

CHAPTER 7

The Courage to Teach Social Responsibility

If Dewey and the pragmatic philosophers are correct, if indeed we learn what we experience, then the only way to guarantee a reservoir of democratic sentiment in the culture is to make public schooling a center of democratic experience. (Wood, 1988b, p. 176)

[T]he test of what you produce is in the *care* it inspires. If there is any chance at all, it is in a world more challenging, more workable, more venerable than all myths, retrospective or prospective; it is in historical reality, at last ethically cared for. (Erikson, 1965, p. 27)

A New Theoretical Framework

Over the past fifty years, the ever-increasing awareness that global events have local and personal impact has moved us to a new understanding of our relationship to the world around us. Rather than seeing ourselves as isolated individuals interacting with other isolated individuals, we have become connected. The emergence of a sense of global community has closed the circle around us. There is no escape to isolation. Our behavior has an impact on a global scale and the behavior of others, sometimes half the world away, may have a direct impact on us.

We see this most concretely in the pollution of our water, the breakdown in the ozone, and the extinction of species. We also see it in the

suffering and pain perpetrated on human beings by other human beings. The Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, right-wing death squads throughout Central and South America, the Khmer Rouge's murder of millions of Cambodians, the Serbian ravages of Muslims are not distant incidents in an age of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons. They make us all vulnerable and all aware of our ethical responsibility to stop such behavior and to prevent it in the future. And we see our new way of thinking about our relationship to the global community embodied in such collective humanitarian acts as aid to the starving in Ethiopia, the international intervention in Somalia, and aid to the victims of earthquakes and other natural disasters.

Being a responsible member of the global community demands both personal and collective action. It demands personal action in the sense of treating others as we would treat ourselves. It demands collective action in the sense of needing to work in concert with others. First, collective action to promote a more just, peaceful, and ecologically sound world through the appreciation for diversity, respect for human rights, and the peaceful resolution of conflict. Second, collective action to intervene in behalf of those in need and those suffering from oppression.

Social responsibility is the concept that communicates a commitment to live in ways that are personally and globally ethical and caring. Social responsibility means being personally invested in the well-being of others and the well-being of the planet.

For over half a century researchers have been trying various ways of understanding how social responsibility develops. They have come at it from different angles and have approached singular aspects of it. Political sociologists have explored political development and political behavior and looked for the keys to the politically conscious and politically active individual. Different schools of psychologists have researched psychosocial development, the development of prosocial behavior, and moral development to understand the motivations for helpful, caring, and ethical actions. Educational researchers have studied the impact of citizenship education to understand how young people become effective citizens. In identifying and studying individual elements that constitute social responsibility, these researchers have created the tools and strategies for studying the concept as a whole. Yet, it is only when we step out of these individual fields and examine the data holistically that we begin to answer questions about its development.

Examining the data from the perspective of the development of social responsibility gives coherence to the disparate data in citizenship education,

political socialization, prosocial behavior, moral development, and psychosocial development. Social responsibility is the central theoretical construct that ties these fields together.

Social responsibility is integrative. It allows us to integrate the particularistic approaches of the other fields. It allows us to examine how people make sense of their relationship with society. It allows us to understand how people come to behave in ethical and caring ways on the political and social level. Finally, its multidimensionality—integrating political consciousness, prosocial behavior, moral judgment and action, and social and political participation—is a more authentic accounting of the factors influencing social and political decision making and participation.

When we use social responsibility as the central theoretical construct we see that development is relational. The development of social responsibility is an emotional, affiliative, and cognitive process. Throughout childhood and adolescence, young people negotiate their relationship with society. They determine if the social and political world is one that they can enter or one from which they will withdraw. They are defining their role within this society and defining the range of their moral commitments. Children, in essence, feel their way into the world—issues of safety, empathy, acceptance, attachment, fairness, and identification inform their cognitive understanding of the world around them. Cognitively, young people formulate a theory of how their society works and their place in it. The relationship they experience with society often remains implicit, visible only in off-hand comments expressing their attitudes and judgments about the world around them. The degree of connectedness they experience determines their sense of efficacy and their interest in participation.

The development of this relationship begins at an early age. The synthesis of the studies reported here reveal an early engagement—especially on an affective level—in the social and political arena. There has been a commonly accepted view in the fields of political socialization, moral development, and elementary education that children prior to age ten are egocentric, unable to take the perspective of others, morally immature, uninterested and unaware of the social and political world, and unable to think in sophisticated ways about social issues or political conflict. The research challenges these notions. Children's awareness of the social and political world emerges far earlier and their social and moral abilities are far more advanced than we thought. Such basic components of social responsibility as empathy, moral sensibilities, the understanding of social conventions, and political awareness emerge prior to the age of eight. We

also see that the social and political inequalities relating to gender, race, and class have already made an impact on children's ability to enter and feel a part of the social and political world. The research indicates that in contrast to the stereotype of children as egocentric, children care about the welfare of others and care about issues of fairness on both a personal and social level. Social consciousness and social responsibility are not behaviors that we need to instill in young people but rather they are behaviors that we need to recognize emerging in them.

Social responsibility does not emerge from one's sense of efficacy or one's locus of control but from much deeper sources—the unity of one's sense of self and one's morality, the sense of connectedness to others, and the sense of meaning that one derives from contributing to something larger than oneself. This understanding dramatically shifts our focus away from concepts of internal confidence to concern with the nature of one's relationship with others and with the social and political world. It shifts our attention away from the development of self-esteem to the development of a sense of meaning, place, and commitment. The development of a positive and connected relationship with society becomes a primary contributing factor to healthy development.

There are four basic processes that nurture these deeper sources of motivation and promote social responsibility and activism (see Fig. 4.1). The first is a nurturant and caring environment, especially within the family, where reasoning is the dominant mode of discipline, children are involved in decision making and prosocial action, and warm and caring relationships are the norm. The second is modeling of prosocial and ethical behavior by parents, other adults, or peers. The third process is the development of perspective-taking skills that allow children to enter the world of another and identify with victims of injustice. The fourth process is confrontations with injustice and the development of effective ways of handling conflict situations.

A connected relationship with society emerges over time and through ongoing dialogue with others. Family and important role models play a critical role in its development. Direct experience with human suffering or injustice helps crystalize it. And it is expressed in a deep sense of connection and interdependence with humanity and one's environment.

The synthesis of the research reported here reveals that there is a far greater potential for nurturing political and social development in young people than previously thought. Researchers have found that elementary school children develop an increasing ability to apprehend the social and

political world and, if engaged, can feel passionate about its dangers and its potential. Significant political development occurs in the early and middle elementary years. The social and political development of adolescents is also richer than previously thought. They are not only trying to make moral and cognitive sense of the social and political world, they are attempting to make sense of their place in it. Our conception of the child as egocentric, morally immature, uninterested in the social and political world, and unable to understand it has effectively deprived young people of the kind of contact they need to make society and politics salient. Young people's distance from politics and their lack of interest may be an effect of our misconceptions, our ignorance of their potential, and our protectiveness.

The studies of classroom interventions show that when the processes that promote social responsibility are deeply embedded within classroom and school practices, they have been effective in enhancing aspects of social responsibility. Researchers have studied such interventions as classroom climate, inclusion of controversy and conflict, participation in classroom and school decision making, democratic classroom and school governance, cooperative learning and community building, and action learning through direct engagement in the social and political arena. Because social responsibility is rarely studied holistically, these studies examine the impact of classroom practice on such variables as prosocial behavior, democratic values, sense of efficacy, interest in participation, perspective-taking abilities, and moral development. The synthesis of the research points to particular directions for practice and a cohesive vision of what this practice might look like at its best. But before articulating this vision, it is important to note two cautions. First, a vision is useful in setting directions and goals, but it may not be able to be directly realized. Although the studies point to different practices that seem consistent with one another, only rarely have they been practiced as a single program and these efforts have not been researched. There is no guarantee of preexisting harmony among these practices. There may be trade-offs and inconsistencies among the practices that only further effort and research will reveal. Second, most of the studies of educational interventions are short-term studies and do not track changes into later life. We know little about the long-term impact of these practices except as reported by activists reflecting back on their development. Therefore, this portrait of practice is only suggestive in hopes that it encourages further exploration and research.

The pedagogical model that emerges from the research affirms that classrooms and schools are microsocieties that teach children about the way the world works and about their place in it. Authoritarian classrooms and schools nurture authoritarian values. Democratic classrooms nurture democratic values. Nurturing social responsibility in young people means creating environments where children can live the challenges of a democratic society and, from an early age, learn about our civic culture.

These classrooms and schools are cooperative democratic communities where children are engaged in learning from and contributing to the social and political environment in their classroom, school, and the world outside the school. Through class meetings and schoolwide governance meetings, students participate in classroom and school decision making. They collaboratively create rules and ways of being in the classroom and school that reflect standards of fairness and care.

These classrooms and schools are also communities where people care about each other's welfare and cooperate so that all can experience success. Children learn to support and help each other. They learn the skills to resolve differences without resorting to violence. They learn to understand the perspectives of others and to appreciate the richness that having diverse cultures and perspectives offers. They also learn to step back and reflect on their own attitudes and perceptions, to hold these up to the same kind of inspection and introspection that they use in assessing the attitudes and perceptions of others. In essence, these classrooms and schools are places where the dialogue between student and student, and teacher and student is characterized by self-reflection, caring for the well-being of others, considerations of ethical standards, an entertaining of the other person's perspective, and an openness to listening to and negotiating differences.

Curricularly, these classrooms bring the world into the classroom and the classroom into the world. A central goal of the curriculum is to help students find meaningful ways to contribute to the world. As with the culture and social structure of the classroom and school, the curriculum nurtures a positive and empowered relationship with society. This relationship is positive and empowered, not in the sense of approving of current social arrangements or being accepted within those social arrangements, but in the sense of students being willing to confront inequity, injustice, and oppression in order to improve those arrangements.

Whether in science, math, social studies, reading, or other areas, the curriculum addresses social and political issues, conflicts, needs, and controversies. Although each subject area can integrate consideration of

social and political issues, these issues can serve to integrate subjects themselves, such as when students study an environmental problem and use math to collect and interpret data, reading to understand the problem, science to examine possible solutions, social studies to understand how action can occur in the political arena, and writing to keep a running account of their own thoughts, reactions, and potential actions. In this way, the curriculum gives students the opportunity to engage in solving real social and political problems. And it gives them the opportunity to act and to implement solutions. Service learning and action learning are primary vehicles for engaging students' interest and teaching basic skills.

This does not mean the whole curriculum is problem-based. It is equally important to help children appreciate the beauty in the world and in themselves, understand the value of knowledge, enjoy the challenge of learning for its own sake, and feel free to play. As we saw in the studies of activists, these are not diminished by engaging in real problems and controversies. In fact, they are often enhanced. Yet, it is important to recognize that we do not always need to focus on problems. In Reindl's (1993) discussion of elementary teachers who have made social responsibility a goal in their curriculum, she describes one teacher who takes her fifth-grade children outside each day to watch and wonder at the sky. As they draw and write about what they see in their sky journals, they begin to appreciate that there is a more diverse range of skies than they had ever noticed. They begin to appreciate nature in a new way. They begin to ask questions about what accounts for these differences. And as they try to answer their questions, they also become interested in issues of air pollution, ozone depletion, and the preservation of species habitats. This teacher's approach helps children appreciate beauty, learning, and playfulness, yet it also allows them to explore questions about how that beauty is damaged and what we can do to repair the damage.

In classrooms and schools that promote social responsibility there is a congruity between content, teaching methods, and classroom or school structure. Each integrates and highlights issues related to social responsibility. Each strives to model ways of being with others and ways of being in the world that promote a unity of one's sense of self and one's morality, a sense of connectedness to others, and a sense of meaning that derives from contributing to something larger than oneself. This is not an easy task nor is there a pat "socially responsible" answer to each problem. Most issues are not simple choices between right and wrong but complex decisions between conflicting and incomplete rights. In experiencing this

complexity, students learn the true difficulties of maintaining a democratic society that balances individual rights and collective well-being, individual success and the common good. It is in this environment that democracy comes to be seen as an ongoing and open-ended experiment. It is in this environment that young people begin to see that their knowledge, skills, and commitment contribute to making this experiment work.

In an earlier book (Berman & LaFarge, 1993), I and sixteen other authors studied teachers who were making social responsibility a core element in their curriculum. Although there are teachers and schools that are trying to implement many of these practices, few have brought all the elements of this pedagogy together. Each teacher we talked with and each school we observed chose what each thought was the most appropriate way to begin. Although some emphasized either content, methods, or structure, many had begun to merge these. In the vision they set for themselves, many articulated the pedagogy I've described. For them, teaching social responsibility meant teaching a way of being in the world that is deeply connected to others and respectful of the dignity of each person. It meant teaching a set of thinking skills to help students make open-minded, considered, and independent judgments. And it meant helping young people develop the vision and courage to act. Connectedness, thoughtfulness, vision, and courage were the central characteristics that echoed throughout these teachers' words. The parallels between the research findings I've reported and the practice of these teachers and principals are striking and encouraging.

This does not mean that achieving this vision is easy. The teachers we talked with described many of the forces identified in chapter 6 that maintain the persistent patterns of current instruction. The lack of any natural advocate for social responsibility, the unwillingness of educators to risk dealing with politics and controversy, the predominant demands of the existing curriculum, the difficulties inherent in changing teaching methods and school culture, and the contrast between democratic classroom practices and the social and political environment outside the classroom were powerful forces for them as well. Yet, these teachers and principals prevailed in spite of the constraints. In our conversations we realized that what kept them going was the depth of their caring both about the children they teach 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. (Berman & LaFarge, p. 11)

The care and courage of teachers and administrators are powerful forces for change, and they encouraged my own optimism of what can be done. Yet they are not sufficient for more widespread or long-term change. There is no prescription that one can write for widespread and long-term change. However, there are important building blocks. One of these is grounding one's efforts in both theory and research. Another is providing the organizational networks that support and build on teachers' efforts.

Creating Change

The synthesizing of data related to social responsibility and the development of social responsibility as a field grounded in theory and research are vital steps in overcoming the inertia and the resistance that prevents change. To create progressive change in schools, advocates need to be able to rely on a solid base of research that supports the viability and effectiveness of their program initiatives. Currently, instead of having this research base, progressive initiatives are justified to teachers, administrators, school board members, and other policy decision makers on humanistic or ideological bases. Even more problematic is that the effectiveness of progressive programs or programs that promote social responsibility are rarely documented. Change, when it occurs, tends to be in schools where the administration and faculty of an individual school or school district are in philosophical agreement with progressive education goals. Yet the lack of research on the viability and benefits of these efforts leaves those who are involved with little to substantiate their work when it is challenged. The lack of research data also makes it more difficult to transfer successful programs to less progressive districts.

Linking research and practice, however, can produce powerful results. In fact, the research-practice link has been critical for getting a number of significant progressive innovations off the ground. There are numerous examples, but some of the most current include such efforts as cooperative learning, school restructuring, conflict resolution, and prosocial education.

The concept of cooperative learning has been around since the late 1800s. Although there have been a succession of well-known advocates, it languished due to the public's skepticism about children learning more through cooperative means than through competitive ones. However, the reception given to cooperative learning by educators and parents changed dramatically with the publication of the research findings by Roger Johnson and David Johnson (Johnson & Johnson, 1978; Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson & Skon, 1981) and others. The Johnsons' review of the hundreds of studies comparing cooperative learning with competitive and individualistic learning showed that in two-thirds of the studies cooperative learning proved superior. These results were popularized through the Johnsons' and other researchers' books and workshops. They gave teachers and administrators a firm ground to stand on when justifying a radical change in educational methodology. Since that time there has been an explosion of interest that has touched most of the school districts in the United States.

This pattern is also the case for high school restructuring. The Coalition of Essential Schools, the organization spearheading major changes in the structure and curriculum of high schools, was launched by a research report on high schools written by Ted Sizer (1984), the initiator of the coalition. Now the coalition is working on major restructuring efforts in over 300 high schools across the country.

In the mid-1980s, the New York Metro chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility initiated a conflict resolution program in one school district with a progressive and interested administration. Working with the New York Board of Education and an independent evaluator, they produced a research report on the program that clearly demonstrated its effectiveness (Metis Associates, 1988). Based on these results ESR has been able to extend this program to other districts in New York and is replicating it in other parts of the country.

A final example is the work done by the Developmental Studies Center on prosocial education that is discussed in chapter 4. In thoroughly assessing their work with the six schools involved in the Child Development Project (CDP) they have been able to document the effectiveness of a program that combines cooperative learning, prosocial role models,

opportunities for service to others, a focus on understanding the perspective of another, and a mode of discipline that helped children internalize helping values. Based on this documentation, CDP is now being funded to replicate this work in eight more districts across the country.

Each of these innovations was thought of as an idealistic pipe dream by detractors, yet became influential due to a supportive base of research. In the areas of cooperative learning and prosocial development, there was a substantial body of existing research that needed to be brought together and articulated. In the areas of high school restructuring and conflict resolution, research was needed to demonstrate the need for change in the former and the potential effectiveness of the program in the latter. In each case, administrators, school board members, and foundation decision makers were able to justify their support for or further their implementation of these efforts on the basis of the research findings. I observed this personally in my work with ESR's conflict resolution program and with numerous districts' efforts to gain acceptance of cooperative learning programs.

This book is an effort to build the link between research and practice in the area of social responsibility and to explicate a theory of social responsibility that is grounded in this research. In doing this the research can inform our practice and help improve current efforts. I hope that it will also encourage additional research that can reexamine and extend the findings reported here. Social responsibility, like moral development or higher-order thinking, is not easy to assess. Because it doesn't appear on the traditional standardized tests, teachers and schools don't chart their progress in this area. In addition, the pressures to perform in areas that are tested are often great enough to cause people to ignore or spend little time on such areas as social responsibility. With some standards by which we can measure social responsibility and with additional research that provides a base of support for interventions that promote social responsibility, we can make a credible argument for positive educational change.

The data that lead to these conclusions come from diverse fields and utilize diverse research methodologies. Yet there is a large degree of consistency in the results of studies across these fields. Each field contributes a piece to a larger understanding of the development of social responsibility. However, only a few examine social responsibility directly and none examine social responsibility holistically. Taken together they present a convincing picture of both the development of social responsibility in young people and the kinds of educational interventions that are

instrumental in promoting social responsibility. There is a need for additional research to fill the gaps in the existing research and to examine the direct relationship of social responsibility and particular educational interventions. There is a need to examine some of the current interventions that may have an impact on social responsibility, such as systems thinking and multicultural education, that have not been researched from the perspective of moral development, social responsibility, or political interest, efficacy, or participation.

There are a number of research efforts that would be particularly important. One would involve taking a more in-depth look at the development of social consciousness. Currently, developmental studies have focused on cognitive aspects of political understanding or moral reasoning. We need data on the evolution of the emotional and relational aspects of social and political consciousness. Coles's (1986a) work and my own initial research in this area (1990) are starting points. The field would profit from a longitudinal study of the kind completed by Moore, Lare, and Wagner (1985) that used in-depth interviews. Rather than focusing on political knowledge, as they did, this research would pay greater attention to issues of attachment, identification, interest, efficacy, meaning, democratic values, and participation.

Another productive avenue of research would involve an examination of particular educational interventions in terms of their impact on moral integrity, sense of connectedness, meaning, and participation. Does a particular intervention have an impact on students' sense that they can make a meaningful contribution in the social and political arena? Does it encourage them to feel a sense of social responsibility and to participate in making a difference on issues of public concern in their daily lives, in their immediate environment, and in the larger society? The research tools—questionnaires, interview schedules, observational inventories—for doing this type of research are available in the various studies reported here. What needs to be done is to cull through these for the most productive questions and strategies and develop a model that can be applied in a variety of educational settings.

A third productive, although long-term, research effort would involve a longitudinal study of participation from preadolescence into adulthood. Hoehn (1983), Keniston (1968), Colby and Damon (1992), and Oliner and Oliner (1988) have given us retrospective accounts of the development of activists. None looked specifically at the educational backgrounds of these activists. Studying patterns of social and political participation among a

matched sample of young people from various educational environments—democratic, participatory, authoritarian, and so on—could provide concrete data on the correlation between these environments and actual participation.

Finally, there are a number of important studies that should be replicated. Button's (1974), Haan, Aerts, and Cooper's (1985), and Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg's (1989) reveal a great deal about the kinds of interventions that promote social responsibility. Replicating these could give greater credibility to their findings. In addition, there is a great need for research similar to that reported by Conrad and Hedin (1982) that examines the impact of community service and direct political action on the development of social responsibility.

Research is an important step but not the only step in overcoming the obstacles to change. In addition, it is critical to have organizations that act as advocates of social responsibility and as support to teachers and schools that are pursuing change. Educators for Social Responsibility and the Institute for Democracy in Education are two organizations that play a critical role in this effort, yet they are small and poorly funded. There is a particular need for the funding community, both public and private, to support research in this area and the organizations that are working to create change.

It is also critical to have larger societal change that highlights socially responsible activism. In the past decade we have seen a growth in professional organizations focused on social responsibility, in investment and banking companies that use environmental and social responsibility screens in their investment practices, and in organizations promoting a renewal in democratic participation. These may be indicators of this larger social change. They set a positive climate for changes in educational practice and provide models for educators and young people to follow.

Having a research base, an organizational support network, and change in the larger society are three basic components in creating change. But more than any other factor, change will hinge on the courage of teachers and administrators who hold social responsibility as a central goal in their teaching, who challenge the accepted patterns and school structures, and who continue to experiment with ways of changing their classrooms and schools that empower students to make a difference in the world. For over a decade I have worked with educators who have the courage to teach social responsibility. They are from every region of the country and every level of education. Working individually and collectively, these people are the pioneers who are forging the renewal of participatory democracy in

the United States (Berman & LaFarge, 1993). They do not experience it as an easy task. Yet, this work has often given them a renewed sense of meaning in their teaching and a revitalized commitment to young people. Research, organizational support, and social change add to their efforts by helping to make it acceptable for educators to care about the state of the world and about their students' ability to find a meaningful place in it. But it is their enduring commitment that will provide the wealth of practical experience and the results to build more long-lasting change.

A Gift of Strength and Hope

Social responsibility is more than an educational rationale or a set of educational practices. On the one hand, social responsibility is about caring. It's about the way we live with each other and treat each other. It's about touching other people's lives. On the other hand, social responsibility is about seeing a vision of our human potential and reaching for that vision. It's about bringing people together in solidarity while affirming their differences. It's about holding out standards of justice and care and creating a public dialogue about how our social and political practices can embody these standards. In essence, it's about seeing a larger sense of self that is a meaningful and contributing member of a society. Because it involves the richness of human connection, the breadth of human diversity, the complexity of human conflict, and the inspiration of human hope, social responsibility is truly a heartfelt responsiveness to the world. It's not just a tool we give to students or a skill we help them develop, it is a gift we offer them of their human birthright.

Educating for social responsibility helps young people understand that their lives are intimately connected to the well-being of others and to the social and political world around them, that they make a difference in their daily lives by their choices and values, that diversity in cultures, races, and values enriches our lives, and that they can enter the political arena and participate to create a more just, peaceful, and ecologically sound world. Educating for social responsibility is a gift of strength and hope that they can carry into the world that can enable them to live with meaning, integrity, and responsibility.

Promoting individual success is a narrow and insufficient goal for public education. Without a larger context, a context that gives social meaning to our educational efforts and that embodies a vision of a better society,

education is mechanical and egocentric. Its narrow scope encourages pettiness and self-centeredness. Educating for social responsibility provides the necessary balance so that individual success can be set within the context of the public good and individualism set within a context of a local and global community. The challenge for education in the twenty-first century will be the reframing of education to integrate this larger context and the reaffirmation of our basic connection with others and the planet as a whole.