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Current Trends in Civic Education: An American Perspective

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"Citizenship" is a quality that most Americans would agree should be promoted in the schools. "Values education," as we have seen, provokes controversy and the question "Whose values are you going to teach?" An acceptable response is - "Values of citizenship, American democratic values, and the values upon which our country was founded."

Jefferson, Madison and Adams each said that a well-constructed constitution was not enough to maintain our democracy; a free society ultimately depended on its citizens and on their knowledge, skills, moral, and civic virtues. The "habits of the mind" and "habits of the heart" that Alexis de Tocqueville saw in the American democratic ethos need to be taught by word, study, and example (Quigley, 1996). Noted historian, R. Freeman Butts (1991) says that education for citizenship was the primary reason for establishing universal education in the American Republic. The purpose of universal school, Butts explains, is to develop among all students, whether in private or public schools, the virtues, sentiments, knowledge, and skills of citizenship. In short, the health and survival of our democracy rests on the character of its citizenry.

This paper shows us how the U.S. Blue Ribbon schools use their citizenship programs to assist in the development of the character of their students. Citizenship programs are usually found within the social studies curriculum but are also found integrated throughout the school in various other programs. This paper presents answers to the following questions:

- What are the essential characteristics that make a citizenship program character education and not just civic education?
- What are the democratic values that we want to foster in our nation's schools?
- Why is it important to involve students in decision making in order to develop character and citizenship?
- What are some ways that students can develop good character by caring within the classroom?

Civic Education versus Character Education

One needs to note what a school means by citizenship, in order to judge whether its citizenship program can be considered character education. If the school considers citizenship only to be learning about voting and laws, observing national holidays, and knowing leaders and historical figures, it is limiting citizenship to civic education, not character education (Letwin, 1991). Character education is much broader than this.

Character education means coming to understand, care about, and practice virtue. It includes learning the moral principles of a democratic society, namely, the perpetual struggle to live rationally within the boundaries of democratic tradition. This moral code is based on cultural history and is accepted as the ethic of our society. It should give students the ability to separate good from evil, fairness from unfairness, justice from injustice, and truth from falsehood.

Democratic Traits of Character

The Communitarian Network's task force paper on *The Role of Civic Education*, explains that civic education is not synonymous with character education; however, the two are related, and

their aims overlap in important respects. An effective civic education program should provide students with opportunities for the development of desirable traits of public and private character. According to the task paper, the public traits of character needed for the healthy functioning of our constitutional democracy are "civility, respect for law, civic-mindedness, critical-mindedness, persistence, and a willingness to negotiate and compromise"(p. 5). The private traits of character needed include "self-discipline, moral responsibility, honesty, respect for individual worth, and empathy for others"(p. 5).

Citizenship education is character education if it focuses on helping students develop the moral knowing aspect of their character while learning about their civic responsibilities. It uses citizenship awards to promote moral feeling in students. Finally, it gives students opportunities to show good actions to others in the classroom, school, family, and neighborhood, so they manifest the third component of good character, moral action. When citizenship education involves cooperative learning, it provides still another way for students to practice good moral actions and develop morally by having the opportunity to work with others, make fair decisions, and develop pro-social skills such as perspective-taking (Lickona, 1991). Citizenship education can be one of the best forums for developing character in students because it allows the development of all three aspects of character.

Citizenship practice in the earliest grades is most appropriate in the setting of the classroom and the school itself. Students begin to understand through participation such as role-playing, games and active discussion how and why rules are made, why people have laws, how people negotiate agreements. Through games, simulations, plays and other activities students can experience directly how disputes arise, how

they can be resolved without conflict, why people need to agree upon rules or laws (Reische, 1987, p. 59).

School Mission Statements Promote Citizenship

It is not surprising, then, that developing citizenship was mentioned as the mission and goal of 11% of the Blue Ribbon Schools. For example, the mission of the Lewis Powell Gifted and Talented Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina, is "to enable students to develop the skills necessary to become capable productive citizens." Lowell is a large Pre-K to 5th grade school with a very integrated student body of 500 students; 43% black. Similarly, the mission of the Saigling School in Plano, Texas, is "to develop students who are responsible citizens, who make good decisions, and who try to do their best." To accomplish this mission, they have defined three goals; one of which is that 100% of their students will exhibit good citizenship and character.

The objective of the Normandy Elementary School in Centerville, Ohio, is similar to Saigling's goal: Normandy staff want to produce self-disciplined, morally sound, and socially aware citizens for the next century. Normandy is located in a suburb outside of Dayton and has a small homogeneous student body.

Mill Lake School is a primary K-3 school of 380 homogeneous students located in the small town of Spotswood, New Jersey. One of the school's goals is to develop good character, good citizenship, and positive relationships with others. Nancy Richmond, the principal explains the school goal:

A commitment has been made to establish a foundation upon which future building blocks of good citizenship, community service, and personal responsibility can be laid. These basic concepts are addressed through age-appropriate activities and

learning experiences which included social studies lessons, assemblies, awards, bulletin boards, community service, and guidance lessons.

Promoting Citizenship in the Social Studies Class

The normal academic setting for instruction in both civic education and character-building citizenship is the social studies class according to the teachers at the Russell Elementary School in Missouri:

Good citizenship is the major focus of the social studies curriculum at Russell Elementary School. The cooperative learning that takes place in these classes allows the students to assume various roles in a group to prepare them for roles in the community. Class meetings and Student Council speeches and elections allow students to experience democratic processes. Discussion of current events and multicultural units within the social studies curriculum contribute to developing the students' sense of citizenship in a global society.

At the Southwest Elementary School in Howell, Michigan, the social studies program provides opportunities for students and staff to be involved in promoting good citizenship and community service. Southwest is a pre-K to fourth-grade small-town school with a homogeneous student population of over 500 mostly middle-class, white students but also including over 10% lower-income families. Student activities include visiting nursing homes, participating in Scouts, recycling, and being part of a good citizen recognition program.

The most recent Blue Ribbon award groups (1994 on) mention using the CIVITAS curriculum in their social studies classes. CIVITAS is the result of a collaborative project of the

Center for Civic Education and the Council for the Advancement of Citizenship, with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts. The aim of CIVITAS was to provide an intellectual and scholarly curriculum for K-12 civic education in the schools. This consists of a common core of knowledge, skills, and values desirable for all students in the nation to achieve (Quigley and Bahmueller, 1991).

It is interesting to see how much the Blue Ribbon Schools value their citizenship program as an important component of their character education program. Joyce Westgate, the principal at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in Binghamton, New York, describes their diverse student body as including students from middle-class to lower-middle-class families. Students learn the habits of good citizenship in three ways:

First is through example. Students witness the cooperation, hard work, and friendliness of the staff, administration, and faculty. Secondly, the Character Education Committee regularly plans events around positive character traits. One month highlights "Responsibility" with a new rap song taught in music classes and sung during assembly; another "Honesty" with public acknowledgment of honest actions; and yet another "Helpfulness" with classroom displays of photographs that show children gaining understanding by helping others. The third focus on citizenship is direct instruction through a series of activities emphasizing peaceful conflict resolution, problem solving, cooperation, self-esteem, and responsibility. (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1995)

Judith Schulz, principal of the Independence Primary School in the Cuyahoga Valley of Ohio, explained that their schoolwide citizenship programs are very effective in fostering good character and leadership in students. They strive to develop values, such as responsibility for self,

trust, and caring for others, and thereby help to ensure that students are prepared to be responsible members of American society.

The Bellerive School in Missouri teaches the civic values of equality, freedom, justice, respect for authority, and respect for property in many of its programs and especially through its Bellerive Cadet Helper Program. The Bellerive Cadet Helper program is one in which students volunteer to participate as a service to the school, but one to which they also have to be chosen, based on their possession of good character and leadership qualities. Students are able to choose the teacher, job, and time they are available, but it is basically an opportunity for them to show they are good citizens of the school by helping out in another grade.

East Elementary School in rural Pendleton, Indiana, considers "love of country" as one of the several cornerstones that support purposeful citizenship. Students raise and lower the American flag each day. The flag is placed in every classroom and the Pledge of Allegiance is respectfully recited each morning. The annual all-school singing assembly emphasizes America's heritage. Individual classrooms study the important responsibilities of American leaders.

At St. Rosalie School in Harvey, Louisiana, current events are addressed daily at all levels. From these topics come the opportunities for discussion of behavior and consequences: Why do we have certain opinions? Are they based on facts? How are we, school, and country, working in support of democratic ideals? From these discussions and role modeling, students gain insights into problem solving.

At the Elvin School in Alabama, current events are used to help students live values. For instance, students wrote protest letters concerning ethical issues in South Africa and wrote their Congressmen regarding political issues. The large, very diverse student body of 647 consists of 18% African-American students and 40% students from lower-income families.

Ernest Boyer (1990) believes that civic education means helping students confront social and ethical concerns, even if it involves controversial issues. Students can apply what they have learned to make judgments, form convictions, and act boldly on values held. Schools that advocate citizenship programs for their role in character development provide students with opportunities in which they can find solutions to problems and can then act on these solutions. These programs help them to become active, questioning young adults who are prepared to take on the vital role of citizens in a democracy (Sadowsky, 1991). Moreover, they build personal character by challenging students to translate moral judgment and feeling into moral action as citizens of their classrooms, schools, and communities.

Ralph E. Noddin Elementary School in San Jose, California has Law-Related Education, a program for fifth grades that builds character and civic responsibility. It is an integrated social studies program that covers the concepts of American history and Civics. It includes field trips to court, mock trials, visits from judges, probation officers, police officers, and attorneys. Through this program, students will examine what it means to be a good citizen, what it means to be fair responsible, and just. Ralph E. Noddin Elementary School is a K-5 school of 507 diverse students: 10% Hispanic, 12% Asian, almost one fifth qualify for free lunch. Noddin is a neighborhood school in a scenic setting surrounded by parks, homes, and small businesses located in the heart of Silicon Valley.

Developing Decision Making Skills

Recommendation No. 8 of the National Task Force on Citizenship Education states:
"Because values and ethical issues are central to civic education, school should be encouraged to use moral education concepts, as well as...community-based experiences reflecting the values of the

community" (Reische, 1987). Some schools have based their citizenship program on an application of Kohlberg's theories of moral development. Kohlbergian methods initially focused on encouraging interactive moral dilemma discussions among students at different levels of moral reasoning. Later, the focus changed to establishing within existing schools, models of participatory democracy called "just community schools" (Reische, 1987). The Blue Ribbon Schools use the moral discussion method extensively; however, instead of discussing hypothetical moral dilemmas, they tend to discuss real school issues. Thus, students truly participate democratically in making suggestions for the effective running of their school.

A good citizen must be a thinking citizen (Rowe, 1990). Social studies is one of the school subjects that provides a natural context for teaching thinking skills. The "town meeting" is a method mentioned in several of the Blue Ribbon Schools. It is a problem-solving framework that allows students to use thinking skills, techniques, and processes learned in the social studies content area to solve real school problems. Some schools use the "town meeting" to invite the community to discuss ethical issues. (Many of the character education organizations are now ending their annual meetings with a "town meeting" that allows participants of the conference to make suggestions to the organizational leaders and problem-solve with the other members of the professional group.)

Caring as a Moral Value

Lickona says that respect and responsibility are the "fourth and fifth Rs" that schools not only *may* but also *must* teach if they are to develop ethically literate persons who can take their place as responsible citizens of society. He states that the effectiveness of a character development program is shown in students' actions. Lickona's comprehensive approach to character education emphasizes the importance of caring within the classroom and caring beyond the classroom. The Blue Ribbon Schools also strive to develop these two aspects of caring within their citizenship

programs. This focus on caring is especially important in order to begin bridging the differences in the multiracial and multicultural community; it is a virtue that has truly global repercussions.

According to George Noblit and his research colleagues (1995), "Morally and culturally, caring is a belief about how we should view and interact with others" (p.680). Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), in *After Virtue* states that caring is a moral concept when it is something that is reaffirmed continually in everyday life. Alfie Kohn (1991) concurs, stating that caring is a natural quality in humans and that the school provides a logical setting in which to guide children toward caring about and helping other people. The outcome of good citizenship education is students who know how to care for all of the other people in their world - family, school, community, city, and nation.

George Wood (1990) has spent three years in classrooms observing teachers who see their task first and foremost as nurturing the skills, attitudes, and values necessary for democratic life□ that is, teaching caring. He believes that, with proper attention to all the individuals within the school, educators can create an experience for students that demonstrates what it means to be compassionate, involved citizens. For it is only within a community that young people learn how important are such principles as working for the common good, empathy, equality, and self-respect.

One of the most common ways for students to show their good citizenship within the classroom is to participate in a buddy program, patrols, or a tutoring program.

Students show that they care for others by sharing their time with them. Educators can begin to promote the value of caring explicitly by exploring ways in which they can create a more caring culture in classrooms and in schools. Culture is based, in part, on such gestures of caring and other everyday ways of doing things (Noblit, 1995). Westwood School in Santa Clara, California, describes how its students care for one another through the buddy program:

Our fourth- and fifth-grade classes are role models for the school. Their leadership program includes working with younger students in developing math and reading skills. Each student selects a buddy, and together they select books to read, stories to write, science, or social studies projects to do and games to play. Consequently, it is a two-way street where both students benefit. A fifth-grade ESL student tutoring a first-grader reinforces his own English skill while the first-grader learns math problem-solving skills.

At Lowell Elementary School in Boise, Idaho, the fifth-and-sixth grade classes use "study buddies" in which children are paired with a partner in class to provide instructional and work habits support. In other grades, peer helpers work with students who are having difficulties academically or motivationally. Lowell is a K-6 urban school of 400 students of growing diversity. The formerly all-white school body now has 8% of its students from other ethnic heritages. Lowell families have the greatest socioeconomic span of the Boise schools; 72% are low-income families, but the others represent middle-income, professional and even executive-level occupations.

In addition to the "study buddies," Lowell has a cross-grade buddy system in which all fifth- and sixth-grade classes are paired up with a primary class. Besides listening to children read, the upper-grade students teach "mini-lessons" to their buddies. The older students have special projects that combine social studies and science with research skills. They learn the material, then modify it to include hands-on, concrete examples to teach the concepts to the younger children. These "mini-lessons" have included subjects on manners, snakes, and plant growth. Buddies also have shared field trips and art projects and celebrate holidays together. This year the second-graders read to the kindergarten students. One of the students told about the program: "We have a buddy program, and

it helps us to know someone little is looking up to us. My buddy cried this morning because she didn't know why I couldn't come." (She was touring this visitor around the building!)

Good Citizenship Award

Increasingly, schools are teaching citizenship and character in the same way that they are teaching reading and math. They are working with their communities to define those core values such as honesty, hard work, and respect for others and for oneself, that make it possible for our democracy to continue (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1995). Although some schools do give grades to their students on their report card for citizenship, 15% of the Blue Ribbon schools have found that a more effective way to promote good citizenship is to recognize those who demonstrate good citizenship in their actions.

Fort Washington Elementary School in Fresno, California, is a large heterogeneous K-8 school of 600 students; 6% Hispanic, 4% Asian and 2% Black. It became a "Blue Ribbon School" because of its Exemplary Patriot Award Program.

The award is based on (1) Academics, (2) Co-curricular Activities (3) Athletics (4) School Service and Leadership (5) Effort and Citizenship. The Patriot Program reflects a holistic view of the person and presents the students with the motivating challenge of striving to achieve the goals set out by the school in order to become responsible and well-rounded individuals. The school has prepared "A Guide for Earning the Exemplary Patriot Award" which defines in clear terms the character expectations and qualities needed in order to win the award. Specifically students are asked to be honest, responsible, respectful, dedicated, persevering, self-respecting, and concerned for others.

The effectiveness of the Exemplary Patriot Award Program was evaluated after five years of implementation. The program was found to be effective in developing a positive, purposeful school climate. Evaluators observed several key outcome variables. Specifically, scores on achievement tests improved and the number of students on the honor roll grew; daily attendance to school improved and incidence of school vandalism became none existent; and the number of students who participated in school extracurricular activities increased greatly (Sparks, 1991).

A visit to the school by the author also verified the effectiveness of this program. In fact, the Patriot's Award Program was seen as so effective that when the principal, Dr. Richard Sparks, moved into the district offices, other schools in the district were also encouraged to implement their own version of the award program. Mountain View School, also in Fresno, implemented the *Exemplary Bear Award*; and other schools are also beginning award programs.

Kohn (1993) questions the use of good citizenship awards although he admits that they are common across the country. "Sometimes rewards are used in the hope of promoting undeniably worthy qualities such as generosity and concern for others. The evidence, however, shows that anyone who is rewarded for acts of generosity will be less likely to think of himself as a caring or altruistic person; he will attribute his behavior to the reward instead,"(p. 173). The Blue Ribbon schools would not agree with Kohn in this area. Although they would concur with him that "good values have to be grown from the inside out and that no behavioral manipulation ever helped a child develop a commitment to becoming a caring and responsible person," (p. 161) they would tell him that good citizenship awards are important because they teach specific character values to students, and the awards are open to all students who so manifest these values. By encouraging self-discipline these awards help students to develop control over their own life and help them to make judgments about what constitutes good behavior.

Almost all of the Blue Ribbon Schools report that their students are recognized for good citizenship and behavior through schoolwide recognition programs and assemblies.

Participation in patrols helps develop good citizenship in students by providing them with the experience of fulfilling a role within a group and serving as role model to others. The Safety Patrol at Anna Reynolds School in Newington, Connecticut, is made up of students in grade five and gives them an opportunity to learn self-discipline and control while helping them to discipline and work with primary students. Safety Patrols help reinforce school safety rules and good behavior before and after school.

Scouting per se was mentioned in a very small percentage of the schools' applications as one of the programs that contributes to the promotion of character at the school because these organizations are not sponsored by the schools. However, visits to the Blue Ribbon Schools confirmed the fact that almost all of the schools do have Scouting activities available for the students and allow the organization to use their facilities. The Scouting program is one that does, at least in its stated aims, foster good character, and good citizenship in students because of the character-related criteria that it sets for each member:

The Boy Scout Law:

A scout is trustworthy, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent,.

One of the most common ways for Blue Ribbon schools to involve students actively in practicing decision-making skills is to promote their participation in Student Council. At the

Argonaut Elementary School in Saratoga, California, students are given an opportunity to influence classroom and school policy:

We instill character and ethics traits through student council meetings that include school officers and two representatives from each class. Student opinions and concerns on timely issues are solicited by the class representatives who then present them during their student council meetings. The council then discusses these issues and makes recommendations to the school faculty, School Site Council, or other appropriate groups.

Sheri Hitching, principal of Argonaut School, explains that their citizenship and character-building programs immerse students in decision making. Students have many opportunities to be involved with democratic values and ethics, particularly in learning respect for one another and reflecting on individual responsibility.

Cadwallader Elementary School in San Jose, California, ensures that their students feel a commitment to the school by providing many opportunities for them to influence school policies and activities; one avenue is the Student Council. The Student Council voted to adopt two city blocks around the school. They were then responsible for picking up litter and keeping this surrounding community clean. Students also bring concerns and suggestions to the Student Council. For example, the Student Council received a complaint about misbehavior in the restrooms. The Student Council recommended that the restrooms be locked should this occur in the future. Based on this recommendation, offered by the students themselves, the problems in the restroom ended. Cadwallader is a pK-6 urban school with a unique student body; one third of them are at poverty level and one third of them qualify for special education services.

One of the key goals of the Child Development program used in the San Ramon, California, schools is to "create a caring community within the classroom" (Kohn, 1990). Several of the San Ramon schools have won the Blue Ribbon Award. One of them is the Country Club Elementary School. It reports on the success of their tutoring program: "Our kindergarten read-aloud program utilizes upper grade level students who read to the young students. This promotes an interest in the kindergarten students to read, while the older students vie for the privilege of reading. Our older and younger students tell us they like this program."

The Value of Caring for Others

Research has found that an intensive experience in caring for others may have a profound effect on young people:

There are many possible ways for young people to become involved in the community in a meaningful and contributory role: working with senior citizens, caring for and tutoring younger children, working in service-learning placements in health and community programs, and taking part in other types of volunteer activity. Those young people who have opportunities to care for others in such programs have been found to show an increased sense of social responsibility, a higher level of self-esteem, and better school attendance. (Chaskin, 1995, p. 670).

Some Blue Ribbon School programs that promote character by giving opportunities to students to care for others are called CARE Programs with differing words for the acronym: Citizenship, Achievement, Responsibility, and Education or Cooperation, Appreciation, Responsibility, (Respect), Effort, and Sharing. These programs promote social and emotional well

being, kindness, and helpfulness. The "KIDS" Program at Pioneer Elementary School in Colorado Springs, stands for "Kids involved in Doing Service". Students take their gifts and talent beyond the school walls into the community. Some of the KIDS projects include performing for convalescent homes, cleaning up the community, sharing with students at the deaf and blind school, food and clothing drives, recycling paper, and Thanksgiving food baskets. Pioneer is a very large school with a diverse student body of 688 that is 7% Hispanic, 5% African-American, and 3% Asian students.

Community service projects undertaken by schools help students realize that character education includes service to others. These projects build self-worth and allow students to experience themselves as part of the larger network of people who are helping to create a better world (Berman, 1990). Some Blue Ribbon schools stated that a measure of the success of their character development programs is the service activities in which their students engage and the percentage of the total school body who participate.

St. Elizabeth School in Kansas City, Missouri, uses a Social Justice curriculum to help students problem solve the moral dilemmas in our world. The curriculum is designed on a three-year cycle and covers topics such as democratic justice, economic justice, world peace, equality, prejudice, and environmental issues. The students are very active in the learning process; they are expected to conduct extensive research outside of class. Students work individually as well as in groups. They exhibit what they have learned through presentations, writing assignments, discussion, and action. A teacher tells about a particularly poignant and powerful lesson in the study of the disparity of economic justice in our country.

The students were first given occupations and salaries and asked to create a budget based on their individual salaries. Then focusing on living a life of poverty, they were given a poverty level income and asked to redo their

original budgets. It did not take long for students to see just how impossible it is to survive on such a low income. Students were then given a two week period during which they were to go to the grocery store and “purchase” enough items for a month spending no more than \$160.00. Discussion ensued in the classroom about the reality of a life lived in poverty.

St. Elizabeth School is a pk-8 grade Catholic school of 478 students; mostly an Irish American population with 6% Hispanic, 4% African-American.

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Citizenship Programs

The focus on citizenship and character seems to be paying off. Many of the schools featured in this chapter report that they are spending less time on discipline and behavior problems and more time on helping children learn (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1995).

Joyce Westgate, the principal at Ben Franklin School in Binghamton, New York, reports that: "We have experienced fewer behavior problems, a kinder atmosphere, and observable positive actions that support exemplary citizenship as a result of our attention to building better habits of character. The best lessons of citizenship, however, are received through living in a caring, nurturing community where all concerned demonstrate good character every day."

Schools have a special and historic responsibility for the development of competent and responsible citizens and the Blue Ribbon Schools show that they are seeking to meet that responsibility by forming good character in America's future citizens. They do this by developing good citizenship in them.

Summary

This paper reports on the different ways in which the Blue Ribbon schools promote the character of their students through their citizenship programs. A character-building citizenship program emphasizes the development of specific "democratic" qualities such as justice, respect, fairness, cooperation, persistence, moral responsibility, empathy, and caring. In order to develop these virtues, schools have given students opportunities in the classroom to practice actions of caring, concern for others, generosity, and kindness. Evaluations of these activities in the Blue Ribbon schools and in other schools that have also implemented these programs have shown them to be effective in helping students develop their character and thereby act as good citizens.

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