to work on it w
22) I am pretty good at organizing a team of kids to do a project.
23) If I'm the leader of a group, I make sure that everyoe in the group feels important.
24) I feel like I can stand up for what I think is right, even if my friends disagree.
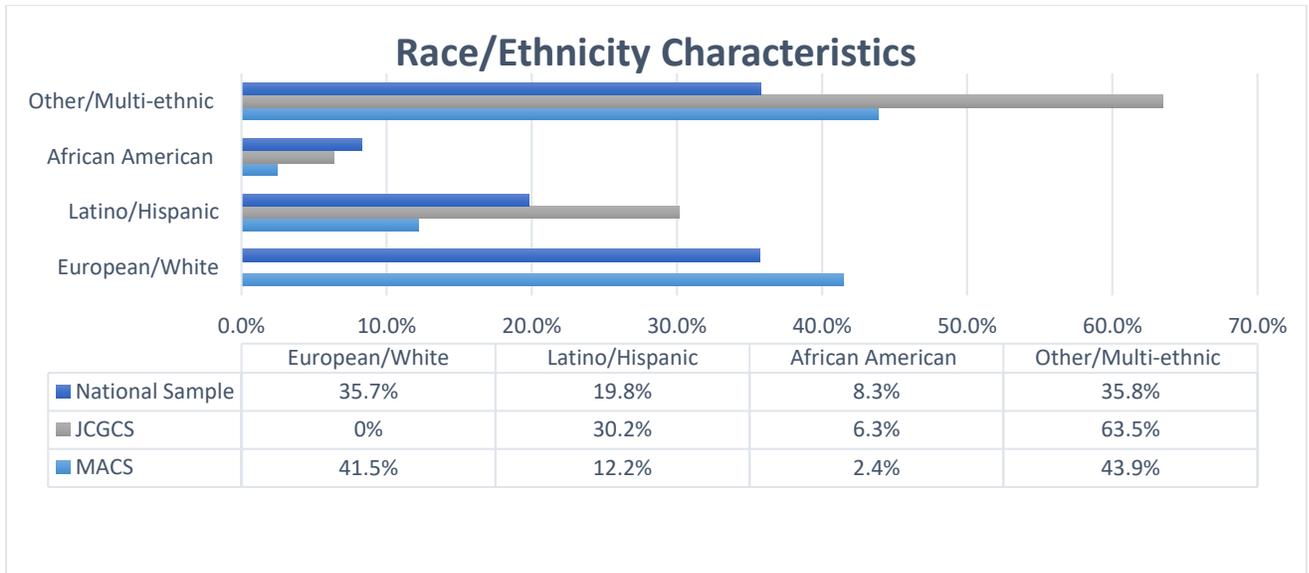25) When I see something that is wrong, I try to change it.

School as Community:

26) Most students at this school treat each other with respect.
27) Most students seem to care about each other, even people they do not know well.
28) Teachers at this school won't let students make fun of other students.

Participant Characteristics

The school settings provide a brief overview of what is to be expected from the participant pool. The full study consisted of 115 fourth and fifth grade students divided between the two sample schools. JCGCS had 68 participants (59.13%) and MACS had 47 participants (40.87%). Reported grade levels totaled almost evenly with 58 fourth grade students and 57 fifth grade students. A total of 59 females and 47 males participated in the study. A breakdown of the gender differences between schools is visualized in the chart below.

Gender Characteristics

	Prefer not to answer	Male	Female
National Sample		42.5%	57.5%
JCGCS	7.6%	43.9%	48.5%
MACS	4.3%	38.3%	57.4%

During the study, many students expressed confusion related to the race and ethnicity question. Particularly, several students from India were unsure whether to mark American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Other for their ethnic/racial group. For this reason, it was decided that collapsing the demographic categories would be the most appropriate step towards correcting the discrepancy. This information is displayed in the chart below.

Race/Ethnicity Characteristics

	European/White	Latino/Hispanic	African American	Other/Multi-ethnic
National Sample	35.7%	19.8%	8.3%	35.8%
JCGCS	0%	30.2%	6.3%	63.5%
MACS	41.5%	12.2%	2.4%	43.9%

Chapter 4: Analysis, Findings, and Implications

School Comparison

Analyzing the Q-Q Plots revealed a normal distribution for both MACS and JCGCS. Additionally, the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances confirmed a homogeneity of variance. Therefore, a series of independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare civic engagement attitudes and behaviors for MicroSociety Academy Charter School (MACS) and Jersey City Global Charter School. These tests are displayed in the table below:

Measure	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Personal Responsibility	.057	103	.955
Concern for Others	-.850	104	.397
Value of Group Work	1.441	103	.153
Caring for Community	-1.678	104	.096*
Leadership Efficacy	-.118	103	.906
School as Community	.260	103	.796

(Equal variance assumed) *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01; ****p<.001

A 90% confidence interval was used due to the small sample size. Beginning with *Personal Responsibility*, there was not a significant difference in the reported levels for MACS (M=3.8, SD=.36) and JCGCS (M=3.8, SD=.31) conditions; t(103) =.057, p =.955. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the variances of *Personal Responsibility* between the two sample schools and fail to reject the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in the variances between MACS and JCGCS.

Looking at *Concern for Others*, there was not a significant difference in the reported levels for MACS (M=3.7, SD=.37) and JCGCS (M=3.6, SD=.36) conditions; t(104) = -.850, p= .692. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the variances of *Concern for Others* between the two sample schools and reject the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in the variances between MACS and JCGCS.

For *Value of Group Work,* there was not a significant difference in the reported levels for MACS (M=3.4, SD=.59) and JCGCS (M=3.6, SD=.37) conditions; t (103)= 1.441, p= .153. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the variances of *Value of Group Work* between the two sample schools and reject the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in the variances between MACS and JCGCS.

The measure *Caring for Community* had a significant difference in the reported levels for MACS (M=3.5, SD=.51) and JCGCS (M=3.3, SD=.55) conditions; t (104)= -1.678, p= .096. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the variances of *Caring for Community* between the two sample schools and accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in the variance between MACS and JCGCS.

For *Leadership Efficacy*, there was not a significant difference in the reported levels for MACS (M=3.5, SD=.40) and JCGCS (M=3.5, SD=.35) conditions; t (103)= -.118, p= .906. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the variances of *Leadership Efficacy* between the two sample schools and reject the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in the variances between MACS and JCGCS.

Lastly, for *School as Community*, there was not a significant difference in the reported levels for MACS (M=3.5, SD=.59) and JCGCS (M=3.5, SD=.47) conditions; t (103)= .260, p=.796. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the variances of *School as Community* between the two sample schools and reject the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in the variances between MACS and JCGCS.

National Comparison

A one-sample t-test was conducted to determine if a statistically significant difference existed between civic engagement attitudes and behaviors from the sample *MicroSociety* schools

and the CIRCLE national sample. Again, a 90% confidence interval was used due to the small

sample size. Table 1 displays the summary statistics, mean differences, and statistical test.

Measure	Sample Mean (SD)	National mean (SD)	Mean Difference	p
Personal Responsibility	3.79 (.33)	3.49 (.44)	0.3	.000****
Concern for Others	3.66 (.36)	3.50 (.50)	0.15	.000****
Value of Group Work	3.48 (.60)	3.35 (.78)	0.13	.025**
Caring for Community	3.38 (.53)	3.09 (.65)	0.28	.000****
Leadership Efficacy	3.52 (.04)	3.21 (.51)	0.31	.000****
School as Community	3.47 (.52)	3.36 (.48)	0.12	.023**

*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01; ****p<.001

Fourth and Fifth grade students at the two sample *MicroSociety* schools reported overall

higher means for each measure as compared to the CIRCLE national sample. These differences

were significant at a 90% confidence interval (p<1.0). We can accept the null hypothesis that

there is a significant difference in means between the sample schools and the national sample for

all measures of civic engagement.

Gender Comparison

A Factorial ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of gender on civic engagement

behaviors and attitudes. The summary statistics are displayed in the table below.

| Measure	Male Mean (SD)	Female Mean (SD)	p
Personal Responsibility	3.71 (.42)	3.86 (.20)	.02**
Concern for Others	3.57 (.39)	3.75 (.30)	.014**
Value of Group Work	3.38 (.65)	3.59 (.55)	.071*
Caring for Community	3.31 (.58)	3.48 (.48)	.123
Leadership Efficacy	3.40 (.40)	3.62 (.38)	.003***
School as Community	3.45 (.57)	3.51 (.48)	.589

*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01; ****p<.001

When combining the JCGCS and MACS sample, there was a statistically significant

difference in which female participants reported higher levels than male participants in *Personal*

Responsibility, Concern for Others, Value of Group Work, and Leadership Efficacy. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between gender at 90% confidence for these measures. We fail to reject the null hypothesis for measures *Caring for Community* and *School as Community* at 90% confidence; however, while there was not a statistically significant difference for measures *Caring for Community* and *School as Community*, the simple means confirm that on average females reported higher levels in these categories as well.

Ethnicity Comparison

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare differences in civic engagement attitudes and behaviors between ethnic groups in the two sample *MicroSociety* schools. Despite the previously discussed issue concerning ethnicity identifiers on the survey, the tests were kept consistent with the survey responses. A consistent trend can be seen in which students identifying as African American reported lower levels of civic engagement for every measure. This trend is visualized in the graph below.
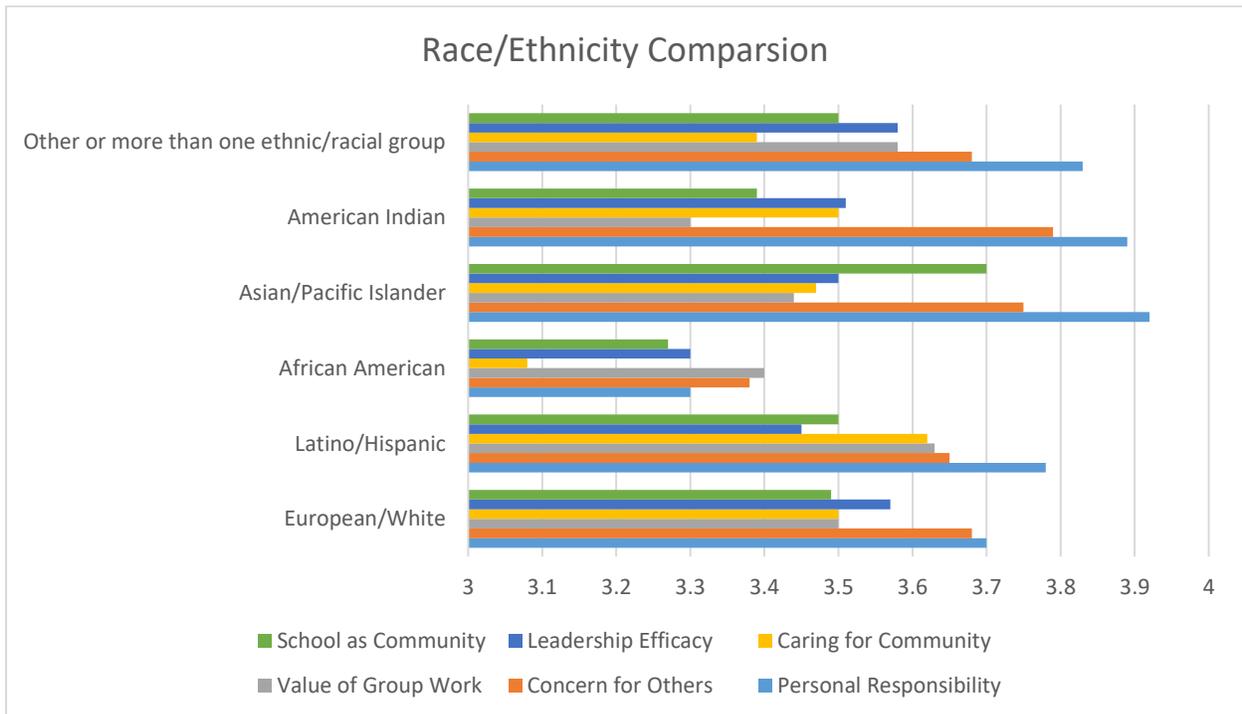
Students who identify as European/White and Asian/Pacific Islander did consistently

better than their peers who identified in another ethnic/racial group. Due to the small sample size

of students who identify as African American (n=5), this data may not be generalizable.

Limitations

It was difficult to accurately compare means without having access to the CIRCLE

national data set. While a One-Sample t-test was still possible, there was no way to look at the

CIRCLE data for just fourth and fifth graders in the national sample. While fourth and fifth

graders in the national sample were in the majority (n=432), sixth through eighth graders made

up 20 percent of the national sample (n=102). However, one would assume that sixth-eighth

graders would be more advanced than students in younger grades, and therefore having this

grade discrepancy may have only decreased the difference of means.

Since there was such a small sample for each racial/ethnic groups, the data is likely not

generalizable. This fact, coupled with the confusion that students had while taking the survey

related to their own race/ethnic group makes it difficult to draw sound conclusions about the

differences in means; nonetheless, graphing the data shows a trend that is relatively consistent in

literature surrounding achievement gaps in education[3]: white and Asian students reported higher

levels of civic engagement attitudes and behaviors as compared to their peers of difference

races/ethnicities. A larger study should be conducted in order to make stronger inferences

regarding these likely trends.

While the results of this study is promising related to the effectiveness of *MicroSociety*,

there is no way to completely contribute the success to the *MicroSociety* program. The high

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[3] Rathee, N. K. 2017. *Relooking at the Common Core Standards Through the Lens of Equity –
    Closing the Achievement Gap.* 13 (August) 22.

scores may be related to other factors at the school such as teacher quality, parental involvement, and self-selection bias considering both schools are chartered. Lastly, the national sample is much older and may fail to account for potential improvements in civic engagement achievement across the nation. The CIRCLE survey should be redistributed for a second national sample that would more accurately capture the civic engagement attitudes and behaviors of students in school today.

Implications

Despite the limitations of this study, there is good reason to believe that the *MicroSociety* program has a positive effect on the civic engagement attitudes and behaviors of students who are involved with the program. Students at the two *MicroSociety* schools outperformed students in their grades and older when compared to the CIRCLE national sample. There was little difference between the two *MicroSociety* schools suggesting that *MicroSociety* works well to teach civic engagement in both urban and more diverse settings. Difference across gender and ethnicity were mostly consistent with general trends in the literature in which females and those who identify as white reported higher levels of civic engagement attitudes and behaviors. This information suggests that there needs to be a more focused effort to grow the civic engagement mindsets of people who fall outside of this typical norm.

The knowledge gained from this study on *MicroSociety* may further support the research of Alex Lin wo found that political simulations increase civic engagement on a community level (Lin 2015). Additionally, this research may open the door for new school structures in localities looking to improve on citizen education. A future longitudinal study should be conducted to learn how *MicroSociety* affects civic engagement later in life.

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