



CHARACTER

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AT THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY AND THE ASCD CHARACTER EDUCATION NETWORK

Educating for Citizenship

Educating for Citizenship in Aging Societies

By Martha Friedenthal-Haase, PhD

Content Highlights

- 1 Educating for Citizenship in Aging Societies

- 2 From the Director

- 4 From the Trenches
 - Making Basketball the Massachusetts State Sport
 - What Price Freedom?
 - What Being a Citizen Means to Us

- 7 Integrating Citizenship Education

- 8 Cultivating Teachers, Cultivating Citizens

- 9 Developing Citizenship Through Engagement

- 11 Myths in Education

Democracies that enjoy continuity in their development can offer the best conditions for acquiring civic competence.

"But there is also another kind of education that must continue over the entire span of life. Experience has shown that there is no middle ground between making progress and losing ground."—Marie Jean Nicolas Caritat Marquis de Condorcet, 1791

"Erudition is one thing, judgment another."—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1827

In the history of political systems there is a tradition dating back to Greek antiquity of constructing both descriptive and prescriptive, 'normative' images of the citizen. Of particular importance is the concept of the ideal citizen in a democracy, that highly demanding system that functions on a set of conditions that people bring about. Here I shall deal with one of the prerequisites of that system: the democratic competence of the citizen.

If it is true that democracy depends more than any other system of government on its citizens' attitudes, motives, cognitive potential, and contributions, two questions come to the fore. First, what are the characteristics of a citizen, seen as an ideal and as a realistic type? Can we identify these characteristics singly or only as a complete picture? Second, how is competent democratic citizenship transmitted and gained?

The first question belongs to the realm of political science (broadly comprised of political philosophy, comparative government, and empirical studies); the second aims

continued on p.12

Educating for Citizenship in All Spheres

By Bernice Lerner, EdD

During my recent visit to Japan I witnessed a people's decorum and attention to detail. One scene that impressed me occurred as our bullet train pulled into the Kyoto train station and I saw a well-dressed man unwrap the paper on his empty bottle and put both the label and the glass bottle in separate recycling bins, taking the

trouble to properly dispose of his trash. While visiting schools, I observed how children are trained; for one, they change out of their shoes and into sneakers upon entering school buildings. In Hiroshima's Shinonome Elementary School, they also change into sandals before entering the restroom, which I saw one girl do automatically, carefully maintaining her school's hygiene standards. Nineteenth-century Frenchman Alexis de Toqueville believed that the discipline of performing small sacrifices every day "shapes a lot of orderly... and self-controlled citizens. If it does not lead the will directly to virtue, it establishes the habits which... turn it that way... the person who acquires the habit of active citizenship is also likely to become a better person."

Visiting foreign countries helps one to more clearly see one's own. In the United States we do not have separate recycling bins at most train stations and we do not take off our shoes upon entering schools. But we do have a decent and proud citizenry. We are moved by acts of caring for strangers in need. Six weeks after 9/11, Ray Charles sang "America the Beautiful" at the first game of the World Series. Its third verse reminded attendees—and television viewers—of the hundreds of New York City police and firefighters who risked their lives trying to rescue those in the burning towers of the World Trade Center:

*O beautiful for heroes proved in
liberating strife,*

*Who more than self the country loved,
and mercy more than life.*

Good citizenship is displayed in numerous contexts and through various forms of positive action. Consider some characteristics of citizenship on the local level—as members of schools, work place communities, religious organizations, and neighborhoods, we may support local businesses or charities, participate in a conservation commission or library board, or otherwise model civic virtue for the young. In school and in their local communities, young people can volunteer for community service and conscientiously shape positive lifestyle habits, such as turning off the computer after using it, recycling and using recycled products, and taking care not to pollute the environment.

One of my friends suffers on account of her neighbor, who saves on his heating costs by using a wood-burning stove. Soot spews from his chimney, coating the side of her house and seeping through cracks around its windows; during winter cold spells, she and her family feel its effects on their respiratory tracts. According to local ordinances, her neighbor is not violating any law. He likely considers himself a good citizen and would probably agree that industries should install pollution-inhibiting devices on their factory smokestacks so as not to put people's health at risk. When my friend asked him to problem-solve the situation with her, he refused to acknowledge its seriousness. If everyone acted as this man does—solely according to his private will, enjoying rights of citizenship while ignoring fundamental rights of others—society would be in trouble. Good citizenship entails sacri-



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...the question is not "What can I do that will actually make a difference on a global scale?" but rather "What even modest action on my part can improve the lives of others?"

fice. Paying for clean heating or an over-ride in taxes, carpooling or taking public transportation, and disposing of trash in environmentally safe ways may be costly or inconvenient, but such sacrifices are for the common good.

In caring for those within our sphere, we sow the seeds of a more expansive altruism. Eighteenth-century Irish statesman Edmund Burke envisioned a natural progression of commitments: "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle of public affections." Beyond our "little platoon" we gradually proceed to a love of country.

Recently British Prime Minister Gordon Brown invited the British public to help its government develop a statement of British values. Toward this end, the government will consult widely with people throughout the country and convene a "citizens' summit" of 500 to 1,000 people to deliberate on what it means to be British. Subsequently, the government aims to formulate a "bill of rights and duties" for its citizens. There is also talk of writing a constitution, instituting a "British Day," and revisiting the national anthem, "God Save the Queen." People are reacting in a variety of ways to these

efforts. The educator in me sees possibilities; for one, teachers can invite their students to reflect on their British citizenship—what rights are they accorded and what obligations are they expected to fulfill? What British traditions ought to be preserved and/or celebrated? Teachers can encourage young people to interview their older relatives or neighbors to explore their heritage. They can also put before their students historical, cultural, and political facts about British and other societies, to help them make useful comparisons. Students might also—in learning about a range of possibilities—envision solutions to problems. For example, they might gather ideas for how to help the National Trust conserve mountain paths eroded by hundreds of hikers each summer. (Many who take on the "Three Peaks Challenge" to raise money for charities simultaneously harm the beloved Lake District.) I would hope that attendees at a citizens' summit would consider how to capitalize on young people's intelligence, energies, and talents, and discuss how to encourage their engagement with national concerns.

When citizenship is taught in the context of loving relationships with teachers, in a mature nation, students' vision can

be stretched. They can seek (in any measure) to ameliorate the plights of peoples subjected to war, poverty, natural disasters, epidemics, or terrorism; this sphere encompasses fellow human beings who are citizens elsewhere. University of Pennsylvania President Amy Gutmann believes that "public education ought to cultivate in all students the skills and virtues of democratic citizenship, including the capacity to deliberate about the demands of justice for all individuals."

Lest students feel overwhelmed, we can make clear that the question is not "What can I do that will actually make a difference on a global scale?" but rather, "What even modest action on my part can improve the lives of others?"

When I was in high school a woman called Bunny taught a group of girls how to raise money for Cancer Care. On weekends, I stood in the entryway of a department store that sells luxury and household goods, canister in hand. As people exited the store, I politely yet assertively asked them to make a contribution to this worthy cause. At that time, few people that I knew personally had the dreaded diagnosis, yet during those hours at Fortunoff's there was nothing more important to me than helping anonymous sufferers by raising money for cancer research.

Caring for others begins at home; with proper education, it spreads. It is the educator's moral obligation to help students embrace causes larger than themselves and to encourage them to display good citizenship in all spheres. ❖



Follow the Bouncing Ball: Making Basketball the Massachusetts State Sport

By Laura Mullen

In September of 2004 my third-grade students were learning about the First Amendment and struggling to understand one part of it in particular, the Freedom to Petition. I decided the best way to explain this would be to have my students live it. They began by looking at state symbols and found there was no state sport. After discussing several possibilities, we decided basketball should be a Massachusetts symbol because it was invented in the city of Springfield, Massachusetts. This was the start of our two-year adventure in the legislative process.

The petition to make basketball the state sport was written and put into motion by Senator Pamela Resor and Representative Patricia Walrath; the students and I traveled to the State House in November of 2004 to file the petition with the Senate Clerk's office. Once the official stamp was put on the petition, it became Senate Bill #1851.

In January of 2005 the bill was referred to the Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Committee for review. We were told a hearing would be scheduled so we could present evidence as to why basketball should be the state sport. In the months to come, the students spent many hours investigating the origin of basketball, even taking a trip to the Basketball Hall of Fame.

Although the wait seemed long to the students, in May of 2005 we finally had a hearing date scheduled. On June 1, we headed to the Boston Public Library to testify before the committee that would decide if our Bill #1851 would go to a full House and Senate vote. Representatives

from the Boston Celtics and Basketball Hall of Fame joined the students. All seventeen students testified before the committee, each presenting evidence to support making basketball the state sport.

The end of the school year came with no word on the fate of the bill. In the fall of 2005 the students came back to school as fourth-graders and although they were no longer my students, we worked to keep the bill in the minds of the committee that was deciding its fate. I received news in March 2006 that the committee was not going to send the bill to a full House and Senate vote. After I told my former students this disappointing news, they decided to get everyone they knew to e-mail the committee about how important this bill was to them. Thanks to their persistence, the bill received a "yes" vote from the committee on April 20, 2006, and would go to a full House and Senate vote.

The process of a full vote in the House and Senate proved to be another learning experience for the students and me. We learned that a bill must be read and approved three times by both the House and Senate before it can come to a final vote. In May of 2006 the bill was read twice and received a "yes" vote. School ended without that crucial third and final vote, and the students once again saw another school year go by without the bill passing. They knew that the House and Senate do not meet very often in the summer, and hoped the bill would not be forgotten.

On August 1, 2006, I received the call we had been waiting for since filing the

bill in November of 2004. The House and Senate had enacted Senate Bill #1851 in a late-night session on July 31 and the bill was on its way to the governor for final approval! On Monday, August 7, Senator Resor called, saying that then-Governor Mitt Romney would be signing the basketball bill into law the next day. She also told me that the governor wanted the students to be present for the signing.

Even though it was summer, I was able to contact the students, and get them on a bus to the official signing. When we reached the State House in Boston, we were taken to the large room where the governor makes important announcements; the local newspapers and TV stations were in the room waiting for the signing. Representatives from the Celtics and Basketball Hall of Fame also joined us. The governor entered and with the stroke of a pen and to a huge round of applause, the bill that the students had worked so hard on was now law.

In its origins a simple simulation, this exercise showed students that dedication and persistence are two valuable qualities. Teaching strategies such as this one, in which students directly participate, have proven time and again to yield positive and lasting results. More importantly, students learned through doing that they all have the potential to initiate change, participate actively, and have a voice in public affairs. This experience allowed them to exercise citizenship. ❖

Laura Mullen is a third-grade teacher at J.L. Mulready School in Hudson, Massachusetts.

What Price Freedom? An Educator's Call to Rally Students from Apathy to Appreciation of Citizenship

By Lor Cunningham

"Posterity will never know how much it has cost my generation to preserve your freedom. I hope you will make good use of it."

—John Quincy Adams

"Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom, must, like men, undergo the fatigues of supporting it."—Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, No. 4, September 11, 1777

How do we teach citizenship to those who seem apathetic? As any educator knows, this is not a simple challenge. More than two hundred years have passed since our Founding Fathers pledged their sacred honor as they signed the Declaration of Independence, but more than time differentiates the generation that birthed the American Experiment from some of our young people today.

A few years ago, Dr. Phil did a talk show with Oprah Winfrey on the phenomenon of adult children living at home with aging parents. The popular psychologist insinuated that such "late bloomers" seem to have little concern for the financial and emotional price exacted when

they fail to assume responsibility for themselves, act indifferent to their duties, and choose, instead, "the easy life." Not all young people act this way—many have developed good character—but a focus on character in our schools can help even those who may fall into a habit of indifference to lead good lives.

The writings of the Founding Fathers attest to the fact that character education and citizenship go hand in hand; we must continue to teach young people to think beyond themselves. While many Americans today enjoy the benefits and privileges of being citizens, some conveniently ignore their obligations. At times of crisis in our history, such as World Wars I and II or September 11, heroic actions on the part of citizens buoyed the nation. In the absence of such critical moments, too many citizens lapse into apathy.

In *The American Crisis*, No. 1, published in 1776, Thomas Paine wrote, "What we obtain too cheap[ly], we esteem too lightly." Does that ring a bell? How many of us know what it cost the fifty-six Founding Fathers to sign "The Declaration of Independence?" Today we

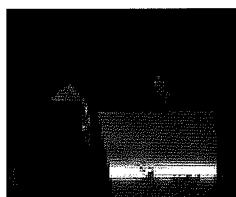
think of them as patriotic heroes, but in 1776 their actions were considered treasonous. All fifty-six men risked profound loss for their involvement in this country's birth. Could they have imagined a time when people would think it too much trouble to vote? It is the job of parents and educators to encourage young people to understand that freedom is not free.

For a number of years, one of my colleagues used the U.S. Citizenship test as a diagnostic exam at the beginning of her high school American history class; she reported that roughly 5 percent of the class could pass the test. Ask them what citizenship means to them, and you will likely be met with blank stares, but ask about pop culture and you'll probably have a lively discussion. How well Thomas Paine understood human nature! In *Common Sense* he wrote, "When we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary." ❖

Florence Lor Cunningham teaches special education (self-contained math) at Southside High School, Center for International Studies, Greenville, South Carolina.

In March, Bernice Lerner gave a keynote address at Singapore's Ministry of Education conference on character and citizenship education.

Photos: At the podium, and with colleagues from the MOE.



What Being a Citizen Means to Us

submitted by Ruth Kirschenbaum on behalf of her and Mrs. S's 3rd-grade class at Maryland's McLean School

We are very privileged to be born in a country where we have rights and our voices are heard by our governments' leaders who try to make proper decisions. However, it is also our responsibility to live our lives as good citizens. There are several ways that we can contribute to our country. We must try to use kind words every day, protect the environment, and act as leaders in our communities.

First of all, it is important to use kind words daily. We have to remember people who set good examples with their leadership, like Martin Luther King and Gandhi, who worked for civil rights and equality for all people and changed the world by means of peaceful demonstrations. Their example shows us that we can live in a world without hatred, bigotry, and violence. If we all stop and think before speaking and acting, we can become a population of good, kind citizens.

Second, we need to protect the environment so that it remains healthy for future generations. The little things we do daily can add up to bigger things if everyone participates. In our classroom, we have recycling bins where we throw all our papers after we use both sides. In our school, we try to recycle plastic, glass, and paper goods so that our trash dumps will not overflow unnecessarily. We can also walk, bike, scooter, or take the bus to visit our friends. If we don't use cars as often, we will not pollute the air. Many of us belong to Cub Scouts and Brownie chapters, and we spend time cleaning up our local parks and lakes. If everyone remembered to do at least one thing for the good of the environment each day, our world would be a cleaner place.

Finally, we should all try to be leaders in our own way. We do several community service projects at our school each year.

During the holiday season, we put together candy poppers for the children at National Institutes of Health, so that while they are getting treatment they can also have a sweet reminder that we are thinking of them. We also do schoolwide community service projects to help those in need. We collect money, school supplies, warm clothing, and canned food for different organizations that need our help. To be a good citizen is to always remember that there are people who are not as fortunate as we are to have a meal and warm clothes.

All in all, we have to always remind ourselves that we live in a country where people fought hard to give us the rights that we enjoy today. In order to keep living in the country of the "free and brave," we have to use good judgment and kind words and help our environment and our community. That's what being a good citizen means to us. ❖



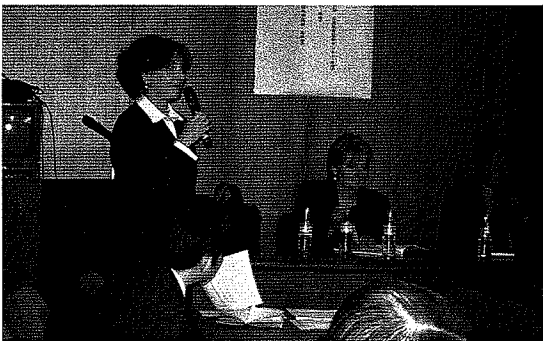
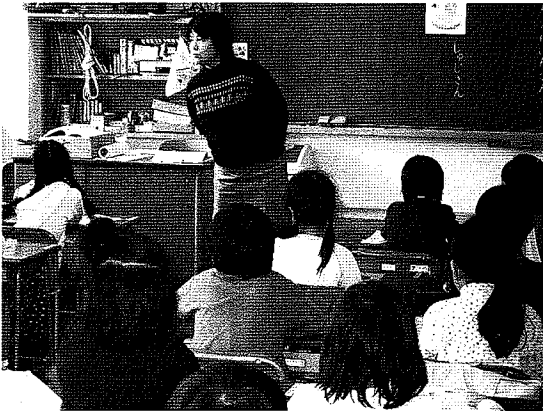
Integrating Citizenship Education

Citizenship education should be an integral part of all that takes place in school. Beyond offering formal instruction in civics, government, law, and democracy, the virtue of citizenship can be brought to the fore at all grade levels and in a number of subjects.

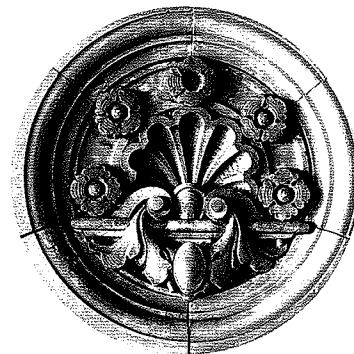
History, literature, and the arts are rich with narratives that can be mined for lessons on citizenship. But citizenship education should not be limited to language arts and social studies courses. In science, students learn to systematically ask questions, gather information, and find ways to evaluate their answers. Such problem-solving skills enable constructive participation in social affairs. In science, students also learn about subjects of critical importance to society, such as the environment, resource management, stem-cell research, animal rights, and genomics.

Citizenship education can also be integrated into mathematics classes. The citizen who has knowledge of statistics and is able to read charts and graphs is able to access and interpret information. Citizenship education also has a place in social science classes. In conducting real-world testing and collecting data about human behavior, students gain a sense of what is needed to make informed decisions.

Citizenship education ought to be incorporated in age-appropriate and creative ways at all grade levels. It should inform what takes place in the hallway, playground, and cafeteria. Teachers should initiate students into modes of public discourse, giving them a say in the formulation of moral and political rules and in the development of fair procedures. Students can thus be responsible for helping to shape their school's ethos and, ultimately, their own characters. ❖



In January of 2008, Bernice Lerner and Linda Wells (Dean of Boston University's College of General Studies) lectured at Hiroshima University and visited schools in Tokyo's Setagaya School District and Hiroshima, Japan.



Cultivating Teachers, Cultivating Citizens

By Gerald Porter, PhD

Teachers are gardeners of the republic; they cultivate citizens. They act as instruments of both culture and the state by helping children gain the necessary knowledge, skills, and commitment to assume a responsible place in society. Consequently, the preparation of teachers requires that each prospective educator master the knowledge and skills required of a competent citizen, as well as display the moral commitment to serve as a role model, a “public agent of socialization.” The teacher, at least the public school teacher, should be recognized as a government official who upholds the shared values of society and who should be held to a higher standard of behavior. A teacher not fully engaged as a citizen with a real understanding of the responsibilities of civic life is not credible as a citizen educator.

What competencies must the teacher master? I would suggest that there are four required of teachers who endeavor to shape good citizens. First, they must have knowledge of the mechanisms of government and an appreciation of various aspects of civic life. Second, they must have good judgment, i.e., the wisdom to understand the nuances and complexities of a given situation and the ability to decide what is right and wrong—the moral task is to always act with integrity, regardless of temptations or risks.

A third competency has to do with caring not just for self but for others; not just “about,” but “for” others. The teacher must be motivated to act and to bring external conditions into conformity with the demands of care.

A committed sense of identity is the fourth competency. In a society as large and diverse as is the United States, educators need to see themselves as part of an extended circle of individuals who face common threats and have common needs. The capacity to see oneself as part of a broad and inclusive society—with a shared history and future—is essential for

Prospective teachers will benefit from field experiences from the very first semester of their training. They ought to become engaged in some sort of service or noble cause as they encourage their students to participate as active citizens. They should also display the virtue of caring in all of their relationships, especially toward those perceived as “strangers.”

We should be preparing teachers to conceive of citizenship at “postconventional levels,” whereby a citizen...has profound insight into the dynamic workings of universal values and truths.

one who aims to help shape a robust and healthy citizenry.

Conventionally understood, a citizen is a full-fledged member of a political state, and as such enjoys all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities prescribed by law. We should be preparing teachers to conceive of citizenship at “postconventional” levels, whereby a citizen perceives the principles underlying laws and has profound insight into the dynamic workings of universal values and truths.

Competencies are best cultivated by creating conditions that facilitate growth and development rather than using direct instruction or prescription. We can teach teacher candidates about government and prescribe basic consensual rules for responsible social and civic behavior, but good judgment in the exercise of these rules must be cultivated through practice.

The goal is to produce teachers who are not only competent in their subject matter area and who have good instructional skills, but also to create teachers who understand and accept their responsibility to cultivate a responsible and informed citizenry. We need to incorporate experiences that help teachers understand citizenship and its competencies into training programs. The “citizen teacher” must not be an accidental if fortuitous development, but an intentional product of a society that considers how all in its gardens can flourish. ❖

Gerald Porter, PhD, is Dean of the School of Education at SUNY Cortland. He is a school psychologist with professional and policy-level experience in the nonprofit sector, state government, and higher education.

Developing Citizenship Through Engagement

By Michael E. Slodovnick

Democracy, finally, rests on a higher power than Parliament. It rests on an informed and cultivated and alert public opinion. The Members of Parliament are only representatives of the citizens. They cannot represent apathy and indifference. They can play the part allotted to them only if they represent intelligence and public spiritness.

—Dr. Eric E. Williams, on the first day of independence for Trinidad & Tobago

As Abraham Lincoln put it, the government he thought best was of the people, by the people and for the people. Such a government requires informed, committed citizens and skills and attitudes that must be lived.

In over thirty years as a social science teacher and consultant in and for secondary schools, I have seen many efforts to improve citizenship; all of them curriculum-based and all only moderately effective for the broad population of young people in a school. Most of the reason for this is that curricular changes are generally not relevant to the lives of students, thus there is little internalization of the skills and attitudes that characterize productive and caring citizens.

Some schools do help their students to become positive contributors to their communities. These schools have several common strategies. They conscientiously focus on the whole person; they provide meaningful opportunities for most students to become involved in the school community; and they relate learning to real-world issues.

In schools where character education is highly evolved, students seem to have a greater sense of autonomy and belonging. While these may be cultivated through academic curricula (which would necessitate a particular approach and skill set on the part of teachers as well as family support and student commitment), the most consistent successes are seen in schools that supplement curricular emphases on citizenship development with three initiatives. The first two of these are internal: student governance and student-led support programs. The third involves student outreach to the broader community.

The key to developing young people into active citizens is to engage them in running their school. The broader the participation, the greater the chance that a significant number of students will be motivated to participate as committed citizens in their future communities. In schools where various councils (student, athletic, music, etc.) collaborate on scheduling events and programs, the school has input from a broad array of students. When administrators thoughtfully consult a student body, whether through surveys or town halls, the young people in that building will have a sense that their voice matters.

One technique I used effectively involved an entire school. After an organizing committee of students and teachers polled about 200 of the 1,800 students in the building, key concerns were identified. Topping the list was respect, followed by environmental issues. Step two involved having two students from each homeroom attend a workshop led by se-

nior students on respect to familiarize them with the scope of the issue. Teachers then ran a session on facilitation skills. The next day, we held a series of assemblies in which every class discussed the subject; recommendations were recorded and submitted.

After collating and analyzing the results, the committee presented its findings to the administration. Importantly, several high-profile changes were implemented as a result of the consultation. The same sequence happened the following year in relation to the school's environment. I cannot stress enough how much this increased students' sense of ownership in their school community and the likelihood that they will play an active role in their future communities.

A second initiative to promote good citizenship revolves around the support students provide to each other. Having trained peer mediation teams in many high schools and worked with peer counselors, peer tutors and mentors over the years, it is clear to me that these programs contribute to various degrees to students' sense of belonging and caring about others, regardless of whether a student is a mediator or counselor or the recipient of mediation or counseling. The bonus here is that such programs free up administrative and guidance time to focus on areas of more critical need.

Finally, interaction with the broader community, a third component of citizenship training, occasionally happens as a part of courses (e.g., politics or world issues). Schools that have committees dedicated to social justice or charitable works (sometimes taken on by a student

council) have an opportunity to bring many students into the altruistic fold. In Ontario, as in some other jurisdictions, community service (40 hours over four years) is a requirement to graduate. Schools that set up student committees to help provide connections to outside agencies or to create their own opportunities for student involvement seem to be most successful at achieving goals. They probably also have the greatest impact on their students' future commitment to those in need. Where an orientation and reflective activities are incorporated, such initiatives are greatly enhanced.

It can go even further—high school sports teams can run clinics for their feeder schools. Mediation teams can assist with conflict-resolution training for younger students. After-school recreation

programs and tutoring for younger and/or needier students will undoubtedly contribute to growth and the sense that students are part of a larger community.

Co-curricular activities have a long-term impact on the young people who become involved; they broaden their interests and help them to see that communities can thrive when members actively participate. They also speak to the public spirit referred to by Eric Williams in the opening quote. To enhance the citizenship skills and attitudes of the next generation is not rocket science. It involves merely giving them authentic opportunities to practice those skills in a safe and supportive environment and letting them grow organically into the kind of people we want to have living on our block in the future. ❖

Michael Slodovnick (BA, BEd, MEd) of MS Educational Consultants, retired in 2007 from the York Region District School Board, Ontario, where he taught, trained mediators, and consulted on character development and applied ethics for 30 years. He can be reached at ms_ed1@hotmail.com.

CITIZENSHIP IN QUOTES, BOOKS, AND MOVIES

QUOTES

"No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline."

—KOFFI ANNAN

"How wonderful it is that nobody needs to wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

—ANNE FRANK

"The most important thing an institution does is not to prepare a student for a career but for a life as a citizen."

—FRANK NEWMAN

"A generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit the community is a generation that is not learning what it means to be citizens in a democracy."

—ELIZABETH HOLLANDER

"I believe that to meet the challenges of our times, human beings will have to develop a greater sense of universal responsibility. Each of us must learn to work not just for oneself, one's own family or nation, but for the benefit of all humankind."

Universal responsibility is the key to human survival. It is the best foundation for world peace."

—H. H. THE DALAI LAMA

"Citizenship is a tough occupation which obliges the citizen to make his own informed opinion and stand by it."

—MARTHA GELLHORN

BOOKS

A Very Important Day
MAGGIE RUGG HEROLD

Citizenship: Being Helpful
CASSIE MAYER
(series also includes *Being Honest*, *Being Responsible*, and *Following Rules*)

Helpers
SHIRLEY HUGHES

Way Home
LIBBY HATHORN AND GREGORY ROGERS

Frederick Douglass: In His Own Words
edited by MILTON MELTZER

The Kid's Guide to Service Projects: Over 500 Service Ideas of Young People Who Want to Make a Difference
BARBARA A. LEWIS

My Fellow Americans: A Family Album
ALICE PROVENSEN

Mulan (G)
Princess Diaries (G)

Young Adults:
Twelve Angry Men (NR)
It's a Wonderful Life (NR)
To Kill a Mockingbird (NR)
Ghandi (PG)
Stand and Deliver (PG)

MOVIES

Kids:
Antz (PG)
The Lion King (G)

Adults:
Erin Brokovich (R)
The Patriot (R)
Braveheart (R)

Santa Claus, Character, and Citizenship: Myths in Education

By Val D. Turner

Cultural myths have existed as long as there have been cultures to transmit them to the next generation. Myths frequently serve a positive purpose; they convey key values to future generations in an easily remembered format. It is not surprising that they are often incorporated into educational programs that stress values, including those of character and citizenship.

The Santa Claus myth serves to transmit values such as giving over receiving, treating all persons equally, and the importance of good behavior. As with many myths, children eventually realize that the stories about Santa Claus are not true. Typically, the values associated with the myth remain even after the belief that such a person actually exists is given up. The major concern of young children as the myth disintegrates is whether they will continue to get presents. Once that concern is alleviated, the deception is not only tolerated, but also willingly passed along to the next generation.

Myths incorporated into character and citizenship education can be more nuanced and complex. For instance, as students mature they grapple with the proposition that "honesty is always the best policy" (an undoubtedly useful stance when dealing with a child who seeks to avoid punishment). Is this maxim untrue? Is it a "myth"? The Jewish Talmud, 2,000-year-old volumes of ethical stories and moral deliberations, illustrates this point in a particular dialogue between rabbis. In describing a homely bride on the day of her wedding, should one tell the truth? The house of Shammai said that yes, one should describe the

bride as she appears. The house of Hillel argued that all brides should be described as beautiful on their wedding day. We can imagine many examples when "honesty is *not* the best policy." Acting justly may entail myth-making. For example, French farmers being questioned by Nazis as to whether they were housing Jews would be morally obliged to tell a noble lie if they were. Though we would like children to believe that honesty is always the best policy, in the real world of ethical decision making, we need to use a moral compass as our guide at each turn.

Citizenship programs in which students become invested in positive action ought to be grounded in reality. One program that comes to mind involved inner-city middle school students and focused on local laws pertaining to tobacco use and promotion. In reviewing applicable laws and ordinances, students found that tobacco products could not be advertised within a certain distance of school property. They also found that within their school district there were numerous violations of this particular law.

Over several months, the students met with local political leaders and law enforcement officers. They presented their concerns to the state legislature and developed numerous video presentations that were posted online and used as public service announcements. The program encouraged the students to act as involved citizens, assume responsibility for their neighborhood, and serve as role models for younger children.

While listening to a presentation of this program, my major concern centered on its long-term effects on the students.

What if tobacco advertising was still across the street from their school in a few years? What if, despite all their hard work, nothing had changed? I felt this question to be especially pertinent because these children were largely "at-risk" youth with little control in their own lives; they were often engaged themselves in inappropriate or illegal activities. What would the long-term effect be if this exercise in civic engagement failed? That such programs are intrinsically positive and always bring about their desired goals would be a myth unless they taught students the value of striving to do one's best, regardless of the outcome.

In *Educational Psychology*, Lev Vygotsky argued that morality and ethics are learned in much the same way as other cognitive skills. If this is true, we need to prepare character and citizenship students for the unexpected, special circumstances under which they must reevaluate and consider taking a different approach, just as we would in science or mathematics. When the Santa myth falls, we continue to receive our expected gifts. We need to exercise care in character and citizenship education to make clear that what matters—whether in truth or myth—is right action. ❖

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Civic competence comprises cognitive abilities, knowledge, positive character traits, and dispositions toward social action.

directly at the core of educational science. The problems involved transcend both of these two academic fields. These questions can be dealt with sufficiently only if a complex and responsible practice is taken into account—one of political participation on the one hand and of education and self-education on the other. The fields of practice as well as the academic expertise are influenced by activities of intermediary agents, cultural communicators, and opinion leaders from the media, the arts, churches, political parties and interest groups, socio-cultural movements, and organized adult and continuing education, all of which can intentionally or unintentionally affect the development of civic competence by either furthering or weakening it.

In its complexity, civic competence comprises cognitive abilities, knowledge, positive character traits, and dispositions towards social action. Among elements usually mentioned are interest in and a sense of responsibility for the life of the political community; recognition of one's role of citizen as a component of one's personal identity; a capacity for sound judgment and critical thinking; sociability and tolerance towards fellow citizens; a basic knowledge about norms, structures, and processes, at least of one's own political system; and finally, a sense of efficacy in relation to the given system (including its segments and its representatives).

At least three overarching, systemic variables affect the development of civic competence in a democracy: one of continuity, one of discontinuity of the democratic system, and one that entails a gradual process of democratization under the direction of an authoritarian and possibly autocratic regime. These three gener-

al variables exert considerable influence on the political and educational culture of a respective country and its citizenry.

Continuity occurs when democratic rule is traditionally rooted, as is the case in the few "old" democracies such as Switzerland and the United States.

Discontinuity occurs when the democratic system is endangered by crises, is interrupted, or is in itself the result of a recent regime change, be it peaceful or violent (the latter caused by revolutionary, internal military, or external foreign occupational forces after a military defeat). Examples of such democracies after the Second World War are Japan, Germany, Italy, and Austria, and—although in a different, namely postcolonial constellation—India. Today, all these countries seem to be regarded at least as candidates for the club of "old" democracies. More recent examples of discontinuity, whose progress and setbacks are watched globally with great attention, are such widely different countries and systems as Ukraine and Iraq.

The third variable, that of democratization under an authoritarian regime, represents a nondramatic process of change either towards democracy or towards at least an increase of democratic elements. Within such a process, the position of the citizen—and his rights—cannot yet be clearly ascertained. The main feature of the relationship of the individual to the state probably remains that of subject (as opposed to that of citizen, a person with full rights and duties). Examples include some monarchies in the Middle East that strive to develop the structures of a constitutional state with democratic elements within their systems. One could also think of the gradual emergence of democ-

racy in Spain—guarded by a constitutional monarchy—in the first years after the death of General Franco in 1975.

With regard to the role of the citizen, it is clear that democracies that enjoy continuity in their development can offer the best conditions for acquiring civic competence; it is feasible for learning to be positively linked with traditions and meaningful experiences and images, collective as well as individual. In such a system, the integration of the personal and the sociopolitical identity can be attained. Thus, the role of the citizen does not pose a serious problem or moral dilemma for the individual and it will be acquired without much formality. As for the formal instruction of civics in schools, extensive didactical freedom is granted and hardly any limitations are imposed on educational inventiveness and creativity. This is true even more of lifelong learning and self-education, in which civically aware individuals may engage.

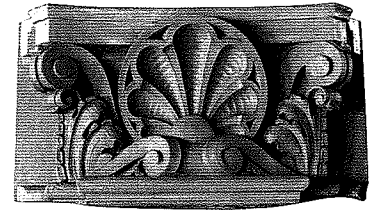
Beside these (and other) invaluable advantages of the learning culture in stable democracies, possible weaknesses must be mentioned. The existence of a broad, undisputed consensus on the general principles of a democracy may lead to self-sufficient routines, a mentality of complacency, and a lack of inspiration. Stability may bring about a kind of exhaustion of personal motivation to engage in politics to improve society. Possible results are ideological thinking, a loss of participatory energy, and a deadening of political thought caused by a lack of serious challenges. Citizens of such stable systems may lose the ability to represent attractive and convincing images of the "homo politicus," the politically aware and responsible man or woman, to the next generation.

When an existing democracy is characterized by discontinuity, the conditions of acquiring and nurturing civic competence will be quite different; in such cases there is no political culture that naturally supports learning for democracy. Many deficiencies of political life must be

coped with—among the most acute is the burden of having to come to terms with a highly controversial past that divides society and estranges citizens from one another. How is one to deal with guilt and accountability for deeds committed under a former regime? Under such circumstances, gaining a renewed and well-integrated political identity requires extraordinary efforts and strength of character—individually and, if at all possible, collectively. A special responsibility rests with educators in general and teachers in particular; but how many of them have themselves been ideologically aligned with the undemocratic former regime? Also, the propagators of new democratic values can hardly be credible and authentic if they avoid discussion of the past and feel embarrassed to answer their students' questions. In

citizens may be better understood. This applies not only to those who engage in politics professionally, but also to the "common man," the layperson who is now participating in the democratic process.

The third "model," efforts at democratization under the umbrella of a more or less authoritarian rule, could remind one—vaguely—of the epoch of "enlightened absolutism," when ambitious and benevolent rulers would attempt to modernize their countries by decree from above. Thinking, however, of the mass media and global communication of our time, it is obvious that the general conditions for such modernization are different now. Much depends on popular consent and the freedom granted for communication and association. In other words, the growth of a civil society will have to be tolerated and/or



examined in each case. Individuals exposed to such experiences may well gain political insight, but at high cost. There is no doubt that learning about democracy in undemocratic or even anti-democratic conditions can happen. One might call this a "paradoxical learning," indirect lessons attained by resisting autocracy and seeing through its strategies.

In the field of education today it is imperative to investigate and evaluate the broad spectrum of political experiences at least since the beginning of the 20th century, nationally and worldwide. Suitable for this kind of scrutiny are the educational activities and developments in the aftermath of the regimes of Hitler and his allies, learning in the context of denazification and reeducation after 1945. Changes in Europe after 1989 may be of equal, if not even greater, topical educational interest. For example, students might study how people in the newly independent states (formerly under Soviet control) have rebuilt their educational and cultural systems, come to terms with the past (and still struggle to do so), and created the foundations for civil societies. Studying these achievements—which will determine the future of democratic citizenship in a united Europe—can be of great value, especially if done in the context of a global perspective.

After having outlined just a few variables of political systems with reference to the development of civic competence, I would finally like to discuss a highly topical question that seems not always to be given sufficient attention and emphasis in educational science—the phenomenon of lifelong learning in relation to the role of the citizen. Understanding this topic is

Not all that comes with a lack of continuity is detrimental to the development of civic competence...in crisis situations there may arise opportunities for strengthening "political character."

addition to the forces of institutionalized education and teaching, much will depend on the existence of at least some complementary societal factors of integration.

Not all that comes with a lack of continuity is detrimental to the development of civic competence and democratic awareness. In such crisis situations, there may also arise distinct challenges and opportunities for intensive political learning, sharpening political thought and ethos, and strengthening what may be called "political character." The opportunity may arise to observe extraordinary courage and imagination shown by ordinary people who were previously unknown as "heroes." The existential dimension of politics may become clearer and the importance of politics for creating the foundation for a good life for all

facilitated, at least to a degree. Whether the intended innovation can be integrated with historical "layers" in culture and society and reconciled with traditional roles related to ethnicity, gender, class, and age remains an open question. Preparing citizens for democracy in a slowly changing society requires unusually talented, humane educators dedicated to a peaceful transformation; educating them may have to be the first step of a transformation process that may otherwise be difficult to shape. The underlying idea is evolutionary. The class of change agents has to be in favor of a peaceful transformation. The outcome of such a process is difficult to predict.

Another question is that of "the seeming" and "the real." Whether the proclaimed intention to further the process of democratization is genuine or simply a pretension or façade must be critically

particularly important in light of increased longevity. In prosperous countries a new epoch is emerging when, for the first time in the history of mankind, the majority of people can hope to live long, active lives. This implies a hitherto unknown prolongation of average "political biographies."

Real and authentic learning for competent citizenship in a democracy is not restricted to a certain age or developmental stage (childhood or youth); nor to an educational institution (school or college); nor to a certain didactic mode (formal instruction); nor to certain media (book

in civic competence also requires individuals to reflect on their own political life experiences and to put these into new perspectives.

As mentioned, the phase of active citizenship has been prolonged by the great increase in life expectancy. With the concomitant decrease in birth rate in many prospering societies, we have a phenomenon called the "aging of the electorate." As a result, in today's democratic societies and communities more "political generations" than ever before live at the same time and have to get along with each other. This calls for new means of inter-

opportunities not only for children and young people but also for the entire adult population, including those of advanced age. Individuals and society alike should be aware of the enduring importance of civic competence. While many other roles of adult life—in family or workplace—will change or have to be parted with, the roles and responsibilities of citizenship can remain meaningful for a lifetime. If these new demands on learning and communication are to enlarge the humane potential of democracy, there will be a need for new types of enlightening, nonprofit institutions that employ moderators and communicators of great ability who are well trained in the social and political sciences as well as in the theory and practice of adult and continuing education.

The viability of democratic culture in the emerging societies of longevity will depend to a considerable degree on the education and competence of citizens in a truly inclusive sense. In many parts of the world, a new understanding of the relationship between education and politics and of the need for responsible experts is growing. Educational science and practice will have to be integral and critically aware parts of this change. ❖

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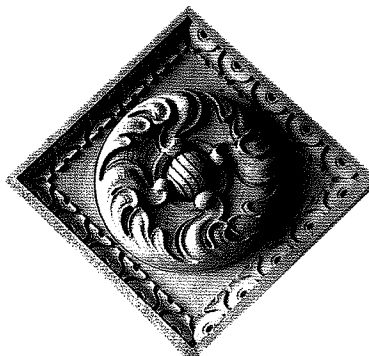
...authentic learning for competent citizenship... is not restricted to a certain age or developmental stage... learning... how to act as a competent and critical citizen is an ongoing process that takes place fully in adulthood.

or film). Contrary to a general preoccupation with educating children and adolescents, it is safe to say that the essential learning of how to act as a competent and critical citizen is an ongoing process that takes place fully in adulthood.

Through all stages of adulthood, citizens will be challenged by political realities and will have to search for ways to meet ever-changing situations. It is crucial for them to expand their knowledge and capacity for judgment, balanced thought, tolerance, courage, and resolve. To grow

generational communication, i.e., new modes of listening to and understanding the political experience of others, and learning from their wisdom as well as their errors. If such a cultivation of political life can be achieved, we will no longer speak of an "aging" but rather of a meaningful "maturing" of the electorate.

While it is true that the learning necessary for this "democracy of many generations" has to be free and the responsibility of the individual, it is the duty of society to provide relevant and attractive learning



TO OUR READERS

We want to hear from you!

The strength of this newsletter depends on your active participation. Our readers want to learn what is happening in your school or community—that's what our "From the Trenches" section is all about.

We welcome submissions of any kind, including letters, articles, and anecdotes. What has worked in your classroom, home, or school? What has inspired your dedication to character education? We also encourage recommendations for our selected books, movies, and character quotes.

Our next issue will spotlight "The Best of CHARACTER" in honor of the CAEC's 20th anniversary. If you would like to serve as a panelist to review and select the "best" pieces

from past issues of *CHARACTER*, please contact Eileen Gessner at 617-353-3262 or e-mail us at caec@bu.edu.

Also, please save the date for next year's Spring Institute on the topic of **Citizenship and Character Education**: April 16-17, 2009.

This fall, the CAEC will launch an essay contest on citizenship for Massachusetts high school students and will also seek nominations of teachers who have implemented exemplary programs in this realm. For more information, please contact the CAEC.

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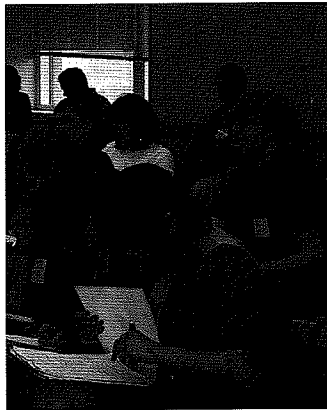
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CHARACTER

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Best of CHARACTER: 1992–2008

Content Highlights

- 2 How Do We Care?
- 4 Teaching Children Values in School
- 5 How Can I Matter if I Don't Win?
- 6 Character Education Through Buddy Reading
- 7 Making Room for Moral Questions in the Classroom
- 9 Caring: At the Heart of an Educator's Role
- 11 Ten Tips for Navigating the Odyssey of Adolescence
- 13 Life Lessons in Art

Reflections

by Nancy Turock, MSW

When asked to be a part of the panel to select articles for republication in your upcoming anniversary edition, it was hard for me to believe that 20 years have passed since the first issue of *Character!* While considering each article, I was struck most by what is common to all of them, despite their different content, approach, writing style, and so forth.

Over the past two decades, the discipline of character education has matured. It has emerged as a separate and respectable field of study and has become accepted—at least theoretically and, increasingly, practically—by schools and parents as an important part of the educational process. Unfortunately, it is true that other professions have been brought under the rubric of “character education” that do not actually teach virtues or address how character develops. Within the discipline, though, there is a cohesiveness, a certain baseline of acceptance and agreement about the major tenets of what character education is (and is not), and how it can be taught.

As anyone who has ever been a student knows, character education is already in every classroom. An important way that students learn character is by experiencing the way a teacher treats others, their teaching style and personality, and how they address the ethical issues that inevitably arise. In practice, many successful formal character education programs recognize this. They have not focused on making large curriculum changes or additions—which is difficult for many schools because of budget and time constraints—but have instead consciously woven character education into the fabric of everyday classroom life, whatever the subject being taught. Formal character education programs and materials can help make students more accountable, assist teachers by

continued on p.10

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