FOR MANY YEARS anthropologists have described man's uniqueness in terms of his upright posture, his prehensile hands, his ability to build and to transmit culture, and so on. Perhaps nearly as characteristic of modern man as these basic elements is the facility which he has developed for compartmentalizing his thinking. At first glance, one is tempted to view man's ability to erect insulating walls between conflicting ideas in his mind as a positive advantage. In a complex world of diversity and conflict the sanity of many depends perhaps upon their ability to keep separate attitudes and values which simply wouldn't "add up" if brought together. However, a longer look at this characteristic of contemporary man calls attention to other consequences of such behavior. It would seem that the mental pigeonholing of ideas without regard for their relationship and consistency is in the long run largely responsible for social conditions which make even tighter compartmentalization necessary.

The theme of this issue of Educational Leadership, "Educator: Teacher and Citizen," suggests one area in which many of us have built such a wall of compartmentalization.

"Of course, educators are citizens too," some say, "but their special responsibilities as teachers must frequently limit the nature and extent of their participation in community affairs." Few would argue that teachers do not have a special responsibility to society in the education of the young, but does this mean that the teacher must isolate himself from the problems and issues of his community in order to properly carry out that responsibility? Instead, is it not more likely that good teaching depends upon the extent to which the teacher is alive to the world around him? Perhaps only so can he guide young people into experiences which promote the habit of participation, a habit which Eduard Lindeman has called "... the most precious possession of democratic citizens."

One of the really thrilling experiences of many young adults in recent years, as they have moved into a new suburban community after living in a busy urban center, has been a growing feeling of involvement—a feeling that what they do as citizens really counts. Smaller community size and a relative absence of tightly defined status groups now enable many such persons to work in community groups and to see for the first time some results of their labor. We need to maximize such "can do" feelings—to pass these on to the students via teachers who themselves have had the thrill of real participation in the life of a community.

Should Teachers Be "Neutral"?
To those who hold that teachers only partially can exercise their rights as citizens because of their obligation to be objective—to be neutral—we should point out the impossibility and indeed the undesirability of such a requirement. Do we really want the teachers of our children to be persons who "don't care" about the fundamental issues of the day? What effect has such an attitude upon boys and girls in classrooms across the nation? Perhaps
what we want instead is an active, vigorous involvement of the educator in the civic affairs of the community, but along with this a fuller recognition by the school person of his own preferences and biases. Such an awareness, accompanied by a classroom climate in which boys and girls make up their own minds on the merits of a case rather than because of what the teacher thinks, will keep our schools from becoming a kind of hothouse environment.

Too many classes in citizenship in our high schools today are preoccupied with students’ committing to memory the eight advantages of the short ballot system or some other mechanical phase of our democratic way of life. Along with this, these students may be exhorted to take their place as active citizens, to vote and otherwise to participate in civic affairs—but always when they are adults. We have too frequently sought to teach democracy in an authoritarian climate; participation in a classroom situation in which only passivity is required and in which a somewhat academic future always seems to crowd out the present. Can we expect any real improvement in this classroom environment if teachers are discouraged from participation in community life?

The importance of a close relationship between the school and community has been emphasized by many educators. To some, however, it would seem to be little more than a catch phrase that results at most in an occasional excursion to the firehouse or to the art museum. Our relationship with the community is too often comparable with the behavior of the timid oldster who dips his toe into the edge of a chilly lake, hurriedly withdraws his foot and retreats to the warm sand. If we mean for the schools to become truly community schools, their curriculum and their staff must reflect real sensitivity to community problems.

Some would accept the theoretical merits of these arguments applied to classroom instruction. They might, however, object that the identification of the educator with one point of view on a controversial issue would in practice impair his relationship with parents and other lay persons in the community. Such a position in effect rejects the possibility of democracy's real functioning in school-community relationships. To imply that people can respect only their mirror image is to deny a central element in the heritage of America. Our culture has drawn great strength and vigor from the creative use of diversity among its members. Are we now to believe that contemporary Americans demand only conformity from their educators? Several recent investigations have indicated otherwise. In some respects the general public has outdistanced the teaching profession in accepting new and controversial matters in education.

In a democracy, good citizenship and good teaching have many things in common. Perhaps the most basic common element is a commitment to the method of intelligence in dealing with problems. If we emphasize our reliance upon this method of thinking and recognize that its fruition comes in the form of enlightened, intelligent action, we need have little fear that the teachers' personal beliefs will be uncritically accepted in the classroom.

Let's help ourselves get over this schizophrenia caused by erecting barriers between our role as citizen and as teacher. America cannot long afford to have its teachers consider themselves second-class citizens.—George W. Denemark, executive secretary, ASCD and editor, Educational Leadership.