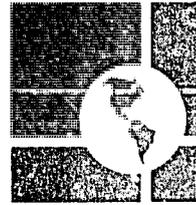


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**ADVOCACY SERIES**  
Education & Development

**6**  
**Education  
for Democracy:  
The Role of Schools**

*Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean • Office of Development Resources • Education and Human Resources Division*

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**Education  
for Democracy:  
The Role of Schools**

**Eleonora Villegas-Reimers**

**1994**

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## Introduction

This paper presents recommendations for designing and implementing education for democracy programs and activities, that is, programs that promote knowledge, skills, and values necessary to live in a democratic society. The paper informs policy makers, national and community leaders, educators, parents, and other interested persons about the critical nature of education for democracy in preschool, elementary school, and high school settings.

The literature that supports the purpose of this paper is from various fields: values education, citizenship education, civic education, education for democracy, and moral education—all of which are concerned with values and citizenship education. In spite of the diversity of the writings, several common themes emerge and will be emphasized throughout the paper:

- True education for democracy involves a complex web of processes that must address the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of education. Therefore, education for democracy must not limit itself to teaching specific information. The development of skills and values is also a necessary part of such education.
- Democratic knowledge, skills, and values are developed by practicing them. Lecturing about them, therefore, is not an efficient way of promoting their development. Much more needs to be done in relation to teaching methods, school organization and management, school climate, and the content of all school subjects.
- Preparing students to live in a democratic society is the responsibility of every member of the community. Parents, teachers, community leaders, institutional leaders (including, but not limited to, religious institutions) all play an important role.
- The teaching of democratic knowledge, skills, and values in one school subject (for example, civic education, history, or social studies) a few hours a week is not adequate to achieving mastery. While one subject should specifically address these issues, the entire school community should be involved, and its activities should be centered around this endeavor. Other aspects of the curriculum and other subjects must address these contents, the schools must be models of democratic communities, teachers must use methods that illustrate democracy in practice, and all school members must be a part of the effort to make education for democracy an integral part of the daily school environment.

Section one of this paper answers three main questions:

- *Why should schools be concerned with the teaching of democratic values?* Answers to this question support the idea that schools and formal education have an important role in the education of citizens who live in democratic societies, not only by teaching them the knowledge and skills needed in that type of society, but also by promoting

the values that underlie the actions of true democratic citizens. Values like tolerance, respect, freedom, justice, equality, responsibility, and fairness are only a few in a long list of values that most people agree are desirable.

- *What do citizens in a democratic society need to know?* Answers to this question are drawn from literature that describes the type of knowledge, skills, and values expected of educated individuals who live in a democratic setting; this literature argues for the need to teach democratic knowledge, skills, and values in more than just one school subject.
- *What can schools do to educate democratic citizens?* Answers to this question describe what schools, teachers, and administrators can successfully do to impart the knowledge, skills, and values associated with democratic citizenship.

Section two focuses on three age groups: preschool (ages 3 to 5), elementary school (ages 6 to 12), and high school (ages 13 to 18). Each age group is discussed in terms of developmental characteristics; the type of knowledge, skills, and values associated with education for democracy that should be developed; and finally, specific suggestions and examples of age-appropriate activities that embody democratic practices and instruct about living in democratic societies.

## Section One

### The Role of Schools in Education for Democracy

#### Why Should Schools Be Concerned with the Teaching of Democratic Values?

*Informed, thinking, and involved citizens are perhaps the best guarantee for democracy and, certainly, for nation building and social development" (Griffith 1990, 164).*

Democracy is a political system and a way of life that is based on each person's active participation in the decision-making process and the implementation of responsible actions for the well-being of the individual and the community; therefore, each individual must have some specific knowledge, skills, and values that will allow him or her to function to the best of his or her ability. The kinds of knowledge, skills, and values that a person must have to be a true democratic citizen are learned and, therefore, must be taught.

*Such values are neither revealed truths nor natural habits. There is no evidence that we are born with them. Devotion to human dignity and freedom, to equal rights, to social and economic justice, to the rule of law, to civility and truth, to tolerance of diversity, to mutual assistance, to personal and civic responsibility, to self-restraint and self-respect—all these must be taught and learned and practiced (American Federation of Teachers 1987, 11).*

In societies where schools are the public institution in charge of preparing young people to take responsibility for their lives and the well-functioning of society as a whole, it follows that schools, along with parents and other social institutions, are one of the most important institutions in charge of educating democratic citizens. Extensive literature, beginning with the writings of Plato and Aristotle, has supported this argument throughout history. In fact, many societies across times and cultures have identified education about democratic values, skills, and knowledge as one of the main goals of their educational systems<sup>1</sup> and, yet, schools have not done much to develop appropriate curricula or teaching methodologies.

This has also been true for many countries in Latin America. In a recent study of the constitutions of sixteen Latin American countries (Livavic 1991), twelve countries explicitly made the education and development of values (responsibility, morality, and social and political consciousness) one of the main goals of the educational system. Two of these countries—Cuba and Nicaragua—strongly advocated for the development through education of a political consciousness for participation and involvement. However, the other ten countries, all of them with democratic governments, only mentioned—without further discussion or priority—the development of a democratic consciousness. This omission is not uncommon: in

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<sup>1</sup> The paper "Can Schools Teach Democratic Values" by Eleonora Villegas-Reimers summarizes the thinking through the ages about education for democracy.

many instances, democratic societies do not sufficiently recognize or support the role of education in the preparation of democratic citizens, instead leaving that function to chance.

*It is easy to recognize that, too often, the authoritarian regimes have used the school to develop a very rigid task of ideological indoctrination or to develop the so-called national spirit . . . on the other hand, societies that are democratic in their constitution have taken for granted, too many times, the execution of an authentic and constant work of true political development that assures knowledge, understanding and valid attitudes for a process of democratization (Mayordomo 1991, 14; my translation).*

More curious still is that often in Latin America, there is some suspicion about the political associations of authors interested in education for democracy and the promotion and development of the knowledge, skills, and values needed to function effectively in democratic systems. A good example is Paulo Freire, the now famous Brazilian educator, who has proposed the need to develop the critical consciousness of citizens so that they realize how important their participation is in the effective functioning of their society and government as true democracies. Freire has always been labeled a "leftist" and, therefore, his message has been neutralized in many societies. The same is true with other authors who are labeled "rightists." This political labeling has meant that most authors avoid raising the issue of education for democracy and, in many instances, ignore the propositions of those who do write about it. Fortunately, this trend seems to be slowly changing.

In the last several years, different constituencies—from many political and social perspectives—of many societies, including many in Latin America, have shown a renewed interest in promoting the preparation of democratic citizens in school settings. For example, in 1986 the Organization of American States organized the conference "Education, Development and Democracy" that explored the need to pay more attention to the education of democratic citizens; in 1984 UNESCO published a book that describes the educational systems in Latin America and explores the relationship between education and democracy (Nassif, Rama, and Tedesco 1984); in 1987 the American Federation of Teachers published the document "Education for Democracy: a Statement of Principles" that was signed by many prominent educators in the United States and was the target of a great debate in the field—not because people were against the main goals, but because of the ways the authors presented the information; in recent years, several international organizations (UNESCO, the Comparative and International Education Society, the Organización Cívica Panamericana, among others) have organized conferences and seminars on the topic; and finally, in the past two years, the United States Agency for International Development has supported research and writing on the topic as a way to begin a dialogue among the many interest groups and people involved in the educational sector about the importance of teaching about democracy and of promoting the development of democratic values in the schools. This paper is part of that effort.

The argument for the need to include programs, activities, curricula, and models that teach and promote the development of democratic values in school settings has taken different shapes and forms. But in the end, all the authors—from many different backgrounds, professions, and political beliefs—agree that societies that value a democratic political system and a democratic social life (where all members of society enjoy their rights and fulfill their duties by actively participating in decision-making processes that affect everyone) must be active in teaching their citizens the principles and values underlying real democracy, so that a true civic consciousness can be developed and put in to practice.

### **What Do Citizens in a Democratic Society Need to Know?**

An initial review of the literature shows that throughout the years many definitions and models of civic and citizen education have been used to teach that school subject known in most countries as civic education. Dynneson and Gross (1985) organized these models in eight categories:

#### **Eight Categories of Civic Education**

- Persuasion, socialization, and indoctrination
- Education about contemporary issues and current events
- The study of [the country's] history, civics and geography and the related social sciences
- Promotion of civic participation and civic action
- Development of scientific thinking
- Jurisprudence process
- Humanistic development
- Preparation for global interdependence

Even though this summary of models helps in conceptualizing what civic education should address, more detailed information is needed. Choosing any one of these models would mean not addressing the issues central to the other models, and combining all the models may be a complex task. It seems more appropriate to simplify the models by focusing on which specific contents and skills should be addressed in general.

Literature on civic education offers a wide variety of information on what should be taught. This information, presented in the following table, can be organized into three categories—knowledge, skills, and values. Since the list is not exhaustive, it should be used as a first step in operationalizing the contents and objectives of a program of education for citizenship and democracy. As a program is developed, some items may be deleted and new ones may be added to the list.

None of these categories is independent from the other; therefore, learning a specific concept may also mean developing a certain skill and/or a specific value. In addition, not all authors who have presented excellent pieces on ways to educate democratic citizens have given a clear list of knowledge, skills, and values; yet, underlying the theories or arguments, an emphasis on a specific type of content and/or pedagogy becomes clear. Paulo Freire's writings, such as *Educação como Prática da Liberdade (Education for Critical Consciousness)*, are good examples.

## Critical Topics In Civic Education

### KNOWLEDGE

- knowledge base
- history
- geography (cultural and economic)
- economic systems
- political systems
- legal systems
- social systems and institutions
- world reality
- humanities
- moral education
- alternative social arrangements
- differences (ethnic, cultural, racial, political, etc.)
- human rights
- elements of true democracies (rights, solidarity, tolerance, respect, etc.)
- country's constitution
- country's government
- multiculturalism

### SKILLS

- critical thinking
- independent thinking
- problem-solving
- literacy
- communication/dialogue
- decision making
- assessment of political situation
- cooperation
- protection and promotion of one's interests and values
- productive participation in work force
- political, social and civic participation
- community service
- personal and social responsibility
- dealing with differences
- leadership

## VALUES

- respect (self and others)
- principles of democratic life
- respect and defend human rights
- care about others
- sovereignty of people
- justice
- freedom
- equality
- diversity
- authority
- privacy
- due process
- participation
- responsibility (personal, civic, social)
- rule of law
- civility
- truth
- tolerance
- assistance to others
- civic sense

Sources. American Federation of Teachers 1987, Avery 1988, Banks 1990, Boyer 1990, Butts 1980, Castro 1991, Clark 1990, Freire 1970, Jarolemik 1990, Kaltsounis 1990, Mayordomo 1991, Meyer 1990, Negrette 1989b, Smith 1985, Strike 1988, Wood 1988.

This list of knowledge, skills, and values shows that the task at hand requires much thought, planning, and discussion. Teaching and promoting the development of democratic knowledge, skills, and values is the responsibility of every member of a democratic society because this complex process cannot be accomplished unless society makes a concerted effort.

As one of many social institutions (such as family and church), schools have a crucial role to play in the process of educating democratic citizens because schools are the public institution in charge of shaping and preparing the next generation to serve society. But, unless all components of schools participate in this effort, accomplishing this task may be unrealistic.

True education for democracy and citizenship involves a complex web of processes that must address the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of education. Therefore, one school subject alone cannot accomplish that goal effectively; much more needs to be done.

*To develop civic virtue through acceptance and practice of the ethical elements of the curriculum means that all subjects must be taught in such a way as to bring out and make central their moral significance in social, economic, and political life. . . .*

*First, we must reject the most hoary of all beliefs about civic education: that it can be taught as a separate subject matter unrelated to all other subjects in the curriculum. Second, we must discard the belief that didactic instruction, whether by preaching or by less explicit means, can instill a civic virtue in those subjected to this education regimen . . . . Third, civic education is not separate from the social life of human beings wherever they associate: the school is a form of social life, not a preparation for life (Pratte 1988, 307-308).*

Aspects of the educational process other than the curriculum—for example, the organization and management of the school, the content of the curriculum, and the teaching methodology or pedagogy used—need to be examined.

### **What Can Schools Do to Educate Democratic Citizens?**

Because of the complexity of the knowledge, skills, and values that students need to learn and develop to become democratic citizens, one class on citizenship education with a nonparticipatory teaching methodology such as lecturing is not the only activity schools should undertake. Designing a few objectives in the social studies curriculum to deal with civic and citizenship education is not enough. Developing the consciousness of democratic citizens so that their actions are critical and representative of that consciousness requires the involvement of as many people and as many institutions as is possible. And students must actively participate in their own learning. Otherwise, citizenship education will be one more subject that students learn by rote just to get a passing grade, and they will have little understanding of the connection between their actions, or lack of, and the functioning of their society. This type of learning is already happening:

*[In Latin America] people feel there is a separation between their daily life and the people who are in charge of decision making (Cerdoso 1990, 8; my translation).*

For these reasons and because of the difficult social situations most societies are facing today, schools need to begin by examining their own organization and structure. Then, they need to examine their curriculum and the way it is implemented. And finally, they need to look at the individual relationships that exist within the school community. Teacher education (both pre- and in-service) will also need to emphasize this inquiry; unless teachers get involved in this transformation of traditional education, the most innovative curriculum will not make a significant difference.

*Although values and attitudes are often explicitly included as specific objectives in a social studies curriculum in developing countries, there is reason to believe that many classroom activities treat these objectives as merely intellectual exercises. Far too little time is devoted to the demonstration and application of these values or to social action (Griffith 1990, 164).*

The following specific practical recommendations suggest ways schools may begin the process of preparing citizens to live and participate in democratic societies.

#### *School Organization and Structure: Moral/Civic/Democratic Atmosphere*

One common theme throughout the literature concerned with the development of democratic citizens is the need to reorganize the structure and management of schools. Most authors consider that "the school itself should represent as much as possible a minidemocracy" (Wood 1988, 299).

*To get rid of authoritarianism is difficult for those who have spent all their childhood and preadolescence in a condition of subordination or lack of initiative. It is time now to introduce democratic structures in all aspects of life, beginning with elementary school, where students begin from the first year to discuss, value, propose, and decide, so that the class acquires a cooperative aspect in implementing tasks established by group agreement (Negrette 1989a, 14; my translation).*

Negrette's words echo those of many experts in the field. As a consequence, the reform should begin by redefining the school organization and structure, so that every member of the community can practice democracy.

Using different models, this transformation of the traditional school organization has been successfully done in Latin America, the United States, and Europe. For example, Kohlberg's Just Community Approach—which encourages the whole school to be organized as a democratic community and which allows every student, teacher, and staff member to have one vote in every decision—has been implemented successfully in Germany and the United States. Also, the model of Escuela Nueva, designed by Colbert and Mogollon (Colbert 1991)

in Colombia, calls for a school organization where children are grouped in committees that are responsible for different aspects of school life. This model is also being implemented in Chile and Guatemala. Finally, in Venezuela in the 1960s, the model República Escolar was implemented successfully at the experimental level (Villegas-Reimers 1993); in this model, the school is a republic, and the students run for different government offices. Everyone participates in elections, and those elected are responsible for specific aspects of school life, while the rest act as concerned and actively involved citizens of the republic. Similar to this model is one implemented in Massachusetts (United States) (Weintraub 1991) where elementary school children were able to elect representatives to meet with faculty and administrators to discuss managerial issues of the school. The representatives would report to their constituencies and would, in turn, be responsible for presenting their views to other members of the school. So, instead of having every student involved (as in the Just Community Approach), this model functions more like a representative democracy and has also worked successfully.

These models show that the organization of the school, supplemented by a specific curriculum that focuses on the development of a democratic consciousness, is a necessary and effective element that promotes democratic knowledge, skills, and values. If the school is not ready to adapt one of these models in its organization, the school community should at least use some elements of the models. All members of the community should help decide which elements should be used because the organization will affect everyone, and the more the members participate in the decision, the more easily the plan will be accepted, and the better it will work.

### *Teaching Methods and Practices*

The pedagogical methodology used in the classroom needs to be reexamined. Teachers lecturing and students reading silently from textbooks are not the most effective ways of teaching democracy. The classroom must be transformed into an active arena for discussion, research, and decision making. Only in this way can students understand the responsibilities they have for their own lives as individuals and citizens and for the well-being of others.

*We need to change dramatically our style of teaching in the classroom. We need not only to preach so-called democratic principles; we need to act them out in real life. We need to create a school environment that provides the opportunity for all members of the school community to practice democracy and democratic decision making (Massialas 1990, 203).*

*If students are to become actively engaged in public forms of thinking and participate thoughtfully in the whole spectrum of civic activities, then civic education and social studies programs require a strong element of practical civic experience—real participation and empowerment (Barber 1989, 355).*

## *Curriculum*

Changing the school organization and structure and the roles of each of the members of the school is not enough if the content of the subjects taught remains the same. The curriculum needs to directly and indirectly address the different knowledge, skills, and values identified as crucial in the education and development of a true democratic citizen. A curriculum that is developmentally appropriate will be much more effective than a curriculum that does not take the students' developmental needs and differences into account. A curriculum that is multicultural—and, therefore, presents all subjects from multiple perspectives; includes all members of society, their histories, and cultures; and emphasizes differences as something to be valued and respected—will be a more democratic curriculum. The content of a curriculum on democratic education may be more effective if the process of curriculum development is a democratic one.

*Like the aims of democracy itself, the aims of democratic education should be debated and formulated by the people, but neither the process nor the aims themselves should violate the human rights of individuals and groups (Kaltsounis 1990, 192).*

## **Section Two**

### **Developmental Characteristics of Children and Suggestions for Appropriate Activities**

This section suggests specific activities for three age groups: preschool (ages 3 to 5), elementary school (ages 6 to 12), and high school (ages 13 to 18). Each discussion of a particular age group begins with a brief explanation of what are considered typical developmental characteristics, describes the aspects of democratic education that should be developed, and offers practical suggestions for teachers.

Designing and implementing specific activities is not the only thing that educators should do to promote the education of true democratic citizens. However, this may be the most immediate way for teachers to begin the long process of reform of school organization, curriculum, and pedagogy. The reality of many Latin American countries, and other developing countries, is that the educational system is so centralized that teachers feel little freedom to experiment with different content and teaching methods. Integrating these activities (and others that teachers may design for this purpose) into the current curriculum should be the beginning of a more efficient process of educating for democracy—a process in which all members of society concerned with the education of the younger generation get involved. It is very important to involve parents and community leaders in these efforts, as their support, ideas, and leadership may be key in initiating and sustaining this process. Hopefully, this integration of activities will trigger other changes—school organization, curriculum content, and pedagogy and teacher training—that are necessary for an effective process of education for democracy.

One of the leading theories in the field of child development is that of Jean Piaget and his colleagues (Wadsworth 1989). Most of the description that follows is a summary of Piaget's observations of children in each age group.

The following table summarizes the main characteristics of the cognitive, social, and moral development of children in each of the three age groups.

**Developmental Characteristics  
(by age group)**

	<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Moral</b>
<b>Preschool (ages 3 to 5)</b>	<p>Concrete</p> <p>Egocentric</p> <p>Static</p> <p>Animistic</p> <p>Transductive</p> <p>Centered</p>	<p>Open to new social interactions</p> <p>Egocentric</p> <p>Beginning to be empathetic and caring</p> <p>Beginning to have a sense of self</p>	<p>Unable to autonomously understand rules and moral values (heteronomous)</p> <p>Egocentric</p> <p>Aimed at avoiding punishment</p>
<b>Elementary School (ages 6 to 12)</b>	<p>Concrete</p> <p>Nonegocentric</p> <p>Able to use transformational reasoning</p> <p>Logical</p> <p>Decentered</p> <p>Increased ability to understand complexity</p> <p>Able to recognize more than one perspective</p>	<p>Peer groups</p> <p>"Society" of children</p> <p>Self-organized</p> <p>Industrious</p> <p>Give importance to opinions of others</p> <p>Develop new interpersonal skills: leadership, communication, volunteering</p>	<p>Considerate of perspectives of others</p> <p>Cooperative</p> <p>Able to understand that rules change by mutual agreement</p> <p>Not yet autonomous (heteronomous)</p> <p>Dependent on acceptance by others</p>

<p><b>High School (ages 13 to 18)</b></p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p>Logical</p> <p>Egocentric</p> <p>Able to have multiple perspectives</p> <p>Able to develop complex thinking</p> <p>Able to solve hypothetical problems and think in hypothetical ways</p>	<p>Peer group as primary group</p> <p>Societal perspective</p> <p>Understanding of own role in society</p> <p>Identity formation</p>	<p>Transition from using immediate group to using society as a reference</p> <p>Autonomous</p>
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**Note:** Terms in this chart are explained in full in the following text.

## Preschool Children (ages 3 to 5)

### Developmental Characteristics

Children in the preschool years have distinct characteristics (see the chart on page 14) attributed to their cognitive, social, and moral development. According to Piaget (1965), during the preschool years, children need external structures setting limits and external authorities (parents, teachers, etc.) telling them what to do or not to do.

### *Cognitive Development*

- As *concrete* thinkers, children understand their reality and all concepts in concrete terms. Abstract concepts like freedom, trust, and responsibility are understood only when they are transformed into concrete actions; for example, a preschool child understands freedom as being able to do whatever he/she wants, trust as not telling a secret, and responsibility as remembering to feed a pet.
- Children at this age are *egocentric*; they can understand actions and facts only from their own perspective. They are not selfish, because to be selfish, one needs to be able to see another's perspective and choose to ignore it. Children do not have that choice; they only perceive one side of everything. Egocentrism is a particularly important characteristic because children will put their wishes and needs before anything and anybody else; this egocentric view, of course, creates conflict. Children do not have the ability to perceive groups or societies as entities; they just see each individual member as an individual.
- Children in this age group cannot perceive a process clearly; rather, they perceive different steps within the process, but do not see them connected. Piaget called this phenomenon, *static reasoning*, and he illustrated this concept by the tendency that children have for paying attention to only one aspect of a movie or a book or for assuming that any process of transformation that is presented to them happened because of magic or other unexplainable reasons. Children in this age group seem to have a vivid imagination and tend to use "magic" to explain many phenomena.
- Inanimate objects acquire human characteristics (*animism*); imaginary friends may appear and disappear even when no other person but the child can see them.
- The child's reasoning is what Piaget called *transductive*, meaning that it is not logical. The child lacks a clear understanding of cause and effect as well as awareness of this lack.
- Children also *center* their thinking on only one variable at a time. They cannot consider two or more aspects of one issue, or two or more variables of a situation at

the same time (they cannot see, for example, that something can be classified by both shape and color).

### *Social Development*

- Many children at this age begin to attend some form of school for the first time (day care, nursery school, preschools, etc.) and, therefore, have their first contact with institutions outside of the family. *New social relationships* are emerging, and interactions with groups of equals are, for many, a first opportunity to see how difficult it is to come to an agreement or to impose one's will.
- Cognitive development characteristics affect social interactions; for example, their *egocentrism* makes them unaware of how their taking a toy away from another child makes that other child feel (so, teaching about cooperation and respect for others is a challenge). Centering makes children in this age group unaware of the possibility of one person playing two roles at the same time (like being a friend and a citizen at the same time).
- Despite this typical egocentrism, preschool children develop *empathy* early on. This means that children are able to respond emotionally to another person's distress, and, therefore, may offer help. However, this help will be conceived of in an egocentric way (offering a pacifier to an adult who is crying, for example).
- It is in the preschool years when children develop an understanding of themselves as individuals. Around the *age* of twenty-four months, children recognize themselves in the mirror, use words such as *me, I, mine, and my*. This new *sense of self* affects their behavior, as they constantly want to self-assert their ways.

### *Moral Development*

- They have neither an *autonomous understanding of rules nor an autonomous self* that generates judgments and decisions.
- According to Kohlberg (1984), right and wrong depend on their own wishes and needs (*egocentrism*).
- *Avoiding punishment* at all costs guides their action.

Moral reasoning shares the characteristics mentioned above as part of typical cognitive development for this age group.

## Aspects of Democratic Education to be Developed

The following table summarizes the main aspects of knowledge, skills, and values that should be promoted among preschool children.

**Main Aspects That Should Be Promoted  
Preschool Age**

Knowledge	Skills	Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group membership</li> <li>• Importance of rules</li> <li>• Formulation of rules</li> <li>• General values: honesty, sharing, cooperating, freedom of choice (within limits), diversity, etc.</li> <li>• Basic historical facts</li> <li>• Geography of immediate community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal communication (especially when in disagreement)</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Critical and independent thinking</li> <li>• Sharing and cooperating</li> <li>• Simple problem solving and negotiating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for diversity</li> <li>• Cooperation</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Tolerance</li> <li>• Care for others</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Truth</li> <li>• Honesty</li> <li>• Responsibility for self</li> <li>• Responsibility for group</li> </ul>

Given the developmental characteristics of the children in this age group, many teachers and other adults may think that it is almost an impossible task to develop any of the concepts, skills, or values related to democratic citizenship. After all, children do not seem to understand the meaning of the core values of citizenship and democracy, and they do not have a clear sense of what society means. However, it is at this age that the basis for later understanding needs to be developed. Many important habits and skills (discipline, structure, organization, respect, honesty) are formed during the preschool years, and initiating this learning at this age is imperative.

## *Knowledge*

Children in this age group need to learn about groups and their own membership in them. They should learn about the need to have rules so that groups of people with different interests and goals can still work together; about general rules and values like honesty, sharing, cooperation, freedom to choose within certain restrictions, and respect for diversity; about how rules are generated; and about more abstract concepts (even if they will learn them in more concrete ways) such as family, citizenship, society, government, elections.

Children may begin to learn about basic historical moments in the life of their country. If the historical moment is told as a story, children may become interested. Later on, in the elementary years, children may learn that there are different ways of looking at history (depending on whose perspective is taken), but for now the children are only able to understand one side of the story. They can also learn some geographical knowledge about their own community (location, part of the country, main economic activities).

## *Skills*

Children may begin to develop some specific skills now: verbal communication (especially to communicate disagreement by talking rather than by hitting another child), listening, critical and independent thinking, sharing and cooperating, and simple problem solving and negotiating.

## *Values*

Preschoolers need to learn about diversity and respect for differences. Children are aware of differences among people and are eager to learn about these differences and about the importance of everyone in society. During this age, children may begin to learn from their peers and the media about intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination (there is nothing innate or natural about those values); therefore, it is important that schools teach children the exact opposite so they can reject these negative concepts.

Some other values that can be developed in preschool children are cooperation, respect, tolerance, care for others, empathy, truth and honesty, personal responsibility, and responsibility for the group. These are not easy values and attitudes to teach, but the foundations for their learning are usually created during the preschool years.

## **Suggested Activities**

The organization of the classroom and the daily schedule should give children the opportunity to interact with each other as well as with adults (which is a good reason to ask parents to collaborate with the school and the classroom) and to choose (within a certain limited number of alternatives) what activities they would like to do during specific times of the day. Giving

children choices (during free play, for example, allowing children to choose among doing a puzzle, playing at the water table, or drawing) is a way of teaching children about decision making, the right to decide on one's own (independent thinking), and the responsibility to respond to one's choices. Giving choices teaches children to respect the choices of others and the decision-making process.

The curriculum in preschool—and in all other grades—should be multicultural to reflect the society in which the child lives. Children need to begin to be exposed to differences so that they can learn and value them. Stories, puppets, games, and role plays that introduce children to other ethnic groups, racial groups, and cultures (especially those represented in their classroom and their country) are effective ways of introducing the child to the diversity of our world today.

Children should be given the opportunity to participate in deciding the rules of the classroom (such as not yelling, communicating disagreement with words and not with actions, not telling lies).

*In learning how to make and why to follow school and community rules, students begin to acquire citizenship participation skills (Instructor 1990, 42).*

In a successful preschool classroom, children discussed—with the guidance of the teacher at the beginning of the school year—what they were supposed to do and not do in the classroom. The teacher created displays of the "rules" and posted them on the walls around the classroom. Each time a child broke a rule, the teacher offered a gentle reminder about the rule that everyone had agreed on. By the middle of the school year, children were reminding others, and sometimes themselves, about the rules. These rules were revised about once a month: some were added; some were modified. The children learned how their input affected what happened in the classroom and how they had to be responsible for following up on their own rules and decisions. They also learned that taking a vote is important that every vote counts, that everyone had a right to participate and decide, and that what the majority agreed on was for everyone to follow.

Another useful activity to develop specific knowledge, skills, and values related to democracy in children of this age is to use story telling and story reading as opportunities to present concrete situations that involve conflict, choices, and resolutions. Many children's stories throughout the world present situations in which a character does not know the right thing to do. The teacher may take this opportunity to elaborate on the story. For example, the teacher may read a story only until the moment when the character gets confused and then discuss with the children the character's options. This discussion can be followed up with many other activities to engage the children's interests and to develop other skills. For example, children may be asked to role play the story and then add their own ending to explore the consequences of different decisions, to draw endings, or to create puppets (or paper dolls) to play out the story and the many options a character has. These activities will

allow children to discuss abstract values and concepts such as trust, freedom, and respect in concrete ways with the guidance of the teacher. These types of activities will also develop other skills such as listening, talking, thinking critically, reasoning, and gathering information.

Since preschool children are egocentric (their needs and wishes always come first because that is the only perspective they are capable of taking), they should be provided with many opportunities to work in groups. These opportunities should help develop a sense of understanding that there are different ways of perceiving and understanding the same situation and should develop skills and values like cooperation, sharing, prosocial behavior, empathy, and the ability to problem solve in groups.

Assigning each child a specific responsibility in the classroom is also useful. A good responsibility system allows children, rather than the teacher, to choose their tasks. These tasks may rotate each week, so that every child can play different roles and experience different responsibilities. For example, the teacher may list on the board every Monday morning activities for that week: cleaning the blackboard, helping with snack time, reminding everyone what day of the week it is, choosing a book for the teacher to read to everyone, feeding the classroom pet, watering the plants, etc. Children may select what activity they want to do, and they need to commit themselves to completing that activity every day. This would teach children in a concrete way about the importance of active participation, decision making, responsibility, doing activities for the well-being of the group.

The teacher may follow up events as they happen with related activities. For example, if a child comes to class with a story of something that happened at home, or something that he or she witnessed in his or her community, the teacher may take that opportunity to point out to the children in concrete and simple terms some of the values involved in the situation or take the opportunity to explain a concept like "freedom of speech" or "due process" based on the experience of that child. In this way, the children will begin to understand that the concepts and ideas they discuss in relation to books, movies, or stories are actually applicable in real life.

The way that the child is disciplined in the classroom carries an important message about democracy for the children because it raises issues of authority, power, rules, consequences, the well-being of the individual and the group, fairness and justice, etc. Poor behavior does not necessarily indicate a child is misbehaving on purpose. The child is being socialized outside of the home in a group setting for the first time and confronts many new rules and standard norms. Yelling, insulting, or labeling the child as a "bad" boy or girl is not going to help in any way. The child needs to receive a firm message that specific rules are necessary for everyone to be able to live together and respect each other. For the child to learn this concept, he or she needs to be respected as a human being. Constantly yelling at and scolding the child will not teach the child the importance of communication, honest problem solving, and discussion. Children learn by doing and by imitating. Parents and

teachers are among the most important models of behavior children have in this age group. The more we model the behavior, skills, and values we want children to have, the more effective any program will be. Involving the children in the process of choosing rules, gently reminding them of those rules, and giving children valid and logical reasons as to the importance of following rules are crucial steps at this age.

Many teachers (and parents) may already be implementing many of these suggested activities. The important element for developing knowledge, skills, and values in relation to citizenship and civic education is not only the activity, but also how this activity is presented in a specific context to the children; whether specific concepts and values are highlighted, emphasized, and explained; and if a follow-up activity to the learning situations is offered. For example, reading a relevant story book that presents the situation of a child who must act in a prosocial way to solve a problem may be a valuable tool in the curriculum. However, the situation will become truly significant only if the teacher presents it in that context and follows the reading of the story with conversations, questions, and activities that guide the child's thinking and action in the direction of a democratic citizen and that help the child understand the relationship between that story and real-life situations.

### **A Preschool Classroom in Action**

The classroom included four- and five-year-olds and was run as a developmental classroom. The teacher had spent some time at the beginning of the year helping the students develop the rules that would be followed in the classroom. The children by now knew these rules and used them quite well. They took care to remind each other of those rules and felt proud of the product of their actions. The teacher also took care in getting the students involved in activities that emphasized prosocial values like sharing, cooperating, and freedom; work was usually done in groups; and students were responsible for choosing their activities. So, during free-play time, students could "sign up" for a puzzle, play with a specific toy, engage in dramatic play, etc. They were responsible for their choices and for communicating to others when they were done with their activity.

At the beginning of one week during the year, for example, the teacher read a story to the children. This story presents the case of a porcupine that does not have a place to live and is invited by a family of moles to stay with them for the winter. A week after the porcupine moves in, the moles realize they are being hurt by the quills of the porcupine. The teacher then asked the students these questions: What should happen next? What should the porcupine do? What should the moles do? Children discussed their own solutions, and the teacher wrote each suggestion on the chalkboard. For the rest of the week, all the activities were organized around the story. Students role-played suggestions, made puppets to represent different alternative solutions, and prepared boards with drawings of their endings of the story. In all these activities, students had the choice of how to represent their ideas, or what activity to get involved in. Skills like communication (verbal and written), critical thinking, listening, sharing, and cooperating were emphasized. Also, values like respect for differing opinions, tolerance, empathy, truth, and honesty were discussed and practiced. Children also learned about memberships in specific groups, the importance of having specific rules, a little bit about geography (where to live, location of "the forest," etc.). Overall, this week-long activity reinforced themes that had been explored throughout the year with the students.

## Elementary School Children (ages 6 to 12)

### Developmental Characteristics

Children in the elementary years have distinct characteristics (see the chart on page 14) attributed to their cognitive, social, and moral development.

#### *Cognitive Development*

- The characteristic of *concrete thinking* still holds true, although it begins to disappear towards the end of this phase. Also, because children in this age group are now capable of perceiving a process in full and thinking logically, their concrete thinking is different; they are fascinated by concrete details and literal information about almost everything.
- Children are *nonegocentric* now because they are capable of taking someone else's perspective or "putting themselves in someone else's shoes." This characteristic alone explains a lot of the changes observed in the way children interact with each other and with adults in their lives.
- Rather than focusing on only one aspect of a process as before, children can now see a process and pay attention to the many steps that it involves. Piaget calls this characteristic *transformational reasoning*.
- Children show the beginning of *logical reasoning*, where the connection between cause and effect is understood.
- Children can now pay attention to more than one variable simultaneously as they *decenter* their thinking.
- Given their development of logical thinking, children's *ability to understand complex issues and situations* increases during this stage. Problems that involve several variables are now easier to understand, while before one variable was all a child could handle. These problems, however, must involve concrete situations; otherwise, the child is unable to understand them.
- Related to this increased ability to understand complexity is the *recognition of more than one perspective*. Leaving egocentrism behind, children begin to realize that others may have points of view, needs, and wishes that are very different from theirs.

#### *Social Development*

- Children at this age are interested in their *peer group*.
-

- Children are beginning to *organize themselves* in teams, clubs, and other forms of micro-society.
- The emergence of a *society of children*, with all the norms, rules, and codes chosen by the children, is one of the most important characteristics of social development at this age. Children also are beginning to be concerned about what others believe about them, and the influence of others (both positive and negative) can be strong as children now have a need for acceptance.
- Children are *industrious*.
- Because children are now able to take other people's perspective, they realize that others have thoughts about them and *give increasing importance to the opinions that others have* about their actions, behaviors, clothes, friends, etc.

### *Moral Development*

- Since the child begins to *consider others' perspectives*, cooperation in decision making and activities is possible.
- According to Piaget (1965), children begin to *understand that rules can be changed by mutual agreement* and, therefore, enjoy the process of making and changing rules. Children follow the guidance of others in terms of what is right and wrong. They may still follow their own needs and wishes, but somehow always take the needs and wishes of others' into consideration.
- Also according to Piaget (1965), children's morality is considered *heteronomous* (like preschool children) in that children have not yet developed an ability to make autonomous judgments or decisions about moral situations. What is right and wrong is determined by what significant adults in their lives consider right and wrong.
- Toward the end of this stage, children want to please others and want to be accepted, so the peer group or immediate family group dictates the norms of what is right and what is wrong. The need to be "good" (as defined by the immediate group) and accepted is a strong influence on the child's thoughts and behaviors.

### **Aspects of Democratic Education to be Developed**

The following table summarizes the main aspects of knowledge, skills, and values that should be promoted among elementary school children.

**Main Aspects That Should Be Promoted  
Elementary School Age**

<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Values</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General knowledge base (history, literature, math, etc.)</li> <li>• Characteristics of their societies: sociopolitical, economic, governmental</li> <li>• Documents created in society: constitution, human rights, other laws</li> <li>• Citizenship in democracy: rights and responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening of values of preschool</li> <li>• Standard norms</li> <li>• Appropriate and accepted behavior</li> <li>• Verbal and written communication</li> <li>• Listening and understanding</li> <li>• Thinking individually and critically</li> <li>• Solving conflicts</li> <li>• Making decisions and taking action</li> <li>• Assessing of decisions and actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening of values of democratic societies</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Honesty</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Freedom of speech and thought</li> <li>• Equality</li> <li>• Fairness</li> <li>• Justice</li> <li>• Respect of differences</li> </ul>

The elementary school years are years of great change because children increase their ability to understand complex and less concrete concepts, to remember more details, and to take more than one perspective on an issue. These children are also changing in their social interactions and the way they understand the reality around them. The changes should be considered as curriculum is developed and different pedagogical strategies are adopted. Thus, even though this section deals with all the years of elementary school, the important developmental changes that occur during these years should be taken into account.

### *Knowledge*

Children in this age group seem to absorb every detail and concept they are taught, not only because now they have an expanded memory capacity, but also because one of their developmental characteristics is that they are interested in all details. During these years, children learn about the characteristics of their society: its social and economic organization, its political reality, and its government. Children in this age group may also begin to learn about documents that have been generated by their society and government to guide citizens' lives (for example, the Constitution and other laws). Children will grasp many concepts and definitions clearly, even if still in only concrete ways. Children can build a strong knowledge base about being citizens in a democratic society, about their rights and responsibilities, and about the values of such citizens. One limitation of children in this age group is that because they still understand their world in concrete terms, they may be literal in their understanding and, therefore, rigid in the application of their knowledge. Many times, in fact, they will have a hard time considering the relationship between what they have so well memorized and their own daily lives in society. This difficulty should be considered as specific concepts and ideas are presented.

### *Skills*

Children in the elementary schools years continue developing those skills initiated in preschool. Children in this age group have by now learned many of the standard norms of the society where they live and know how to behave appropriately in many circumstances. Teachers and other adults should continue providing opportunities for the children to strengthen their skills, such as verbal and written communication, listening and understanding, thinking independently and critically, solving conflicts, making decisions and following them up with actions, and evaluating decisions and actions. The children also may begin developing specific skills, such as skills for public discourse, skills for leadership, and skills needed for voluntary service to the community.

### *Values*

Children are ready to learn, in broader terms, about core values of democratic societies and about peaceful living. The children can understand and use concepts such as honesty, respect, trust, freedom of speech and ideas, equality, fairness, and justice; the children can now understand concepts generally, not only as they are applied to themselves. In the beginning elementary years, children will understand these values in concrete and rather egocentric ways; but as time passes, children's concrete understanding will be the base for a stronger and more abstract awareness of these values. For this age group, consistency and a clear structure are important elements that give children a sense of safety to explore and examine these complex values.

Presenting activities and exercises from a multicultural perspective should be a priority during this stage of schooling because children are now capable of understanding concepts like ethnicity, race, religion, and political views. And the more they learn to value these differences, the more democratic their thinking and actions will be.

### **Suggested Activities**

There are important developmental differences between the first grades and the last grades of elementary school. The following suggestions can be applied to all the grades, but the level of complexity of the activities and of the discussions and conversations that happen in the classroom must be adapted according to the level of the children. Teachers usually know their groups quite well and, therefore, will be able to modify activities to make them suitable to the realities of their group. These recommendations may also be used by parents and other adults. This constant collaboration will make the process of educating democratic citizens much more effective.

As during the preschool years, children must feel they are members of a group or community so that they begin to understand what being a member of a larger group (society) is about. The differences among the members of the group should be acknowledged and the value of those differences and the need for respect should be emphasized. The more opportunities children have to do group activities and cooperative learning, the better this will be for their own development of concepts, skills, and values related to a democratic society. These group activities must involve not only academic activities (such as working together to solve a math or science problem), but also more social activities (for example, deciding on the rules that will apply in their classroom or in other specific situations such as field trips or playing outside during recess). The more children feel they have some say in organizing and managing their own classroom (and school), the more they will understand the functioning of a true democratic society where all citizens have a say in the working of society.

Similar to the preschoolers, children should be given choices about what responsibilities they want to take for the whole group. Cleaning up and organizing the classroom materials may be one kind of activity; however, as the ages increase, children may want to take more responsibilities, like being officers of a specific school or classroom club, or organizing and participating in some kind of volunteer work to help in their community. Children should also be given the opportunity to be creative about activities and causes they want to get involved in. A class project, for example, could be for children to gather information about agencies that need volunteers and then to choose where to serve. These activities should be followed up with vivid and interesting discussions of the values underlying the activities and the role participating in society plays in a democratic life.

The curriculum for the elementary grades usually includes history, geography, civic education, and other subject areas that are excellent sources for the education of young democratic citizens. The content of these subjects is important as are the pedagogical

methods used to teach them. For example, in the teaching of history of the country, the teacher (and the readings and activities) may emphasize specific historical situations or moments where several choices were to be made and one specific choice decided the future of the country. The group may explore whether that choice is true to the values professed in democratic societies or what would have happened if some other choice had been made. Children may also explore the sources of the history book and the ways the historical event may have looked if the story had been told from another point of view (for example, to tell the historical trips of Columbus to America from the native Americans side or to tell the story of battles of independence from the colonizers' side). Children should also be introduced to situations where conflict arises and one easy solution does not exist. Children may want to debate those situations and take different stands. Finally, exercises should be provided so children can reflect on what a specific historical moment means for the country and the society today; the children need to realize that history is not a dead subject for which lots of dates and names must be memorized, but is a critical way of looking at society's past and shows how society is what it is today because of the choices made by citizens from previous generations. Specific concepts and values can be stressed as the children bring them up in their discussions and questions.

Children also need to begin to learn specific concepts and procedures that are followed by governments and democratic societies. These concepts and procedures may be explained by the teacher, role played, researched by students, etc.

Debates are a great source of teaching many concepts, skills, and values. Debating ideas, decisions, and concepts is at the core of a democracy and of a fair justice and legal system. Providing opportunities for children to debate issues that have some moral, ethical, or values relevance is important. In that way, the children are required to take stands on issues, to defend their position with strong arguments (for which they have to gather information and process it in a meaningful way), and to communicate their ideas for everyone to understand. Debating will provide the children with the opportunity to improve skills such as communication, decision making, critical and independent thinking, and judgment and assessment of a situation.

As reported by Sadowsky (1991), the process of having children be active participants in developing the rules to be followed during the school year has been successfully implemented in several schools and classroom settings at the elementary level. This practice has several positive outcomes: children feel empowered within their classroom environment and learn the responsibilities of having that kind of power, they learn how their own behavior is perceived and experienced by their classmates, and they learn how to mediate conflicts and respect differences.

Sadowsky (1991) reports an experience, implemented at her school at the elementary level, that was successful in developing civic awareness and teaching children several concepts, skills, and values in relation to democracy. In this opportunity, the students—under the

guidance of the teachers—got involved in following the presidential elections of the country. Some grades had mock elections; others followed every speech of the two main candidates and compared them daily in terms of the issues the candidates stood for and the activities they were planning to do. Students had to research the topics (read, gather information) and present to the class not only the topics but also their critical view of them. The children watched presidential debates either together or as part of homework and then discussed them in class. The students also role played, debated, and campaigned within the school. During the campaign, most of the subjects were related to this study; thus, for example, math could emphasize issues related to the budget and taxes as presented by the candidates, and geography could focus on the states each candidate visited.

Moral dilemma discussions are another excellent source of learning during the elementary years. The dilemmas may be hypothetical or real or a combination of both. These discussions help develop not only skills like critical thinking, communication, and decision making, but also values like respect, trust, and fairness. Providing opportunities for the students to discuss dilemmas from their daily lives will increase their awareness of the ethical components of daily events. Also, using current national, local, or international events as dilemmas will allow the children not only to develop all the skills and values mentioned above, but also to learn about their own society as well as the societies of others.

Smith (1985) suggested several ways to use different television programs for teaching civic knowledge, skills, and values to elementary school children. These suggestions for student activities include acquiring and using information (beyond what the television program uses), making judgments and decisions (as presented in the program and then discussed in class), and communicating to others an assessment of the program.

Finally, the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to live in a democratic society are not learned only in a civic education class. Every subject may be explored from the perspective of some of these values and skills. For example, in the language class, several literature sources that emphasize these values may be used. In the math class, problems about fair ways of sharing earnings may be helpful. History, geography, and all other social sciences provide a natural context for discussions related to democratic knowledge, skills, and values. In addition to these discussions, students must bring their knowledge and skills into practice. Volunteer work, active participation in the daily management of the classroom and the school, and school activities that take place in the community are all forms that begin developing the students' roles as members of their community and citizens of their country.

### **An Elementary Classroom in Action**

A good example of an elementary classroom that successfully implements some of these suggestions is a classroom in the Escuela Nueva program in Colombia. In this classroom, students study the typical subjects of the elementary years (such as math, language, and natural and social sciences), but the social reality of their community and their role in it is emphasized in each subject. Students perceive themselves as members of the school community and of the larger community in which the school is located. They are informed (through conversations, reading the newspaper, discussions, debates, etc.) of the important issues of their community. They are invited to be active members of their own groups, not only by being informed, but also by proposing and working towards finding solutions for the problems of the community. Different subjects are taught using examples from their real experiences. Students are given the choice of specific responsibilities in the school (from cleaning to organizing school activities), and they may even be elected for "official positions" in the school, such as president or members of committees. Teachers treat students as equal members of the community and encourage them to participate and evaluate the importance of their active involvement in the community.

Through all these activities, students are not only acquiring the necessary knowledge of their history, geography, government, and other subjects, but also practicing the skills they need to live in a democracy (such as communication, leadership, involvement in action, appropriate behavior, and decision making) and developing the values of democratic citizens (such as freedom of speech, freedom of choice, equality, and respect for human dignity).

## High School Children (ages 13 to 18)

### Developmental Characteristics

Adolescents have distinct characteristics (see the chart on page 15) attributed to their cognitive, social, and moral development.

#### *Cognitive Development*

- Children in this age group begin to understand all concepts in a more *abstract* way than ever before.
- Their thinking becomes *logical*.
- A new form of *egocentrism*, where the adolescent considers that his or her thoughts are unique and the most logical, appears. As part of the combination of their egocentrism and their logical thinking, adolescents want to apply logic to everything, regardless of the constraints of reality.
- Building on the abilities developed during the elementary years, adolescents are now *able to simultaneously have multiple perspectives*; that is, they can think of themselves, of others thinking of themselves, and of themselves thinking of others thinking of themselves—all at the same time.
- Adolescents enjoy arguments and playing with ideas; they are also fascinated by debates and *hypothetical* situations that require critical and *complex* thinking to solve them.

#### *Social Development*

- For the adolescent, the *peer group is the most important social force and reference group*. Peers have a strong influence in everything an adolescent does, and this pressure can be both negative and positive.
- Adolescents are capable of a *societal perspective*; that is, they can now see the larger picture and perceive their role in it. For the first time they *see themselves as members of a larger social group* than their immediate reference group of family and friends and feel a strong need to become active in that large institution called society.
- During this time adolescents begin to *develop a sense of identity*, both in the personal and the social world. They now focus more than before on answering questions such as Who am I, What am I, and Where am I going?

### ***Moral Development***

- According to Kohlberg (1984), adolescents are usually in a *transition* in terms of moral development. At the beginning of adolescence, these children are guided by their immediate group on their decisions about what the right and the wrong things to do are; yet later on, they begin to pay attention to the institutionalization of norms, like the creation of rules, laws, and regulations, and take them to be the guides of what is right and wrong.
- An important milestone is that their moral reasoning becomes *autonomous*. No longer do they need others' influence in their decisions. They have an autonomous self that decides what is right and wrong. Conflict arises many times when they know what is right, but the peer pressure "forces" them to do wrong. This internal conflict does not exist before the adolescent years.

### **Aspects of Democratic Education to be Developed**

The following table presents a summary of the main aspects of knowledge, skills, and values that should be promoted among high school children.

**Main Aspects That Should Be Promoted  
High School Age**

<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Values</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translation of rigid and concrete knowledge into abstract and flexible ideas</li> <li>• More complex concepts</li> <li>• General knowledge base</li> <li>• Multiple perspectives in examining facts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening and communicating abstract and complex concepts and processes</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Dealing with contradictions and conflict</li> <li>• Democratic practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforcement of all values of democratic life</li> <li>• Abstract understanding of human values and human rights</li> </ul>

This age group, like that of elementary school, varies in its developmental characteristics. Therefore, there are serious differences between the entrance into adolescence and the transition into young adulthood, even though both age groups would fall into the adolescence category. Those differences must be considered when developing and implementing curriculum contents and activities.

Many authors agree that adolescence is one of the most crucial (if not the most crucial) ages in the development of consciousness about democracy and the knowledge, skills, and values of true democratic citizens.

*It is critical that students at this level develop the knowledge, skills, and ethical attitudes necessary for effective, active citizenship (Instruct, 1990, 43).*

Adolescents are in a stage of great confrontation and questioning of themselves and their roles in society. Since adolescents are in the process of developing their own identity, they have a strong need to find a place where they fit in both the immediate group and the larger group. They are also questioning set rules and standards of society, and many times they feel conflict between their needs to be adolescents and their desire to receive the same treatment and rights as those of adults.

### *Knowledge, Skills, and Values*

In this often difficult transitional stage, adolescents need to learn how to translate everything they learned from a concrete and rigid perspective in the elementary school years into a more abstract, complex, and sometimes relativistic view. The same values and skills stressed before need to continue being explored now with a new understanding. More complex knowledge needs to be explored (for example, not only the organization of government at the national and local level, but also the politics that affect the functioning of that institution), and the values learned before (for example, all those listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) need to be explored in a more critical and reflective way. Adolescents also need to relearn how to listen to and respect others' perspectives. Because of the typical adolescent egocentrism, children in this age group may lose sight of what true freedom of speech or true respect for differences mean. They will begin experiencing, maybe for the first time, contradictions in their actions and those of adults around them (defending freedom of speech, but criticizing the authorities for permitting a group like the Ku Klux Klan to speak publicly). Adolescents need to learn how to deal with these contradictions and conflicts.

Finally, now more than ever, adolescents need to actually practice being democratic citizens, and the school and the classroom need to provide these opportunities. Adolescents need to be critical, to speak out against injustice, to organize themselves according to interest groups, to feel they have some say in the decisions that affect their lives (school decisions, family decisions, etc.). If the school treats adolescents as citizens in an authoritarian regime, the

students will not learn how to be, think like, or behave like democratic citizens in their society.

All the knowledge, skills, and values mentioned above in the section on elementary school children as goals of a program of civic and citizenship education need to be strengthened during the adolescent years. Hopefully, because of their experiences during the elementary school years, adolescents will begin high school with a strong base in the aspects of democratic citizenship.

### **Suggested Activities**

Activities need to be adapted according to the age of the adolescents being taught. The developmental characteristics of a 13-year-old are not the same as those of an 18-year-old. Teachers and curriculum developers (as well as parents) need to consider developmental differences. In addition, as with children of any other age group, adolescents will benefit more from school programs in which parents are active collaborators and/or supporters. The more the school and the teachers can do to get parents involved directly and indirectly in these activities, the more effective the results will be.

Activities during the high school years should include thoughtful and reflective explorations of concepts, principles, and values underlying any event. It is in this stage when true "conscientization" (Freire) is possible. Whether discussing a piece of literature, a historical event, a current event in the news, or a recent experience of a student in his or her daily life, teachers should always take the time to provide opportunities for in-depth reflection (whether by discussion, journal writing, role playing, etc.). Learning facts and concrete details is too simplistic for this age group. Curriculum should go beyond these steps by providing opportunities for the students to be critical and reflective. The concepts and facts they are asked to learn should be related to their social realities.

*The study of local public issues—housing, sanitation, transportation, environmental pollution, for example—helps students to understand that good citizenship requires clear knowledge of the issues themselves and awareness of the mechanisms used to reconcile different interests and opinions, together with responsible action aimed at contributing to the welfare of the community (Instructor 1990, 43).*

Students in this age group also need many opportunities to feel not only in control of what affects their lives (as much as possible) but also empowered to affect the institutions and groups to which they belong. Organizing the classroom and/or the school in groups that have some kind of organizational power and decision-making opportunity is a helpful way of giving students a chance to be active participants in their immediate community. Students should also learn to understand the "power of the majority" and to be aware that even when one disagrees with a decision, the majority decision needs to be taken seriously.

Kohlberg's Just Community Approach was successfully implemented in many high schools in the United States and Europe and is based on principles of democratic governance in the school (Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg 1988). This approach is characterized by the creation of a moral atmosphere, an active and involved community, and a well-organized institution where each member has a say and one vote in decisions and where committees take care of issues like discipline, academics, and extracurricular activities. If the school cannot be reorganized to resemble a Just Community, some of the elements should be included as a way of providing students with the opportunity to be members of a democracy, even if at a smaller scale.

Students also need to see democracy in action. Principles like due process, freedom of speech, and fair judgment need to be not only explained and learned, but also experienced by the students. The school and the classroom should set procedures to be followed in case someone breaks a rule. The procedure should not only be known ahead of time by all, but also be decided and voted on by those who are going to be affected by it. Having a constitution in the school where everyone has a chance to participate and vote is a good example of how democracy works.

Like students of elementary school age, adolescents need to have the chance to volunteer their time to community service. This will allow them to know other groups of society to which they may or may not belong, will give them a sense of how their work affects others, and will empower them in many respects. This community service must be followed up with discussions, journal writing, and other forms of reflection on the students' experiences and learning process.

Organizing debate teams to discuss current issues, or other events, is a good way of developing the knowledge, skills, and values these adolescents need. The high school experience should be seen as an opportunity to rehearse being a democratic citizen with its rights, responsibilities, and consequences.

Current events are also an excellent source to emphasize specific content and values in adolescence. For example, Feinberg (1988) developed around the Iran-Contra affair a curriculum to be used with adolescents in the United States. This event, being such a controversial one and touching on so many issues related to the components of a true democracy, offers interesting opportunities for class discussions, role-play actions, and opportunities to make judgments and decisions, in addition to exploring concepts, government procedures, and laws. In world events, many situations occur that are as rich as this one in terms of the concepts, principles, and values underlying it.

Another recommendation given by several authors (i.e. Brown 1985) is to involve students in issues that not only relate to them directly, but also are issues of national concern (for example, provide opportunities to get students involved in developing programs for the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, where they work with other adolescents, adults in their

communities, and civic authorities). This type of program will help students develop some form of awareness of their role in society, of how their actions affect others, and of what their responsibility in society is.

The most important reference group for adolescents is the peer group. Regardless of what adults in their communities say or do, adolescents will often pay more attention to their peers. Thus, it is important to organize the classroom and the curriculum in such a way that adolescents feel they can teach each other and, in a way, "control" each other's behaviors. If the peer group in the school advocates for community service, respect to others, etc., more adolescents are likely to get involved and follow those values. It is up to the adults in the community to be creative about how to empower adolescents to behave the way democratic citizens should behave.

### **A High School Classroom in Action**

A good example of an experience with high school students comes from observations of the Just Community model implemented by Kohlberg and colleagues. In this high school, students attend the regular classes of all high school students, but in these classes the teachers emphasize the development of a moral awareness. Topics are discussed, debated, role played, evaluated, and explored in great detail. For example, when studying history, students talk about the different perspectives from which the topic could be examined. Students discuss the different conflicts reported in history textbooks and examine where the books' authors stand. Students are encouraged to present their own points of view in this discussion and to listen and respect those of other students. They are also encouraged to keep themselves informed of local, national, and international news and events. Students are encouraged to volunteer in the community and to find solutions to common social problems.

In addition to belonging to specific classes, students belong to the larger community of the school. Teachers and other staff members are equal to students in this community. All decisions related to the community are discussed and decided by all members following a democratic and participatory process. The rules of the community are decided by everyone, and discipline is enforced by everyone. Every student is invited to belong to different committees that work more closely on specific issues, and students may choose which issue they would like to work on. Overall, the school is a democratic community, and students are immersed in their functioning as full, active, and participatory members.

## **Conclusions**

This paper is only a small contribution to the larger process of educating citizens for democracy. The following points have been highlighted:

- Knowledge, skills, and values of citizens who live in democratic societies must be actively taught and promoted.
- Schools must take a leading role in teaching and promoting such knowledge, skills, and values and work together with parents and other members of the community to prepare children for living in a democratic society.
- Using the civic education curriculum alone is not enough, as the complexity of the knowledge, skills, and values that need to be taught requires more time and commitment on the part of the school and the community than a few hours a week.
- A reform of school organization, teaching practices, curriculum, and teacher education is necessary and should be set as a long-term goal by democratic societies.
- While these major reforms are implemented, specific activities and contents can be integrated and emphasized in the classroom. Implementing developmentally appropriate and multicultural activities is an effective way to start this process of education reform.

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