CHAPTER 1

"I care about the world.
But I don't think it concerns me,
even though it does."

When I was ten years old, I remember watching "Harvest of Shame," the Edward R. Murrow television special about hunger in America. Something happened as I watched. I'm sure I had heard about hunger, discrimination, and injustice before. Issues of civil rights had been in the news. The topic of discrimination, especially against Jews and African Americans, had come up in family conversations. But this time something jelled. I felt pain at the suffering I observed. And I was angry. How could people let others suffer like this? This was an intolerable injustice that we—American citizens and our government—should be trying to correct. Although there were other moments of social and political awareness earlier, this one had a distinctly different quality. What jelled was the link between a social problem and its potential solution. I felt personally compelled to respond to the suffering I observed, and I realized that the solution also had to include collective political action.

There were many such moments to follow throughout my childhood and adolescence. The world became more problematic as issues of civil rights, nuclear war, ecological destruction, and military intervention set the social and political stage around me. Questions emerged. What was my place in this world? What could I do to help? Would anyone listen to my opinions and ideas? Would anyone in government pay attention to what I thought? How do I deal with the wide differences in beliefs and opinions that people have? Why aren't we doing more as a country to

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solve our problems? Inspired by the hope of the Kennedy years and then angered by the ethics of the Nixon years, I found that there was a political background to the day-to-day life of school and play.

However, there wasn't a forum for me to bring these issues into the open. My family talked some about politics. My parents watched the news every night. They voted in every election. In spite of their strong pro-union and pro-Democratic Party stands, we were not an activist family. In fact, "don't get involved" and "look out for yourself" were dominant themes. Issues of political conflict and controversy were not present in school until late in my school years and then only in the form of academic discussion and debate. The deeper questions, the feelings, the desire to do something about problems were not dealt with. Sometimes my friends and I talked about social and political issues but not often. We talked more about presidential candidates because we felt we would eventually have a say in who was elected. There were no other available avenues for action apparent to us. Political reality was distant from our grasp but everpresent as an almost surreal backdrop to our daily existence.

I was never able to fully confront those deeper issues as a young person although I continued to try to make sense of my place in the social and political world. I continued to feel pain at the suffering of others and anger at injustice. And I continued to try to find paths in life that let me make a difference. My first year out of college I tried working on political issues in Washington. I felt alienated by what I saw—a climate that encouraged an egocentric hunger for power and status rather than collective action to correct the ills and heal the pain in the world. I retreated to the woods of Maine to reflect and figure out another path. Ultimately, I entered teaching because I felt that it was a humane and ethical way to make a difference in the world. I could help young people search for answers to their questions about the world around them and help them find avenues for action that gave them meaning and fulfillment.

In many ways I feel lucky. In spite of the seeming inaccessibility of the political arena, I was able to find an entry point and a way of living and working that were meaningful in both personal and political terms. Yet many young people are not so lucky. In fact, most stand at a great distance from the political arena, drawing a boundary around themselves that, at once, protects them from its buffeting questions and paralyzes them into inaction. At an early age they begin to live as if that social and political arena were detached from their daily lives. As one twelve

year old said to me in an interview, "I care about the world. But I don't think it concerns me, even though it does" (Berman, 1990, p. 6).

In the early 1980s Arthur Levine, then President of Bradford College, interviewed freshmen on a number of college campuses. He found that students expressed strong optimism about their own personal futures but were pessimistic about the future of the country and the world. But even more striking, they seemed to see little relationship between the two. He reports the following conversation as typical of what he heard:

Interviewer: Will the United States be a better or worse place to live in the next ten years?
Student: The U.S. will definitely be a worse place in which to live.
Interviewer: Then you must be pessimistic about the future?
Student: No, I'm optimistic.
Interviewer: Why?
Student: Because I have a high grade point average and I'm going to get a good job, make a lot of money, and live in a nice house. (1983, p. 4)

Levine concludes that "there is a sense among today's students that they are passengers on a sinking ship, a Titanic if you will, called the United States or the world. Fatalism and fear of becoming one of the victims is widespread. And there is a growing belief among young people that if they are being forced to ride on a doomed vessel, they owe it to themselves to make the trip as lavish as possible and go first class" (p. 4).

The self-concern and political disengagement of today's young people has been reported in a number of studies. The Committee for the Study of the American Electorate reported a steady decline in the eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old vote and found this group to be the only category of newly enfranchised in our history whose voting patterns have shown a decline since enfranchisement. The rate of decline in voting among this age group is two and a half times that for the general population.

A 1990 study of fifty years of public opinion data by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press concluded that this generation "knows less, cares less . . . votes less and is less critical of its leaders and institutions than young people in the past" (p. 1). "The surveys conducted by Times Mirror reveal a younger generation with less curiosity about news of all sorts, and one with an especially small appetite for the most serious and complicated of issues" (p. 9). The study also found that young people were

less informed about government, politics, and contemporary issues. "Over most of the past five decades, younger members of the public have been at least as well informed as older people. In 1990 that is no longer the case. Times Mirror's research finds that young people were 20 percent less likely than middle-aged and older people to give the correct answer to 74 questions on current events" (p. 1). Times Mirror concludes that the low levels of political knowledge and political commitment among the younger generation makes them an "easy target" for those seeking to manipulate public opinion (p. 28).

These results were echoed in another study commissioned by People For the American Way (Hart Research, 1989), which interviewed over 1,000 adolescents. The researchers concluded that America's youth are alarmingly ill-prepared to keep democracy alive in the 1990s and beyond. "Today's students show little grasp of the responsibilities that accompany the freedoms of citizenship, and they find politics and government remote from their lives and concerns. Sixty percent said they knew just 'some' or 'very little' about how government works, and slightly fewer (53 percent) said they trust Washington to do what is right only 'some' or 'none of the time.' Seventy percent agreed that 'sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on' " (Fowler, 1990, p. 11).

The National Assessment of Education Progress conducted evaluations of civics achievement among thirteen- and seventeen-year-old students in 1975–76, 1981–82, and 1987–88. None of the NAEP studies reported positive results of students' civic competence. The most recent report, issued in 1990, attempted to compare the data from the three assessments and found that although the scores for the thirteen-year-olds were relatively stable, the scores for the seventeen-year-olds showed a marked decline. "As anticipated, the depth and breadth of students' performance in each content area grew as they progressed through school. However, even by the twelfth grade, students' civic achievement remained quite limited in many respects. Most students performed poorly on items that referred to technical vocabulary, detailed political processes, or the historical and intellectual traditions of our government" (Anderson et al., 1990, p. 67).

These studies reveal a problem that has been getting progressively more serious. Most of the studies frame their conclusions in terms of the threat that this lack of knowledge, interest, and engagement has on the vitality and viability of our democracy. Our democracy is, in fact, at risk. Democratic participation continues to decline and cynicism about our political

institutions and leaders continues to increase. Most people, and especially young people, believe that their voices will not be heard and that their participation will be ineffectual. Leading democratic theorists—Barber, Boyte, Pateman, Dahl—argue that democracy functions well only when citizens voluntarily enter our political life and collective decision-making processes. There is disagreement among theorists about whether there is the need for broad participation or more narrowly defined participation, but all agree that some political involvement and a basic understanding of political institutions are critical to preserving democracy and preventing the concentration of power in the hands of the few.

Yet there is another less focused upon but even more critical factor that undergirds the workings of a democracy—a sense of community and a notion of the collective good. Democracy is simply a way for people of divergent perspectives to make collective decisions. The sense of community humanizes this process by adding care, mutual respect, social solidarity, and interest in the common good. In spite of past presidential rhetoric about a "kinder and gentler America," we are living in a culture of separation rather than cohesion (Bellah et al., 1985). The pervasive ethic of individualism, the increase of social divisiveness and violence, and the fragmentation of the family and community have undermined our ability to bridge our differences and build a meaningful national community (Bellah et al., 1985, 1991). When one takes a deeper look at the studies of young people (Anderson et al., 1990; Dynneson & Gross, 1991; Fowler, 1990; Hart Research, 1989; Moore, Lare, & Wagner, 1985; Sigel & Hoskin, 1981; Washburn, 1986), one finds that they do not see community participation as necessary for good citizenship, that they speak of their personal rights but not of the common good, that their notions of democracy are vague at best and often border on advertising slogans, that nationalism and authoritarian values are often preferable to democratic values, and that the only way they plan on participating in public decision making is through voting. At a time when our nation and our planet are faced with serious social, political, and ecological problems that demand both thoughtful collective decision making and persistent collective action, we are faced with a new generation of citizens less informed, less interested in public affairs, and less inclined to participate.

There is, however, some brighter news in two recent studies. The Independent Sector's study (Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1992) of volunteering and giving found a significant rise in volunteer behavior among thirteen- through seventeen-year-olds, although very few participated in

political activity. In addition, the Higher Education Research Institute's study (Astin, 1992) of over 200,000 college freshmen found increases in students indicating that influencing social values, promoting racial understanding, and being involved in environmental cleanup were important personal goals. Many communities and schools have initiated community service programs that have attracted the interest and enthusiasm of young people. Jennings and Niemi (1981) and Sears (1990) note that young people are influenced by the historic period they live in. These researchers identified small period effects. Yet we may be seeing a renewal of social and political interest among young people brought about by the changing political climate and the efforts of educators to bring the concepts of service and political involvement into the curriculum and program of the school. This renewal is far from pervasive, and it is still too early to claim a turnaround in young people's attitudes.

Researchers have placed the burden of responsibility for the lack of social and political interest and participation among young people on a number of sources. Our current social and political problems are more complex and intractable than problems of the past. There are few simple and readily available solutions to the problems of pollution, poverty, the national debt, and the distribution of wealth and power. In addition, our political process has become more contentious and distasteful. People hold out less hope for our ability to develop effective, mutually acceptable policies and programs. But the institution that receives the most criticism is our schools. In part this criticism is misdirected. It is easier to displace our frustration with the political process on children and schools rather than to assume responsibility for our failure to create workable solutions to problems. Whether it is our failure to compete effectively in the international economy or to redress issues of poverty, racism, and violence, it seems that instead of closely examining our current social policies and institutions we look to the schools as the vehicle for change.

Yet the schools shoulder a part of the responsibility. Historically, the schools have been a primary vehicle for citizenship development (Butts, 1980). The founders of our democracy "talked about education as a bulwark for liberty, equality, popular consent, and devotion to the public good, goals that took precedence over the uses of knowledge for self-improvement or occupational preparation. Over and over, leaders of the time, both liberal and conservative, asserted their faith that the welfare of the Republic rested upon an educated citizenry and that free, common, public schools would be the best means of educating the citizenry in the cohesive civic values,

knowledge, and obligations required of everyone in a democratic republican society" (Butts, p. 54). Jefferson expressed this most clearly in 1779 in his proposed law to establish public schools in Virginia.

> In every government on earth is some trace of human weakness, some germ of corruption, and degeneracy, which cunning will discover, and wickedness insensibly open, cultivate and improve. Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves therefore are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe their minds must be improved to a certain degree. This indeed is not all that is necessary, though it be essentially necessary. An amendment of our constitution must come here in aid of public education. The influence over government must be shared among all people. (cited in Butts, p. 55 from Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia,* 2nd American ed. (Philadelphia: 1794), pp. 215–16)

These sentiments were echoed by Horace Mann and other leaders in the movement to establish public education. In fact, the basic purpose of universal literacy was its value in producing informed citizens. Citizenship was seen as the fundamental purpose, the "basic," upon which the curriculum rested.

We have repeatedly looked to our schools' efforts in social responsibility, citizenship education, or civic competence in times of perceived national crisis. Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, the schools were the means for developing a civic culture and national pride. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the waves of immigration created fears of national disunity and schools were asked to be the vehicle for political enculturation and unification. The progressive movement in education of the first half of the twentieth century called for a renewal of democracy with civic instruction as a primary element. In the 1950s, the schools were seen as the vehicle for a national competition with the Soviet Union not only in space and military technology but also in political ideology. Out of the Vietnam era and the first national assessment of civic competence in the mid-1970s came another call for improved civic instruction. In each case citizenship education was defined differently and the proposed reforms took a different shape. For the most part, these citizenship education efforts were nationalistic and conservative in orientation (Butts, 1980). Yet underlying each was the belief that the school played a pivotal role in facilitating our experiment in democratic governance. "Public

education does not refer merely to a kind of education that serves a public. Rather, it expresses the idea of something to be formed—a public—through communicative practices in which all can participate" (Giarelli, 1988, p. 58).

Even among its strongest advocates, however, there has been dissatisfaction with our practice of citizenship education (Butts, 1980; Massialas, 1972; Mehlinger, 1977; Newmann, 1975; Shaver, 1977). Shaver, a past president of the National Council for the Social Studies, writes, "Despite the conscientious efforts of many educators, citizenship education is in disarray. There is little evidence to indicate that the school's citizenship education efforts have affected generally the quantity or quality of adult citizen participation, and social studies programs and school environments often appear to be inconsistent with the demands of 'adult citizenship' " (1977, p. vii). In looking at how the school addresses issues of care and community, social psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner writes,

> [I]n the United States it is now possible for a person eighteen years of age to graduate from high school without ever having had to do a piece of work on which somebody else truly depended. . . . It is now possible for a person eighteen years of age, female as well as male, to graduate from high school, college, or university without ever having cared for, or even held, a baby; without ever having looked after someone who was old, ill, or lonely; or without ever having comforted or assisted another human being who really needed help. . . . No society can long sustain itself unless its members have learned the sensitivities, motivations, and skills involved in assisting and caring for other human beings. Yet the school, which is the setting carrying primary responsibility for preparing young people for effective participation in adult life, does not, at least in American society, give high priority to providing opportunities in which such learning could take place. (1979, p. 53)

Since the end of World War II, many educators, political scientists, and psychologists have studied the development of young people's ethical thinking, political understandings, and prosocial behavior, and the role schools play in this development, in order to improve our efforts in citizenship development. Some have produced theoretical frameworks and pedagogical recommendations to guide teachers, curriculum developers, and administrators. Others have studied young people's understanding of social and political reality and offered developmental sequences. And

others have pursued empirical research on the effectiveness of classroom practices and school organization and climate. Their work, however, has appeared in such disparate fields as political socialization, moral development, prosocial behavior, citizenship education, and psychosocial development. There has been little communication or collaboration among these fields. Yet, when the work in these various fields is taken together, it provides important new insights into the development of social consciousness and social responsibility in young people and effective classroom and school practice. It gives us a clearer handle on what responsibility the school can assume and how it can effectively assume it. If we want to revitalize public participation among young people, it is important to take a close look at what we know about the processes by which young people develop a sense of social responsibility and the educational practices that support this development.

However, in order to give coherence to the disparate research data in citizenship education, political socialization, prosocial behavior, moral development, and psychosocial development, a new theoretical framework is required that uses social consciousness and social responsibility as central organizing constructs. This new framework treats the development of one's relationship with the political and social world and one's personal investment in the well-being of others and the planet as a central concern. The data that come out of these disparate fields on the development of political consciousness, social understanding, political interest and participation, prosocial attitudes and behavior, moral reasoning and moral action, and democratic values then contribute to this broader understanding. In fact, when synthesized within this framework, the empirical data illuminate specific developmental patterns, basic motivational factors and processes, and particularly effective educational interventions that had previously remained isolated or obfuscated by the research boundaries maintained by each of the fields.

The theoretical framework that I want to explicate from an examination of this research builds on, but often stands in contrast to, much of the independent work done in these disparate fields. For example, it becomes clear that moral sensibilities emerge far earlier than many moral development theorists suggest, that activism is more grounded in one's sense of connectedness, one's identification with morality, and one's sense of larger meaning and purpose than in the factors that political socialization theorists propose, and that perspective taking and conflict management are more central to the development of social consciousness and social responsibility than the prescriptive recommendations of citizenship

educators indicate. The theoretical framework provided by the construct of social responsibility not only pulls together the fragmented under-standings and recommendations from these fields but suggests a more adequate and holistic way of looking at both development and educational practice.

This book, then, is an effort to synthesize the research in these diverse fields, explicate a new theoretical framework, and answer the questions: What are the processes by which young people develop a sense of social responsibility? And, what are classroom and school practices that effectively support this development? In answering these questions, I hope we can begin to build the base of knowledge and research in the field of social responsibility development and use that knowledge to guide our future efforts.