Developing Social Responsibility Through Law-Related Education

by

JANICE K. COLVILLE
Forest Park High School
and

RODNEY H. CLARKEN
Department of Education
Northern Michigan University

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
San Francisco, April 20-24, 1992

ABSTRACT

This paper will explore the need for developing social responsibility and how social responsibility can be developed in schools through law-related education (LRE).

Developing social responsibility is one of the greatest challenges facing educators and leaders in today's world. The breakdown of social responsibility and our having dramatic effects on institutions and individuals.

Schools represent a major socializing influence for young people. All students need to be equipped with the knowledge, attitudes and skills to contribute and participate in society.

Problems are widespread in American society. They permeate the nation's institutions and will require tremendous effort to solve. Young people must be taught to care about other people and to make a personal investment in social and civic action in order to create a more humane and just society and world. Pine and Hilliard (1990) state that "a major goal of socialization should be to promote civic virtue and those qualities that enable children to become productive and dependable citizens in a just society" (p. 599).

Schools can no longer do business as usual. Students must develop effective citizenship for our present day multicultural society and world, and that of the 21st century.

The expectations and requirements for effective citizenship in the next century include: the ability to think and use reasoning skills at higher levels; the ability to empathize and understand others, especially those groups who present differing perspectives and points of view from their own; the ability to compare, contrast, weigh evidence and make reflective decisions when presented with diverse and conflicting perspectives; and the ability to think critically about data and information.

The complexities, contradictions and challenges of life facing students today and in the future will test schools and students to their limits. This will entail a realistic vision for an all-encompassing, just world, where all peoples can not only survive, but thrive.

Social responsibility is the foundation of this new civilization—it is the means for both individual and collective advancement. Human development and success depend on social responsibility. Schooling must play its part in developing social responsibility. All other education is related to and depends on this goal. If a child is well trained in knowledge but lacks social responsibility, that knowledge will prove harmful, not only to the person, but also to society.

Crime, suicide, substance abuse, illegitimate births, and other social problems have increased dramatically over the past few decades. A response to these problems has been an urging for schools to teach more traditional values and social responsibility. Schools, as major institutions for the transmission of culture and values, are also major transmitters and facilitators of social responsibility. Schools must take this responsibility seriously and prepare our students to be morally responsible adults. They must enable our students to deal with the multitude of problems facing them and our society. To effectively deal with these
One must have a moral framework and a strong character. Teachers need to be able to engage students in discussions on morality and character education. Students should be able to think through moral concepts, such as honesty and justice, and to apply these concepts to their individual and collective lives. By approaching and reflecting on current problems, teachers will enable students to develop their own characters and moral frameworks.

In the Michigan legislation, standards and who are able to model and teach the sense of social responsibility we wish to engender in our children. Aristotle's answer to how we know virtue was to consult wise men and to have statesmen decide on these virtues. Socialization and character education are viewed with suspicion--as indoctrination and an infringement on individual rights. Aristotle indicated that moral habits and dispositions that had to be ingrained in young people through training and repetition so that they would be disposed towards these virtues and to weed out weaknesses. Schools should not only promote academic, athletic, and artistic excellence, but also moral excellence.

The aforementioned values combined with those arrived at through consensus are values that are currently valid in the United States. They include justice, equality, diversity, authority, privacy, due process, participation, personal obligation for the public good, international human rights, equal rights, and economic justice, rule of law, civility, truth, tolerance, mutual assistance, personal and civic responsibility, self-restraint and self-respect (cited in Kaltsounis, 1992). Although these values represent the basic ideals and strengths of our society, it is important to realize that they are not practiced and that patterns of illegitimate authority can be challenged, that public power must contain institutional mechanisms capable of undoing injustice. (p. 354) That consciousness is an intense persuasion that we have rights - that when we are wronged there must be remedies, that set of values is the rule of law and the respect for authority. The expression of human rights and the legitimate exercise of power occurs only when an appropriate context is created. This context can be created by law and authority established by the people that functions to protect individual human rights.

Conversely, these conditions prevent them from participating fully in the way they are governed. The value of individual rights addresses the need for all people in a democratic system to develop a consciousness about those rights to which they can lay claim. Hertog (1988) calls this a constitutional rights consciousness and explains that consciousness is an intense persuasion that we have rights - that when we are wronged there must be remedies, that patterns of illegitimate authority can be challenged, that public power must contain institutional mechanisms capable of undoing injustice.

Ideological realignments may occur, questioning existing values and the legitimate exercise of power occurs only when an appropriate context is created. This context can be created by law and authority established by the people that functions to protect individual human rights

by redefining ideologies arise and people attempt to seek different solutions to the same problems. Once consensus has been reached, that agreement becomes a value that is not necessarily static or permanent and is not accepted by all people in a society. Ideological realignments may occur, questioning existing values and the legitimate exercise of power occurs only when an appropriate context is created. This context can be created by law and authority established by the people that functions to protect individual human rights.

The value of individual rights addresses the need for all people in a democratic system to develop a consciousness about those rights to which they can lay claim. Hertog (1988) calls this a constitutional rights consciousness and explains that consciousness is an intense persuasion that we have rights - that when we are wronged there must be remedies, that patterns of illegitimate authority can be challenged, that public power must contain institutional mechanisms capable of undoing injustice. (p. 354) That consciousness is an intense persuasion that we have rights - that when we are wronged there must be remedies, that patterns of illegitimate authority can be challenged, that public power must contain institutional mechanisms capable of undoing injustice.

By redefining ideologies arise and people attempt to seek different solutions to the same problems. Once consensus has been reached, that agreement becomes a value that is not necessarily static or permanent and is not accepted by all people in a society. Ideological realignments may occur, questioning existing values and the legitimate exercise of power occurs only when an appropriate context is created. This context can be created by law and authority established by the people that functions to protect individual human rights.

Philosophy, history, and religion also offer a great wellspring of values, morals, and character models that could be drawn upon to develop a moral framework. For example, Plato and Aristotle indicated four virtues that seem to transcend culture and time, and that might be part of a social responsibility: justice, temperance, courage, and wisdom.

They are drawn upon to develop a moral framework. For example, Plato and Aristotle indicated four virtues that seem to transcend culture and time, and that might be part of a social responsibility: justice, temperance, courage, and wisdom.

Training institutions must prepare their students to teach and serve as models of social responsibility. They must also select students with high moral standards and who are able to model and teach the sense of social responsibility we wish to engender in our children.

Legislation in Michigan would require for teacher certification a philosophy course to include at least all of the following ethical principles and theories: justice, temperance, courage, and wisdom.
nning characteristics associated with ethical behavior:

honesty: to be truthful, sincere, forthright, straight-forward, frank, and candid; to not cheat, steal, lie, deceive, or act deviously.
integrity: to be principled, honorable, and upright; to not be two-faced or unscrupulous.
promise-keeping: to be worthy of trust, keep promises, fulfill commitments, and abide by the spirit as well as the letter of an agreement.
loyalty: to be faithful and loyal to family, friends, employers, clients, and country.
fairness: to be fair and open-minded, willing to admit error, and, if appropriate, change positions and beliefs; to demonstrate a commitment to just the equal treatment of individuals.
caring for others: to be caring, kind, and compassionate; to share; to be giving and of service to others; to help those in need and avoid harming others.
respect for others: to demonstrate respect for others' property, human dignity, and privacy; to be courteous, prompt, and decent; to not embarrass, or demean.

Responsible citizenship: to obey the laws and, if a law is unjust, openly protest it; to exercise all democratic rights and privileges responsibly by participation through voting and expressing informed views, social consciousness, and public service; when in a position of leadership or author openly respect and honor democratic processes of decision making, avoid unnecessary secrecy or concealment of information, and assure that others have all the information they need to make intelligent choices and exercise their rights.
pursuit of excellence: to pursue excellence in all matters and in meeting personal and professional responsibilities; to be diligent, reliable, industrious and committed; to perform all tasks to the best of one's ability, develop and maintain a high degree of competence, and be well informed and prepared; to not be content with mediocrity; to not strive to "win at any cost".
accountability: to be accountable and accept responsibility for decisions, for the foreseeable consequences of actions and inactions. And for setting example for others. To avoid even the appearance of impropriety and to take necessary action to correct or prevent inappropriate conduct of others (Michigan Senate Bill No. 661, December 17, 1991, p. 5-7)

LAW-RELATED EDUCATION

related education (LRE) is one means by which young people become better informed and effective citizens. It provides them with an understanding of how it affects their daily lives. The Office of Education (1978) defines LRE as those organized learning experiences that provide students and educators with opportunities to develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, attitudes, and appreciations necessary to respond effectively to the law and legal issues in our complex and changing society. (p. 36-37)
g in our society has been broadly conceived as developing citizenship. The need for citizenship training is evermore apparent. Social responsibilities are an essential part of citizenship education. The families and schools are currently retreating from the responsibility of teaching students citizens values, leaving a vacuum in our society.

on for citizenship has been regarded the primary purpose of social studies education since 1916. Citizenship education in the social studies has a
ted education was established to revitalize citizenship education. Ferlong and Arbetman (1980) discuss the kind of curriculum required in order for education to occur:

a curriculum that fosters social responsibility, personal obligation for the public good, and effective participation in the social order. The curriculum should enable students understand the laws that determine the nature of the social order and must systematically engage them in the process of clarifying the meaning of authority; become more knowledgeable about the facilitative qualities of the legal system providing protection, social guidelines, order and harmony; and held authority figures accountable for certain standards of responsible conduct. (MLREP, 1988)


ted education has grown and matured since the mid-1960's, which has led to important new dimensions for its role in the classroom. According to a summary of research findings, students were able to discuss the meaning of authority, become more knowledgeable about the facilitative qualities of the legal system providing protection, social guidelines, order and harmony; and held authority figures accountable for certain standards of responsible conduct. (MLREP, 1988)

Characteristics distinguish LRE from traditional citizenship educational programs. These include the methods of instruction, skills development, and development of high interest, motivation and relevancy levels by students. The teaching methods used in LRE include case studies, room rules; to be more cooperative at the elementary school level with those in authority; to be less likely to repeat an offense after enrollment in a LRE program; to have a better understanding at the elementary school level of the reasons for classroom rules; to be more cooperative at the elementary school level with those in authority; to be less dependent on maintaining relationships with others engaged in delinquent behaviors; to be less likely to resort to violent solutions to problems; to be less likely to repeat an offense after enrollment in a LRE program; to have a better understanding of justice, authority, and social behavior. Studies have shown that teaching what constitutes illegal behavior and what the consequences of that behavior are can lead to building positive peer relationships and a reduction in delinquent behavior. According to a study results which indicated significant changes in students' attitudes. To a large extent, these reflect the nature and expectations of the educational reform movement. Consequently, LRE also develop an appreciation for the complexities of social conflict and legal decision making. By examining concepts of justice, authority, and social behavior, students are led to adopt fair procedures for conflict resolution as opposed to resorting to violence and anti-social behavior. Studies have shown that teaching what constitutes illegal behavior and what the consequences of that behavior are can lead to building positive peer relationships and a reduction in delinquent behavior. The combination of methods and content lead to higher levels of interest and relevancy for students of every educational background. Law-related education also helps students to become better prepared to relate to and understand law, as well as deal more effectively and responsibly with law as it permeates their daily lives. (cited in Van Camp & White, 1982).

studies have focused on the impact LRE has on students, their attitudes toward authority, and their involvement in delinquent behavior. According to Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, in his 1981 year-end report to the judiciary, expressed his concern for finding ways of not only reducing criminal docket, but also the damage done to human lives by illegal acts. His reference to LRE was encouraging, in that he cited study results which indicated that delinquency was cut significantly when LRE courses are properly taught in school. Justice Burger identified the vital features of LRE include student involvement in activities, such as case studies and mock trials, and active involvement of police officers, lawyers, judges, and others (cited in Van Camp & White, 1982).
Hersch conducted research on the effect the Cambridge Massachusetts District Court LRE program had on participating eighth grade students. She found that participatory programs involving judges and other court personnel positively influenced student attitudes toward the criminal justice system as they become adolescents. She also points out that although attitudes do not predict behavior, positive attitudes may help students develop into more responsible citizens (cited in Van Camp & White, 1982). An impact study to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of LRE in terms of its impact on students who participated in six found a decrease in students' acceptance of the use of violence to solve problems, and a decrease in their dependence on maintaining relationships with engaged in delinquent behavior (Hunter, 1987).

The relationship between the amount of LRE knowledge gained and improvement in attitudes and behavior were also evaluated. The findings indicate that the impact to be negligible or nonexistent. Students' factual knowledge of the law is important, in that it represents the basic building blocks of character, however, it is not enough by itself.

The creation of a situation and context in which students develop a thoughtfully reasoned belief in the legitimacy of our laws and justice system, and the belief that each student should obey those laws is LRE's contribution to character education and good citizenship. (Hunter, 1987, p. 62)

CONCLUSION

Social responsibility is the foundation of a just, peaceful, and united world. By encouraging students to develop a spirit of service to the world and a sensitivity to their own growth and to the welfare of the community, we lay a firm foundation for the development of a new world order.

Responsibility is manifested in several ways, such as: through one's behavior; the expression of one's attitudes, understanding and respect to law, authority and democratic principles; demonstrated respect for others; and an awareness of what constitutes effective citizenship. Development of responsibility is not something that just happens. It entails the development of basic skills, critical thinking, and valuing. By working through this process move away from positions of negative attitudes and counterproductive forms of behavior to those which are equated with good citizenship.

An viewing law as only punitive, students may also come to view it as necessary, supportive, valuable, changeable and understandable. This may respect for law and rules which govern their daily lives. One possible result is a reduction in the violation of laws and rules. Inherent in this process is an increase in knowledge, understanding and awareness of law, but also a commitment to the principles that underlie law.

The learning process also applies to many other areas, such as: perceptions of powerlessness versus control in society; comprehending issues of right and wrong the problematic nature of social issues; responsible decision making; making commitments and articulating reasons for those commitments; conflict management; handling both legitimate and illegitimate authority in a critically responsible manner; developing a knowledge base about the system and related issues; developing empathy, social responsibility and consideration for others; and developing a level of maturity in order to deal with legal and moral problems (Anderson, 1980). It is suggested that through the implementation of LRE programs, students' competencies, knowledge and ideas can lead to the appropriate learning outcomes necessary for their development into socially responsible citizens in our multicultural, global world.

References


Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. (September, 1989). *Guidelines for basic elementary education programs*. Washington, D.C.


