

Introduction

A TWENTIETH-CENTURY LEGACY

Young people will soon be facing the difficult challenge of managing our survival. They will be responsible for preventing nuclear war, protecting an endangered environment, preventing starvation, deciding about the ethics of new technologies, ameliorating social injustice, limiting violent conflict, and managing the cultural and ideological diversity of a globally interdependent world.

Although this century has had some bright moments, it gives the younger generation many examples of failure and tragedy—two world wars, several attempted genocides, the continued presence of racial injustice, torture, murder, mass starvation, and political corruption. They have seen arrogance and ignorance tolerated at a dangerous level. At an early age they learn of this legacy of brutality and pain. It seems little wonder that this generation is one that, as Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn point out, does not want to know history.

Our political culture adds to this legacy with its often simplistic answers to complex problems and its antagonistic relationships. As a result students rarely see beyond the seriousness of our problems and the political conflict and stalemate that prevent us from solving them.

Recently, I asked a sixth grade class, "When you think about the way the world is today, what comes to mind?" In a matter of moments they generated a list, shocking in its astute awareness of the world and comprehensive in its coverage of the world's problems. Absent from the list were any positive achievements or inspiring trends. In the conversation that followed about the potential for change, only a few were confident that adults were doing all they could about these problems. Others saw these as challenges they would have to meet because the current generation of adults seemed incapable of dealing with them. Too many had already detached themselves. "I care about the world but I don't think it concerns me even though it does," one student said. As they get older, their perceptions of their own powerlessness increase, and even early adolescent idealism changes to a painful or macho cynicism, or simply detachment.

Young people are aware of the world and feel the weight of the

problems that they will soon be shouldering. Yet most students in the United States experience a sense of powerlessness to have any effect on constructive social or political change. The odds of success seem overwhelming, the personal costs too high, the disappointment inevitable. The powerlessness and hopelessness today's young people experience may be causing them to withdraw from active participation in our society and focus simply on meeting their own individual desires and needs. But these young people see the problems, hear the pain, and want to have hope for the future.

Yet, adults, and especially teachers, take too little time to think with young people about how to move beyond the legacy of the twentieth century. Because conceiving of how to do so touches on values and ethics, politics and power, it is controversial. We often act as if conflict and controversy will go away if we pay no attention to them. They do not. We live in an age of controversy. The greatest gift we can give our young people is to enable them to handle controversy in ways that are nonviolent and nonpolarizing, in ways that move us toward a more just and compassionate world.

To move beyond perpetuating this legacy, this generation and future generations will have to come to terms with our capacity for inhumanity and passivity. Much like the German youth who have been struggling to come to terms with the Holocaust, we will each be challenged by our own cultural heritage of injustice. The Soviets will have to come to terms with the Stalin era. The South Africans will need to come to terms with apartheid. Indeed, the United States will have to come to terms with its support of repressive, undemocratic governments, its annihilation of Native Americans, its racial injustice. We all will need to come to terms with the irreparable consequences for the environment of our lack of forethought and our materialism. These issues are painful and depressing. They are often avoided in schools because they raise questions about our economic and political behavior as a nation. Yet the lessons they teach about the need to confront our own passivity and complicity, about the value of compassion and justice, and about the importance of humility and acknowledging our mistakes are the ones that move people to commit themselves to care and to participate.

To overcome this twentieth century's legacy will take more than coming to terms with the past, however. It will take the development of a powerful set of skills and values in young people. They will have to be able to work cooperatively with others, to solve complex problems, to manage or resolve serious differences, and to embrace diversity. They will have to take into account the consequences of their day-to-day actions on the quality of life for future generations and to live their lives in ways that are consistent with promoting the survival of the

planet and the enhancement of the common good. They will have to esteem and nurture the values of care, justice, openmindedness, and respect for human dignity and ecological balance. And they will have to have the courage to enter the political arena.

The hope for the future, however, is in informed and responsible participation in the controversies that determine our political, cultural, and ecological future. This has been the single greatest lesson of the twentieth century. We have seen that hope in the labor movement, the civil-rights movement, the antiwar movement, the women's movement, the environmental movement, and the movements for democracy in the Philippines, Poland, and other countries. In every one of these movements individuals organized into action groups and made tremendous differences. But informed and responsible participation does not necessarily mean protest or political activism. Rather it means understanding that our daily actions and choices are social and political statements. These daily actions create the world as it is and as it will be. What we can come to understand is that we make a significant difference—in our relationships with friends, in our work, in raising children, in our role as consumers not by the political positions we espouse but by how we live— by the consciousness and integrity we bring to our actions and the care we take with others.

Until now, however, most schools and teachers have failed to prepare students to be the informed participants our society requires.

TEACHING FOR INFORMED PARTICIPATION

Citizenship education, often embodied in civics textbooks, is part of the curriculum of most schools. As a former social studies teacher, I know that it was a central goal of my work and of the work of my colleagues. In recent years, however, it has become clearer to me why the work in citizenship education has failed in its avowed goal of helping students develop an active, participatory relationship with society. First, efforts in citizenship education often neglect students' experiences of our political culture. The idealized picture of society presented by many of these programs hardly corresponds to the experience of society— often centering on feelings of alienation and powerlessness—that most students have internalized. Second, these programs often teach about democracy without encouraging students to experience their own power and influence, either in the classroom or in the larger world. We teach reading, writing, and math by doing them, but we teach democracy by lecture. Third, by simply presenting information about the democratic process, these citizenship education programs often fail to

engage students in genuine, thoughtful inquiry about the various ways that an individual can make a difference in society. Finally, citizenship education has been primarily delegated to high school social studies teachers rather than being integrated into all the subject areas and grade levels, and into the fabric of school life. The current drive to develop community service programs is a move in the right direction but still insufficient to address the deeper issues behind students' nonparticipation and alienation.

In general, education has paid far less attention to social responsibility and social efficacy than it has to individual competencies and goals. In part this has come from a desire for schools to be apolitical institutions. At its heart informed participation is seeing a problem that needs to be addressed or an injustice that needs rectifying and doing something about it in our daily lives or in the larger political arena. Yet we fear that when students begin to see problems clearly and to ask questions about them they will become unpatriotic rabble-rousers. On the contrary, by helping students enter the political and social world, we can teach them to be thoughtful about problems and see them in all their complexity. We can teach them to be aware of propaganda and of simplistic solutions. We can teach them that one can learn from differences. But even more significant, teaching students to be aware, to question, and to enter the political arena is patriotic; it is not the patriotism of blind obedience that bolsters itself through simplistic and polarizing slogans like, "my country right or wrong, my country," but instead a patriotism dedicated to the principles of justice, compassion, and harmony. The right to question is at the core of our national heritage. It keeps us free. The quality of democracy in the United States is built upon the freedom to create change, to strive to do better both individually and as a society. Schools can never be partisan, but they can welcome the politics and controversies of the real world so that students can learn how to stand up for themselves in that world. They can help raise the level of political and social discourse so that our public decisions are made by a better prepared and more thoughtful electorate.

The lack of emphasis on social responsibility has also come from a mistaken assumption that if schools focus on individual self-realization, then these self-realized graduates will help create a good society. This point of view was prevalent among many in the progressive education movement in the first part of the 1900s, and it endures today. We are seeing the same mistake in the back-to-basics and cultural literacy movements now, this time with competence replacing individual self-realization. It is evident, too, in the moral development movement which tends to focus on helping students think

through personal and, sometimes, social dilemmas while avoiding the immediate need for moral action in the political arena. Individual self-realization, competence, and personal morality are necessary but not sufficient to help create a more just, compassionate, and ecologically conscious society. In fact our failure to teach even basic skills and to develop moral literacy may be partially due to the lack of attention we have given to young people's relationship to the larger social and political arena and to their difficulty finding meaning and purpose beyond self-fulfillment.

Social responsibility—that is, a personal investment in the well-being of others and of the planet—does not just happen. It takes intention, attention, and time. It will take redesigning the culture of schools and classrooms to one which esteems and creates empowerment, cooperation, compassion, and respect.

My experience in the classroom taught me that, by the middle grades, students realize the seriousness of the world around them. They ask very clear questions about why problems exist and why people have not done more to rectify them. Often, we ignore their pleas for understanding because we have so few answers ourselves. But when we ignore their concerns or treat them lightly we communicate to them that it is not important or appropriate to care. We, in fact, communicate our own powerlessness. I have found that by exploring these issues deeply with young people they respond with care and compassion, thoughtfulness and insight. They realize that their actions make a difference, in fact how they live their daily lives makes a difference.

But teaching social responsibility does not start in the middle school years. There is much groundwork to be laid in the elementary years. Teaching conflict resolution and cooperation, nurturing respect for diversity and multicultural understanding, providing experiences of community, engaging students in conversations about issues that concern them, and having students act in small ways to make a difference are all possible and necessary in the elementary classroom.

Young people are sensitive to the contradictions around them. They confront us with the inconsistencies between our words and our actions. They see a world in pain and they notice when we try to ignore it. Our silence, our failure to acknowledge these challenges, has left them feeling that no one cares and, even if they do, that they are powerless to change things.

Yet adults do care, and we can help students experience their ability to create positive change. This book is about some teachers who care and who are trying their best within the confines of their curriculum and school structure to help students develop a sense of social responsibility and the confidence that they can make a difference.

THE EVOLUTION OF THIS BOOK

This book grew out of an effort to document some of the ways teachers teach social responsibility. In the early 1980s a group of educators committed to helping students engage in thinking about contemporary issues started Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Not only did they want to help address young people's concerns about the world, they wanted to help them understand that their participation mattered. They believed that young people need not feel powerless and ignorant, and simply defer to traditional political authorities or technical experts. In fact such deference undermined the basic principles of democracy. Students could learn to raise important questions, critically assess information, and make independent and thoughtful judgments. They believed that educators could play a role in the larger movement to encourage social responsibility, not through advocacy of particular positions on public issues, but through nurturing young people's investment in the welfare of others and commitment to participate in public affairs.

To improve their own work, they hoped that having an organization focused on the goal of social responsibility would provide them with a network of similarly interested educators and give them the opportunity to think together about how to do this well in their classrooms. Moved first by the urgency of the threat of nuclear war and then by concerns about the environment, these educators experimented with a variety of classroom strategies. By the mid-1980s it had become clear that social responsibility entailed much more than issues-oriented instruction. It entailed educational initiatives in the areas of social skills, thinking skills, and participation skills that could be integrated into all areas of the curriculum and at all grade levels in age-appropriate and academically challenging ways.

It also became clear that social responsibility was nurtured most effectively within schools and school districts that supported these goals and were willing to take the risks of experimenting with controversy. Built upon the commitment of a group of superintendents in the Boston area and another group of superintendents in Oregon, ESR helped initiate a two-site, long-term, multidistrict collaborative project, the goal of which is to make social responsibility a core element throughout the K-12 curriculum and the school program. The project is titled "Educating for Living in the Nuclear Age" (ELNA) in order to acknowledge that we live in an age in which we have realized our capability for global destruction as well as our responsibility for ensuring its survival.

The ELNA project is unique in its systemwide focus on helping students develop the understanding, skills, and commitment to make a

difference in the world. But it is also unique in its emphasis on teacher collaboration and teacher empowerment. The project was designed to empower teachers by delegating to them decision-making authority for its direction, by providing them with opportunities to think and work with other teachers, by giving them support for experimenting with new strategies and materials, and by showcasing the innovative strategies and programs they were developing in “promising practices” conferences.

Here we document some of these promising practices so that other educators can learn from our experiences. Initially the authors gathered together to hear ELNA teachers talk about their efforts and to observe them at work in their classrooms. We realized, however, that these innovations were not unique to the participants in the ELNA project and that many teachers all over the country were trying some of the same innovations. Although many of teachers described here are part of the project, the authors also reached out to other innovative teachers throughout ESR’s national network so that we could present a more national perspective.

Teaching social responsibility is not a static field. In fact, it is one that is in its earliest stages. The teachers whose voices you will hear and whose work you will read about are exploring new terrain, learning as they go along. Their work is always in the process of further development, just as the field itself is still developing. Their efforts, however, reveal a wealth of information about the meaning of social responsibility, the rewards and difficulties of making it real in the classroom, and the questions that remain unanswered.

THE MEANING OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The teachers in this book vary widely in the grade levels and subject areas they teach and the types of communities in which they teach. Each takes his or her own approach to social responsibility. Each finds a different entry point and a different emphasis. Yet, there are strikingly consistent themes in their teaching. They share an understanding of what it means to teach social responsibility and what it takes to make social responsibility a central element in their curriculum.

The meaning of social responsibility is multidimensional. When these teachers talk about social responsibility they first refer to it as a way of being in the world that is deeply connected to others and the environment. Being responsible goes beyond being respectful of the dignity of others. It means experiencing and appreciating our interdependence and our connectedness with others and the environment

around us. It means having the capacity to care and respond to others in need in ways that are thoughtful and compassionate, to treat others and the environment as ends in themselves rather than means to an end.

A second dimension of social responsibility that emerges from the work of these teachers is that it entails the ability to make considered and independent judgments. It entails a particular set of thinking skills. Socially responsible people are openminded and yet able to analyze and critique. They can take the perspective of others and be reflective about their own thinking and behaving. They are able to appreciate the complexity of situations and tolerate the ambiguity of not knowing the answer. They are capable of looking for root causes rather than simplistic solutions. They are aware of scapegoating, stereotyping, and propaganda. And they are able to assume responsibility for the errors and inaccuracies in their own thinking.

Finally, embedded in the work of these teachers is the belief that being socially responsible means having the vision and courage to act. It is not enough to care or to be well-informed. Social responsibility means acting on one's values, living one's values. It means balancing despair, anger, or frustration with hope and commitment. It means having the imagination to visualize alternatives and new solutions. It means having a vision of the possible, a commitment to creating a more just, peaceful, and ecologically sound world, and the conviction and confidence to act in spite of the difficulties one may face.

Connectedness, thoughtfulness, vision, and courage are the characteristics that these teachers are nurturing in young people. These are the elements that undergird their curriculum, their teaching methods, and even the structure of their classroom.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

There is no one intervention that is uniquely instrumental in teaching social responsibility. It is nurtured by a combination of experiences that young people have throughout their education as well as a classroom and school culture that models it. No one teacher does it all. Each chooses what she or he sees as the most appropriate kinds of opportunities for the young people she or he is working with. The vehicle may be global education, environmental education, multicultural education, or community service. It may be such process skills as cooperation, conflict resolution, or community building. Or it may be through the choice of books or content so that issues of social responsibility are directly tied to the existing subject matter. The teachers we talked with and

observed sometimes emphasized one approach and sometimes blended a number together. Each of the chapters explores these vehicles in some depth. Yet, across all the chapters there are some commonalities about how these teachers make social responsibility come alive for the students in their classrooms.

Common to all of them is that they bring the world into the classroom or the classroom into the world in ways that are relevant to the lives of their students. In Janice Balsam Danielson's kindergarten class, morning meetings are times to encourage students' awakening awareness of the world around them, times to share thoughts and opinions about important events, and times to find small ways to contribute to others. In Elaine Messias's fifth grade class, students observe the sky, keep sky journals, and become aware of the richness and magnificence of the world they so often take for granted. In Fred Gross's sixth grade math class, students learn basic math skills by studying how numbers are used, and misused, in the political process. Ginger Crawford's seventh graders learn about world hunger but experience its local impact in a nearby homeless shelter. In Judy Bebelaar's creative writing class, high school students share the pain and joy of their diverse ethnic and racial experiences and develop a sense of connection, community, and respect for each other. In his science classes Ted Hall weaves environmental issues, issues about the safety of nuclear technology, and other science-related social issues into the fabric of the standard science curriculum. These teachers build a relationship between the personal and the social lives of their students. They start with their students' knowledge and experiences. They pay attention to the circumstances of their students' lives and then create the bridge to the larger world. By helping students see the larger context of their lives and enter that larger context with a sense of confidence and responsibility, they empower and inspire them.

For the teachers in this book classroom process is a part of the content of the classroom. They specifically use teaching methods that strengthen students' social awareness and social skills. Sometimes they directly teach students such social skills as cooperation and conflict resolution. At other times activities and lessons are organized to practice these skills while focusing on the curriculum to be covered. Jim Trierweiler's middle school science classes work in heterogeneous cooperative groups on science activities that often deal with the societal implications of scientific and technological advances. Mike Fixler's first grade classroom comes to understand conflict resolution not only through the literature they read and Mike's conflict resolution activities but through living this process in their class meetings. Lucile Burt's English classes pay special attention to taking the perspectives of others, the

perspectives they find difficult to identify with in the literature they are reading and the perspectives that they themselves articulate. These teachers help young people develop social skills and social responsibility by presenting them with situations that demand these skills.

Many of the teachers take an additional step and structure their classroom or their school in ways that model and nurture social responsibility. For Gail Whang's elementary classroom this means that the classroom becomes a healthy community where students experience interdependence and mutual support. For Keith Grove's math classes and Craig Beaulieu's social studies classes this means having democratic structures within the classroom so that students can have a voice in the decisions that govern their classroom lives. For principals Ethel Sadowsky and Len Solo, it means having schoolwide structures that encourage student participation and decision making. In these settings teachers model socially responsible behavior, and students live the concepts of social responsibility. The culture and structure of the classroom and school create an environment that supports and affirms what these teachers are trying to communicate in their curriculum and methods.

The teachers in this book have successfully made social responsibility come alive through their the curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom culture, but this has not been an easy task.

DOING THE WORK

The experience these teachers have had in changing their teaching style, in experimenting with new strategies, and in creating change within traditional settings can teach us a great deal about the demands of change. For many, making the decision to teach social responsibility called for experimentation in unfamiliar areas. It meant adding onto an already demanding work load a new layer of demands, a new set of concerns to think through in preparing for each day's classes. It meant making mistakes and having efforts fall flat. It meant trying things that at first seemed strange to students as well as to colleagues. It meant having to defend taking the time from the existing curriculum to focus on process skills or to give time for student decision making. It meant teaching students skills and attitudes that might not be affirmed by the administrative or instructional climate in the school, for example, teaching creative conflict resolution skills in settings where the principal and other teachers simply used their authority to resolve differences. And it meant not seeing the fruits of their labors until much later for social responsibility is developed slowly. It is something for which we have no tests and only limited observational signposts.

The teachers in this book talked about all these constraints and difficulties. What kept them going was the depth of their caring both about the children they taught and about the health and welfare of the planet. What comes out most clearly in their interviews is how deeply they care. They feel the pain of the violence, injustice, broken connection, and environmental degradation around them. They feel the pain in their students' lives and hear their concerns about the world they are expected to enter. They believe that this kind of teaching is critical for their students and the planet. They see an intimate relationship between the personal and the social and strive to help students develop both personal competence and social responsibility. In many ways teaching social responsibility has given their work a renewed sense of meaning. And this has given them the strength and courage to take on the demands of change.

Despite the depth of their caring, many would not have been able to sustain their efforts if not for a network of other educators that encouraged and supported their work. In many of the interviews, these teachers talked about the desire for a community of educators with similar interests. Often they were exceptionally thankful for the networks—ESR, ELNA, and others—that provided this support. Some have been able to team with another teacher as they tested out new strategies. These networks enabled them to share their struggles, to learn from the experience of others, to solve problems collaboratively, and to think together about further initiatives. The connection with others and the stimulation of the exchange of ideas have been vital in sustaining and nurturing their efforts.

Finally, many of these teachers talked about the critical role administrators played in either supporting or undermining their efforts. Administrative affirmation and acknowledgement were highly valued. The teachers who felt supported by their principal, superintendent, or department head felt that their task was far easier than those who were working in a climate of apathy, apprehension, or skepticism. The support these teachers asked for actually demanded little from administrators. The support they most appreciated was simply interest in and acknowledgement of their efforts, encouragement to experiment and to share their efforts with others, an openness to making mistakes, and access to materials or training.

Some teachers would like to go further, however. Based on their classroom experiences, they see the potential for creating schoolwide efforts and democratic structures that support social responsibility. They would like to see administrators become more intimately involved in this work and find ways to implement social responsibility throughout the school.

In spite of the impediments and challenges of creating change, these teachers continued to move ahead and cut a path that will make it easier for others to follow.

THE NATURE OF THIS BOOK

Just as the ELNA Project showcases promising practices through its in-service conferences, this book is a showcase for the innovative practices that teachers have found most effective. We have tried through the various chapters to address different aspects of social responsibility and different innovative practices. In order to create a readable account of the different kinds of innovations, we gave the authors a great deal of discretion in terms of style and organization. The organization and style of each chapter emerged out of the author's reading, interviews, and observations. Each chapter, therefore, is different.

We do not, however, want to give the reader the impression that the book is comprehensive. Each of the chapters could have evolved into a book in its own right. Because we wanted to cover a wide range of promising practices we have had to cover as much of the terrain as we could in chapters that we hope you will find focused and concise. We also know that in the limited space of this book we could not cover all the promising practices we wanted to. There is creative work being done in community service at the elementary level, in international telecommunications projects that further multicultural understanding, in extracurricular student leadership programs that help young people participate in current issues, in violence prevention and empathy development programs at the elementary level, in holocaust studies programs in middle and high schools. These practices and many more will have to await a second edition.

This book is a beginning rather than an end point. The work reported on here is work in progress. We hope it will encourage you to find your own entry points, build on what has been done here, and then share it with others. It is through our collective experimentation and our shared wisdom that we can help this field grow.

Social responsibility has been a dream of many educators inspired by the work of John Dewey and others at the beginning of the century. The educators in this book are attempting to realize that dream. We hope that what this book communicates most clearly is the power of teaching social responsibility. For those who are doing it, it has restored their sense of purpose, renewed their creativity, and reclaimed the reason they entered the profession. But more than that it is the work that we can do to help heal the planet and ourselves.