



Illustration by Tony Oxendine

What Is Citizenship Education? And Who Is JD?

In citizenship, as in all learning, experience is the best teacher.

The curriculum administrator (CA) of a large suburban school district remained later than usual that Friday night. He and the personnel director had devoted much of the week to interviewing candidates for the newly created position of "Coordinator of Citizenship Education." He was deep in concentration—poring over the résumés and notes—glad that the week of interviews was over. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed someone sitting at the table where he had conducted the interviews. Under the impression that everyone had gone home, he was understandably startled.

CA: Who are you? May I help you? (Opening his calendar) Did you have an appointment? ... I mean, did you contact my secretary earlier? (He wondered if his mind was playing tricks, recalling the call an hour earlier from his family informing him that he was about to miss "Starman," one of his favorite fantasy TV programs about an insightful interplanetary visitor. He noted the benign, confident, and somewhat old-fashioned demeanor of the guest.) What may I do for you?

JD: Call me JD. Some error must have prevented the arrival of my correspondence requesting an interview. I have come a great distance and would be grateful if you would be kind enough to speak with me about my interest in your position of coordinator of citizenship education.

CA: Well, why not? We have yet to find the ideal candidate for the job (thinking about stories of outstanding "walk-ons" in the world of sports; CA tended to make frequent analogies to sports). Tell me why you have an interest in the position. Since I don't have your résumé, could you highlight some of your qualifications?

JD: If you don't mind the turnabout, I would prefer to hear you characterize the meaning of citizenship education. That should help me speak to your concerns and at the same time will enable us both to determine whether we have a common image of citizenship and citizenship education. Do you mind?

CA: Not at all. As you know, the reform effort of the 1980s, beginning with *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983, has had a strong undercurrent of emphasis on the need for improved citizenship. Moreover, International Educational Assessment data, according to no less an interpreter than Ralph Tyler (1981), reveal that in civic knowledge and appreciation U.S. students rate incredibly low—lower than students in most other advanced industrial nations. They rate even lower in civic knowledge than they do in basic verbal and math skills; we seem to be worried about those areas, but for some reason the IEA data on civic education deficiencies are neglected.

I think the title of the recent book by the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, *A Nation Prepared*, epitomizes the need. Citizenship means being prepared—prepared to provide national security and prepared to advance our national interests, economically and politically. The states caught up in the reform movement accept that as an underlying, if not an overt, theme. Our school district's position is that it's time to stop lamenting the fact that our graduates are not good citizens and do something about it. Therefore, the kind of coordinator we seek will help infuse all aspects of the curriculum with a renewed sense of citizenship. Otherwise we, as a nation, will continue to lose preeminent status in the world. Don't you agree?

JD: I agree, and I disagree. I surely agree that a sense of citizenship should infuse the entire curriculum, just as I hold that the development of moral commitment should be at the heart of any attempt to educate. But I disagree with what seems to be your notion about the purpose of civic education. It appears to me that you subscribe to the position that good citizenship means adherence to the prevailing image of national security and prosperity. This bothers me greatly.

CA: Why? I hope you aren't one of those naive idealists left over from the 1960s who thinks education can re-

make society. I was idealistic when I began teaching and again when I began to be an administrator. Interaction with the public, especially power wielders, however, has sobered my ideals.

I have come to realize that schools are but one of society's institutions. They are established to carry out the will of the society that has brought them into being and commissioned them to induct the young into that society. Our district has a national reputation for excellence; we won't maintain that reputation by countering our national interests. And we will enhance our visibility by taking a lead in citizenship education.

JD: Let me put it another way. There is citizenship in the steadfast pursuit of interests of the public, and there is another image of citizenship that is subservient to power wielders. To the extent that these two conceptions contradict each other—and they often do—I prefer the former. The form that education takes for each, in its extreme, differs vastly from the other. The interests of the power wielders foster an education that promotes uncritical patriotism, while an education that focuses on public interest begins with the problems of the people themselves.

CA: I don't see the difference, especially in a country like ours where the government and corporate interest reflect genuine public concerns quite well. The match between the two is never perfect, but we come pretty close in our society, don't we?

JD: Authentic public interest in our society is far indeed from corporate concern for profit—to which the government too often gives carte blanche. Granted, sometimes the public gets caught up in the corporate interest through advertising; moreover, the public is made to feel guilty if it opposes such interests—opposition is frequently equated with a breach of national security. This, I submit, directly counters the spirit of democracy as delineated in the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and other foundational documents. Implicit in

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these documents is a sentiment that Lincoln expressed well, namely, that democratic citizenship requires governance "of, by, and for the people." The order of these prepositions is central: the government must be *of* and *by* the governed, if it is to be truly *for* them. This means that citizenship is not a curricular commodity to be bestowed. It must be learned by experience (see Schubert and Schubert 1981).

CA: This is too esoteric for me. What does this political philosophy have to do with curriculum?

JD: A great deal! Democracy and education are two sides of the same coin. A democracy can thrive only when its citizenry is engaged in a continuous process of becoming educated—and self-education is a major dimension of this process. Conversely, education is never fully developed unless it embodies democratic experience and is fully grounded in it, for such experience has the power to continuously reconstruct education, which is never finished but always being created.

CA: Oh, I think I see what you're driving at. When I taught, I let students make up rules for the classroom. Sometimes I even let them hold trials, of sorts, to determine just resolutions of classroom problems. As a building principal I always valued a student council, and members of the council enjoyed determining some of the school rules, deciding on school songs, colors, slogans, and the like. The councils even helped select assembly programs, plan open houses, design bulletin boards, and so forth.

JD: I certainly commend these initiatives ... (*interrupted*)

CA: Yes, yes, thank you. You know, the more I think about it, what I did in those days reminds me of attempts to provide "just" communities in schools. I refer to those who have built upon Lawrence Kohlberg's (1966) theory of moral development. I think of reports by Reimer and colleagues (1983) on ways to promote moral growth and Sprinthal and Mosher (1978) on value development. Al-

though as a teacher I was influenced by William Glasser's (1975) ideas of classroom meetings, and frequently used this technique to deal with discipline problems, I think I actually anticipated that more recent efforts would bring a spirit of cooperation back to schooling. For example, the work of David and Roger Johnson (1984) on cooperation in the classroom seems to be along the lines of what you advocate. By the way, we've had Johnson and Johnson here to make in-service presentations, as well as those who have participated in the "just" school community approaches.

As I noted before, we are a very progressive district. We have projects based on most of the best-known research initiatives. I can't think of a better opportunity for an emerging curriculum leader than to coordinate an exciting new program in our district—one such as the citizenship education program.

JD: To be sure, as I was beginning to say, I find your programs and your awareness of the literature laudable. However, you must not forget that curriculum raises the fundamental question: what is worthwhile to learn and experience? To address this question invokes even more basic questions about what gives meaning and direction for life, what kind of lives we want to create for ourselves, what kind of society we hope to help develop, and how we can live together for both individual growth and the common good.

What troubles me about most of the reform reports—indeed, about your examples, as well—is that students are not deemed capable of addressing these questions. To the extent that questions of worthwhile knowledge and experience are addressed at all today in education, the privilege of doing so seems to belong to those who are credentialled as curriculum developers. Surely they do have special expertise, but their monopoly on addressing fundamental curriculum questions subverts the spirit of democracy. Curriculum is made *for* students, but it is not *of* and *by* them.

CA: Didn't you understand my ex-

amples? What about schools as just communities, cooperative learning, classroom meetings, and my own use of student councils and rules created and judged by students?

JD: I did hear you, and I am quite sure I comprehend. The problem is that *curriculum*, the main character in the theatre of schooling, is too often neglected in attempts to grant citizenship rights to students. In fact, some of the most highly touted practices seem downright diversionary. Despite what may have been the intent of theorists who started the practices, student responsibility seems focused on anything but curriculum—anything but the most fundamental mission of the school, the kind and quality of learning experience provided. Student councils, for instance, think about school songs, colors, slogans, parties, and the like. Questions about the nature and quality of knowledge and experience, which will contribute to students' personal and social growth, are left for curriculum developers to decide. So, as far as curriculum is concerned, schools are autocracies.

Cooperative learning is working together to achieve adult-determined ends, more than it is engagement in self-determination. Just communities deal with social and logistical issues, but rarely with selecting the substance of learning. Your examples go farther than traditional schooling, but not far enough. In essence, they teach students that citizenship is obedient adherence to authority when dealing with the most crucial matters.

How can we expect persons to leave schools, where they are expected to comply on the matters that make the most differences in their lives, and then become aggressive, self-directive, imaginative, and responsible citizens upon graduation? I suggest that you look for additional examples in the work of Fred Newmann (1975) on education for citizen action, and that of George Wood and colleagues at The Institute for Democratic Education,¹ who engage teachers in collaborative attempts to create democratic experiences with students. Experience is the best teacher even in citizenship.

CA: We let students make selections in curricular matters. Even in grade school we let them select from among different units, chapters in textbooks, learning packages, computer software, and the like, and we assess and adapt to learning styles in some of our schools. Surely, this is curricular involvement of the kind you advocate.

JD: I can't agree. All of your examples simply provide a range of options, all predetermined by adults, for selection by students. What students receive is still not of and by them.

CA: Well, of course it has to be determined by adults! Children and youth are not fully capable of determining what they need. We can do that better. After all, isn't that what we went to graduate school to be qualified to do?

JD: I suggest that professional school, if it does anything worthwhile, enables its graduates to realize that the basic curriculum questions themselves are the very questions that must infuse the curriculum. Students, from very old to very young, should begin to ask with utmost seriousness such questions as: What is worthwhile for me to experience and learn? What gives me meaning and direction? What life shall I become? How can we live together in a more just world? How can I contribute best to the personal and public good? To ask such questions is the foundation of good citizenship. If answers that ensue from such questioning challenge the prevailing images of political and economic security and prosperity, I suggest that the challenge is a sign of personal and social vitality.

CA: What would such a curriculum be like? How could it be started?

JD: John Dewey addressed this point in 1931. In a little-known monograph called *The Way Out of Educational Confusion*, he argues vehemently that the artificial lines of demarcation between the subject matter areas are the greatest source of curricular confusion. He proposes that we start with the psychological and move to the logical. By *logical* he

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refers to the disciplines of knowledge, what he calls "funded knowledge," and by *psychological* he refers to interests (Dewey 1900, 1902, 1916). Together, teachers and students become the primary curriculum developers, and their great act of citizenship is to learn to become developers of curriculum for their own lives, as well as continuous evaluators of the consequences of action wrought by that curriculum. The process begins as students are encouraged to reflect on the significance of the dilemmas and problems that preoccupy their lives. Though these problems are usually idiosyncratic, when shared with others, it becomes obvious that they symbolize deeper human interests—what Robert Ulich (1955) has called "the great mysteries and events of life: birth, death, love, tradition, society and the crowd, success and failure, salvation, and anxiety" (p. 255).

The realization of common human interests becomes a bridge across lines of race, class, ethnicity, age, national origin, and other differences—a bridge supported by essential human concerns. **Disciplinary or funded knowledge then becomes relevant** because it can be drawn upon eclectically, from the several disciplines, to speak to real concerns and interests.

CA: You make it sound good in theory, but can you provide examples of current practice that have moved in this direction?

JD: Don't look for all your examples in the immediate present. Let me suggest some examples from the not-too-distant past. The first is a rich set of portrayals provided by John Dewey and his daughter, Evelyn (Dewey and Dewey 1915), in a volume called *Schools of Tomorrow*. They searched the country for examples of schools that reflected and extended Deweyan theory and presented them as exemplars. Similarly, a book by Harold Rugg and Ann Shumaker (1928) elaborates the workings of a curriculum built out of student interests. Perhaps the most vivid and elaborate illustration of this work is found in the renowned Eight Year Study (Aikin 1942).



Published in five volumes, this too-often-forgotten study reports a comparison of progressive and traditional secondary schools. As you doubtless know well, students from the progressive schools did as well as, and usually better than, those from traditional schools in social and emotional growth, attitude toward learning and life, as well as in traditional notions of achievement in school and college.

In fact, a recent set of reflections on contributions of Ralph Tyler (Strickland 1986), evaluation director of The Eight Year Study, reveals that workshops designed for teachers began pedagogically with teachers' interests. Thus, the medium became the message; the most progressive schools in the study had teachers who actually took the workshop way of learning back to the classroom. Teachers realized that starting with interests would also fire enthusiasm in students. Thus, the most progressive schools actually built curriculum with students. For instance, Theodore and Chandos Rice (1986), teachers in Denver's East High School in the Eight Year Study, recently reported on a class of high school seniors who chose above all else to develop and pursue a unit on "What Makes Life Worth Living?" This is what they genuinely wanted to study as a culminating activity to conclude high school.

This is not an isolated incident. Successful stories such as this are legion in the fifth volume of the Study, *The Thirty Schools Tell Their Story*. I submit that the kind of inquiry represented here is the seedbed of good citizen-

ship. It begins in concrete and authentic concern for one's own growth and for the growth of those in one's immediate environment, not in abstract consideration of distant social needs. As necessary as such consideration is, it comes in time—as a result of living in a democratic community. Paul Hanna (1936) reported, for example, on the way empathic and altruistic concern evolved from democratic experience of youth in the Great Depression. He tells of students who moved from classroom to the community to help reconstruct cities, assist the poverty-stricken, and contribute as genuine citizens in a host of other ways.

CA: If you have convinced me of one thing, it is that a rich and seldom-tapped heritage exists on what citizenship education might become. You are convincing, as well, in your advocacy that students must *live* democratic citizenship, if they are to learn it in a lasting way. I suppose this question smacks of my technocratic orientation, but how can we know if the experience we provide fosters democratic citizenship? Are there standards or criteria?

JD: I am tempted to say that it is enough to trust the judgment of the participants; when they know they have experienced increased meaning and direction, that is sufficient. But I suspect you want more, so let me suggest R. Freeman Butts' (1980) *The Revival of Civic Learning*, in which he derives a set of basic democratic values. So, if we can see students experience justice, freedom, equality, diversity, due process, and the like, if we see them develop a personal sense of obligation for the public good and for the rights of all humanity, then I think we have just cause to think that they are learning to become democratic citizens. This kind of citizenship challenges taken-for-granted convictions about national security and economic prosperity; it reconstructs our vision of what social life might become. We need children and youth who can do this for us. We need to inspire them to tell us of better forms of social life, and then we need to listen to what they

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say. I am not talking about a new unit or subject of study to incorporate into the patchwork curriculum. I am suggesting what the curriculum itself should become.

CA: That comes through clearly, and I'd like to give you a chance to develop that kind of curriculum in our school district. What do you say?

CA turned for JD's response, but he was not there. CA wondered if he had worked too late, and perhaps should have gone home to see "Starman" with his family. Yet, the image of JD lingered for a long while. It reminded him of a large photograph of young John Dewey that had hung on the office wall of his doctoral advisor years ago.

Longer than the visual image, however, remained the ideas. Would it be possible to develop school experiences that genuinely engage students and teachers in citizenship that gives meaning and direction to their lives? To what extent does the current school reform effort lend itself to such a venture? Or does it inhibit it? He deeply hoped to find a way. □

1. To obtain materials on The Institute for Democratic Education, write to Dr. George Wood, The Institute for Democratic Education, College of Education, McCracken Hall, Athens, OH 45701.

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