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**GOOD SCHOOLS, GOOD CITIZENS: A DISCUSSION**

Reference document coordinated by the Canadian Teachers' Federation  
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*The opinions expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the Canadian Teachers' Federation nor of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.*

## GOOD SCHOOLS, GOOD CITIZENS: A DISCUSSION

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Society makes many demands on schools, not always wondering whether schools are capable of meeting those demands. Among the responsibilities schools have always been expected to play is instilling in students certain values as well as a predisposition to be active and "responsible" citizens. The question is whether in today's circumstances, those are realistic expectations.

There are many reasons why the task is so much more difficult than many understand. In the first place, there is by no means universal agreement on what the appropriate, or "correct" values are for Canadians of any age. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, for example, has declared that "The future of our society depends on informed and educated citizens who, while fulfilling their own goal of personal and professional development, contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of their community and the country as a whole." Prudently, the Ministers assembled did not try to define their terms, leaving it to the beleaguered teacher to determine what constitutes an informed or educated citizen, what happens if one's personal development is antithetical to the development of the community, and how to reconcile the many different views Canadian hold about how proper development should take place.

Then one faces the reality that our children receive their information from a multitude of sources each day, not all of them by any means disseminating the same messages as those conveyed by schools. Indeed, children often see in the outside world reality in stark contrast to the one pictured in the classroom. Often, those most vocal about the importance of schools communicating proper values to students refer to "some sense of honesty, truth, civility, social justice and cooperation, and a determination to combat violence, racism, gender inequality and environmental degradation". Yet in any day's newscast a student is likely as not to find evidence of a world characterized by dishonesty, incivility, social injustice, harsh competitiveness, widespread violence, racism, sexism, and a value system that almost invariably puts economic growth ahead of environmental sustainability. Such cognitive dissonance can surely not fail to have an impact on the student's view of what she's been told in school.

It has often fallen to social studies courses, and above all to history departments, to convey to young people the values that have been enshrined in Canadian history. The problem here is that there is very substantial disagreement as to what values have in fact been reflected in Canadian history, and what history to pass on to our children.

Others point out, similarly, that Canadians are singularly "confused" and "ambiguous" about their own values these days. How, then, is it possible to pass on to students consensual values when they no longer seem to exist (if indeed they ever really did)?

Some question as well whether the actual structure and function of schools make them credible institutions to instill a sense of social justice and democratic participation. After all, it's said, schools themselves are largely authoritarian in nature, and even if they're not as harsh as in the bad old days, children still learn that submission to authority is often a ticket to success. At the same time, schools are patently unequal institutions, children from advantaged backgrounds generally faring much better than those who begin disadvantaged.

Finally, with commercial values seeming of such a high priority these days, with students operating in such a harshly competitive environment, with business-school partnerships growing apace, some critics believe it is naive to think rhetoric about democracy and social justice will be taken seriously by students.

Nevertheless, many serious observers still believe the education system is uniquely placed to instill in our children more appropriate values and sense of their democratic responsibilities as citizens. But if they are to be at all successful, they must have a strategy for dealing with these various obstacles and constraints.

Issues for discussion:

**DISCUSSION ISSUE #1. WHAT CAN SCHOOLS REALISTICALLY DO TO HELP PREPARE CHILDREN FOR LIFE AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP?**

**DISCUSSION ISSUE #2. ARE THERE COMMONLY SHARED CANADIAN VALUES THAT SCHOOLS SHOULD BE TRYING TO TRANSMIT TO STUDENTS?**

**DISCUSSION ISSUE #3. WHAT IMPACT ARE BUSINESS VALUES AND PRIORITIES HAVING IN SHAPING THE OUTLOOK OF TODAY'S STUDENTS?**

In Upper Canada, the upper crust  
Found their provisions flagrantly abused  
And ignorance, like geese, come home to roost.  
For unenlightened by the lamp of learning  
The vagrant youth were bellicosely turning  
To lechery and crime and vulgar show  
And other things that gentry think *de trop*.  
Complaints were heard:  
"This modern youth are sick.  
They'll ruin our whole body politic.  
Our policies must forthwith be revised.  
Learning they need to make them civilized.  
For those who learn to read and write  
Are less inclined to fornicate and fight."  
And so, across the teacups on the lawn,  
The common school for common folk was born.

Hugh Oliver

What are schools for? What purpose or purposes should they serve? How does society decide these questions? Are society's expectations of schools realistic? Do schools also perform certain functions that are not widely understood?

Questions about the appropriate purposes of schools have been asked from the first, as the little poem above indicates. Expectations of formal education have always been great, which helps explain why there is perennial disappointment with it. In the immortal words of the late American folk humorist Will Rogers, "Schools ain't what they usta be, and they never wuz." Rogers reminds us that the golden age of education to which some look back nostalgically, an era of clarity and consensus, never actually existed. Professor Rebecca Coulter of the University of Western Ontario, has pointed out that disagreements about schools' purposes are far from new:

The arguments about the purposes of schooling, for character formation, for social reform, for patriotism/nationalism and democratic citizenship, for economic prosperity, for vocational or job training, persist in rather similar forms across the 19th and 20th centuries, as do the related critiques of those purposes.

This is a useful perspective, reminding us that our generation is not likely to have the last word on the subject. On the contrary. Expectations for schools at this moment are ever expanding, often contradictory, and frequently overwhelming. Significantly enough, it's become quite difficult to make a list that comprehensively tallies up the various jobs that someone or other in recent times has assigned to our schools, because you're sure to omit some of them. Still, with apologies to those whose concern is inadvertently neglected, herewith :

- Teaching the basics
- Teaching intellectual development

- Teaching a great deal of substantive information
- Fostering a love of learning
- Preparing generally for work and career development
- Learning specific work-related skills
- Learning to be self-reliant and to work cooperatively
- Being able to cope in a competitive world
- Creating more equity
- Becoming entrepreneurial
- Instilling personal and public values
- Preparing for democratic citizenship

At the same time, schools are often expected to assume burdens when society at large can figure out no better way to deal with them: compensating for parental abuse, impoverished backgrounds or nutritional deprivation; keeping up with and conveying the dangers of sexually-transmitted diseases; offering new models for conflict resolution; providing physical exercise; deterring drug and alcohol use; preventing suicides; building self-esteem; repudiating racism and sexism; promoting cross-cultural awareness, and many more. The list grows with each new societal crisis, although rarely does an item ever seem to drop off.

Canadian realities add other purposes. Schools for francophones outside Quebec are expected to inculcate a belief in and commitment to the survival of francophone language and culture. Catholic schools are explicitly expected to transmit the values of the Roman Catholic Church. The dilemmas faced by schools are immediately raised. One might ask, for example, precisely which (or whose) Catholic values are meant. What are Catholic schools to teach about women and the priesthood, a question on which the Church is seriously, and very publicly, split? The point here is simply to underline the complexities inherent in many of the purposes schools are expected to carry out.

Presumably there would be agreement among Canadians that, at the least, schools must have as their irreducible purpose academic learning; after all, if they don't do it, no one will. But education defined in this narrow way has palpable limits, as the following *cri de coeur* powerfully reveals:

I am a survivor of a concentration camp.  
My eyes saw what no man should witness:  
Gas chambers built by learned engineers;  
Children poisoned by educated physicians;  
Infants killed by trained nurses;  
Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.  
So, I am suspicious of education.

My request is:

Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

The message is unmistakable. Its execution is more problematic. Do we understand how men and women degenerate into monsters? Do we know how education can prevent such an outcome? Does our society agree on the values schools should transmit to young Canadians, and are schools capable of doing so if there were agreement? Will our children be influenced by the moral lessons schools attempt to deliver to them?

There's always a danger that we'll forget how complex the lives of students really are, and that schooling constitutes only one slice of that life. It's a point that's been underlined by Des Dixon in his memoirs of a lifetime in the trenches of public education in Canada: "The mark of an authentic proposal for education reform," Dixon argues, "offers a vision of the whole reality of childhood. School is a part-time job for most children, yet the school system sputters along pretending the main activity of children is attending school." Given the realities that characterize contemporary life, given the massive competition for a child's interest, this lesson seems particularly pertinent for those who want our schools to introduce certain moral values to our students and motivate them to become active citizens. After all, when schools attempt to communicate values that students know are often ignored by the society around them, by different social institutions, and indeed by schools themselves, cynicism about and disrespect for the education system as a whole can easily result.

Canadians, of course, aren't the only ones attempting to come to grips with the capacity of schooling to fulfil its onerous, ever-expanding mandates. Here is American educator and academic John Goodlad:

It is unreasonable to expect the schools to pick up the slack when families fall apart, religious institutions no longer attract the young, children are malnourished, drug addiction is rampant, prime-time television programs are vacuous and educationally bankrupt, and gang members, athletes, and narcissistic celebrities are admired as adolescent role models.

The contradiction between the values schools claim matter and the world as kids experience it has been made cleverly in a quiz prepared by well-known political scientist Benjamin Barber in Harper's magazine:

A good way to prepare for a high-income career and acquire status in our society is

- a) win a slam-dunk contest,
- b) take over a company and sell its assets,
- c) start a successful rock band,
- d) Earn a professional degree,
- e) Become a kindergarten teacher.

Familiarity with Henry IV, Part II, is likely to be of vital importance in

- a) Planning a corporate take-over,
- b) Evaluating a budget cut in the Ministry of Education,
- c) Initiating a medical malpractice suit,
- d) Writing an impressive job resume,
- e) Taking a test on what a 17-year old knows.

Notwithstanding the potential obstacles, demands that the education system has obligations well beyond the academic continue to be widespread. Of course, there are also substantial divergences of views as to what those obligations constitute. Listen to the expansive words of the 1996 Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, tellingly entitled Learning: The Treasure Within. (Canada was not one of the 15 nations with members on the Commission though David Suzuki is credited with being a "Distinguished Advisor.")

In confronting the many challenges that the future holds in store, humankind sees in education an indispensable asset in its attempt to attain the ideals of peace, freedom, and social justice....the Commission affirms its belief that education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development. The Commission does not see education as a miracle cure or a magic formula opening the doors to a world in which all ideas will be attained, but as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war.

As if this weren't a heavy enough responsibility, the Commission continues:

Education is at the heart of both personal and community development. Its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full and to realize our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and the achievement of our personal aims.

At the same time, education must foster "democratic participation" and "the active practice of citizenship".

These quite sweeping hopes that UNESCO has for the world's schools seem even more remarkable when we realize that UNESCO's writ runs from Afghanistan to Angola to Albania.

Closer to home, expectations too run high. This was reflected in the landmark 1993 Victoria Declaration of the Council of Ministers, Canada, which declared that

The future of our society depends on informed and educated citizens who, while fulfilling their own goals of personal and professional development, contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of their community and of the country as a whole.

Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning, while recognizing many of the factors that seem to limit the capacity of the education system, nevertheless proposed that schools seek to transmit to their students certain unmistakable values relating both to personal morality and social issues. These included "some sense of honesty, truth, civility, social justice and cooperation, and a determination to combat violence, racism, gender inequality and environmental degradation." Although the Commission acknowledged that it had "no illusions that all our fellow Ontarians will agree with this list," it added the perhaps optimistic note that "we do feel that the vast majority of Ontarians support these as values necessary for any kind of equitable and caring society."

An equitable and caring society are among the values schools are most commonly expected to inculcate (even though they are values to which Canadians as a whole have seemed only modestly committed in recent years). So is education for citizenship. But what does the concept mean? What is citizenship all about as we approach the millennium, and what's the role of the schools in promoting it? These questions are at the heart of the Citizenship Education Policy Study project (CEPS), an international research network project begun in 1997 and funded by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation of Tokyo and directed by John Cogan of the University of Minnesota. The project is designed to examine the changing character of citizenship over the next 25 years and the implications of these changes for educational policy in the 9 participating nations and beyond; Canada is one of the nine, and a number of Canadians well-known for their interest in education (and their widely divergent views) are among the 182 "expert panelists" who participated in the project.

After extensive consultation, the study concluded that henceforth educational policy "in all its aspects" must be based on a vision of what it conceptualizes as "multidimensional citizenship" appropriate to the challenges of the 21st century. For the purposes of this paper, the two most significant dimensions of citizenship highlighted by the project are the personal and the social.

The personal dimension of citizenship involves developing a personal capacity for and commitment to a civic ethic characterized by socially responsible habits of mind, heart, and action. As citizens we must enhance our capacity to think critically and systemically; our understanding of and sensitivity to cultural differences and issues of human rights; our repertoire of cooperative and non-violent conflict-resolution and problem-solving; and our willingness to protect the environment, to defend human rights, and to engage in public life.

In the past, as the project report points out, "Preparation for citizenship has traditionally been carried out through formal education programs in schools and almost always through the social subject area of the curriculum. Citizenship education has typically been embedded in courses of history and civics in most nations and for the most part focussed on developing a knowledge base about how government and other institutions in any given state work and the rights and duties of



citizens with respect to the state.” This formalized, narrow approach, the report insists, is no longer good enough.

To actualize this personal dimension of citizenship...requires an attention to the teaching and learning of appropriate knowledge, skills and values which must be the task of the schools as a whole, both in their explicit curricula and courses of study and in the many other ways, both direct and indirect, they influence students. Citizenship is not something that can be confined to a specific course, or to classes in civics, or to exhortations to behave properly. It must infuse the whole atmosphere of the school and be identified as a priority by everyone involved in the conduct of education.

Moreover, schools can achieve only so much on their own, no matter how hard they work....Schools simply do not have the resources or the requisite time available to mold the citizen of the 21st century.... Thus society at large, and especially those social institutions that influence the lives of students, must reinforce the schools’ work in developing the concept and practice of multidimensional citizenship...Everyone from family members to business and government leadership must take a proactive role.

In other words---words the report doesn’t use----it takes a whole village to teach multidimensional citizenship.

As for the social dimension of citizenship, it defines a good citizen as one who is actively involved in the social life and public affairs of their communities. "Traditionally, citizenship education has often defined the good citizen as the loyal servant of the state or the informed voter, both of which are largely passive roles. By contrast, multidimensional citizenship embraces those progressive approaches to citizenship education which see citizenship as entailing a commitment to participation in public life.” The report is silent on the content of that participation, but presumably it includes the causes it had emphasized earlier such as protecting the environment and defending human rights. Nor does it deal with the educative role of "family members, business and government leadership” that are not committed to either the environment or human rights.

We can be confident that all proponents of schooling for good citizenship are anxious to have the entire village support the schools’ efforts. But some take actual course content more seriously than others. This is very much the case of the Dominion Institute which was founded in early 1997 (in their own words) by "a group of young Canadians concerned about our society’s declining sense of civic responsibility and its long-term traditions of civility, tolerance and decency”. The Institute wants especially "to raise awareness of [Canadian] history and civics” among Canada’s youth, and has already won considerable media attention for its surveys showing the abysmal ignorance demonstrated by young Canadians for our country’s history. These findings indicate that "we have failed to impart to our youth the historical knowledge that is necessary to make informed decisions and sustain a sense of belonging.”

The blame for this signal failure is assigned in no uncertain terms: "Although the creation of historical awareness is certainly the product of many institutions, public and private, it is to our education system that the lion’s share of responsibility falls. And the school systems are failing

that responsibility.” The solution is equally crystal-clear: teach Canadian history with "mandatory courses and comprehensive, fact-based curricula", stop "diluting" history with current issues, civics and sociology, and (here the concerned young Canadians tread precariously on dangerous pedagogical ground) put an end to "'progressive' pedagogy or child-centred learning".

To be fair, the Institute understands in theory the dilemma its solution immediately raises. What history will be taught? Which historical facts? Which eras will get more attention? Will it be political or social history? Who will decide? Indeed, it's own rhetoric raises a multitude of questions. For example, many historians who have studied Canadian labour, civil liberties, immigration, aboriginals, women, the poor and others would question the Institute's own sense of Canadian history that has led it to its overall conclusion that "civility, tolerance and decency" accurately portrays the Canadian tradition.

Nevertheless, the Institute's outlook remains positive and optimistic.

Luckily, there's a simple solution to hand, a National History Framework...a minimal list of the people and events to which every child educated in Canada's schools must be introduced...the basic chronology that must be mastered to allow further historical study.

For example, the Winnipeg Strike would be listed, but the social developments that led to the Strike likely would not be...In this way, the inevitable wrangling about the relative importance of certain people, events or movements to the national story can largely be avoided. The American experience with their National History Standards clearly demonstrated that such projects bog down when they attempt to make a comprehensive list of everything of importance for a national history and to give relative weightings to particular events and personalities.

This is a curious interpretation of the furore aroused in the United States by the National History Standards exercise, a phenomenon with direct bearing on the question of education, citizenship and values. In 1988, the US National Endowment for the Humanities commissioned a major study to set standards for American history courses. Six years of work later, including the involvement of nearly 2000 historians, the US History Standards project was completed. Rather than looking to lists of historical events, the final report in fact was highly critical of the American history that had for so long been taught in US schools and recommended paying far greater attention to minority groups within America, to other cultures, and to the broad social history underlying the actions of a few great men.

The reaction was ferocious, at least from American conservatives, including the most prominent among them--- Newt Gingrich, Rush Limbaugh, Pat Buchanan and William Bennett (George Bush's Secretary of Education and, significantly, the America guru of the transmission of proper American values, which he calls virtues). The Standards were accused of being almost disloyal to the United States and its glorious history, while its authors were denounced for being brainwashed by special interest groups, politicizing an ostensibly non-political history curriculum, stealing America's history, and denigrating Western civilization in general.

So when the Dominion Institute casually acknowledges that "Naturally, a National History Framework would require cooperation among provincial governments and a federal government

acting, presumably, as coordinator,” others must wonder at the magnitude, not to say the feasibility, of the task. It’s true that the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, has initiated several cooperative efforts, including the Pan-Canadian Science Project, and that, as the Institute says, “numerous other discussions are underway about how cooperation could work to all provinces’ benefit”. Its conclusion? “The National History Framework fits perfectly within those discussions and would, in fact, be a rather modest undertaking relative to other pan-national education projects.” Those with more intimate insight into the workings of the CMEC may consider this proposition somewhat optimistic. In truth, it is more accurate to state that few education ministries anywhere in Canada, even ignoring the question of Quebec’s role, believe it is realistic to expect joint work on a pan-Canadian history and social studies curriculum for the foreseeable future or indeed beyond.

Similarly, it’s not likely that Prof. Ken Osborne of the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, would find the Dominion Institute’s proposed treatment of the Winnipeg General Strike particularly edifying for students. Osborne has long taken seriously the view that schools should be preparing young Canadians to be good citizens, with monographs with titles such as Teaching for Democratic Citizenship and In Defence of History: Teaching the Past and the Meaning of Democratic Citizenship. One needn’t agree with Osborne, but as one of the few Canadians who has written extensively on the subject, his views need to be taken seriously.

The “difficult question” he acknowledges, is “what or whose history should be taught if history is to contribute effectively to democratic citizenship”. Answering his own question, Osborne provides a multi-page “framework” for appropriate curriculum planning. For the purposes of this paper, his dozens and dozens of specific suggestions need not be recounted here. The apposite point is that his framework couldn’t be more dissimilar both in concept and detail from the Dominion Institute’s National History Framework, although both would probably agree in a very general way on the values they hope are transmitted. Presumably the “framework” that would be proposed by those who don’t even share those basic values would be entirely different again.

Osborne also emphasizes what all professional historians have long recognized: that the very study of history is in constant revision, each generation re-writing the past in a way that reflects the concerns and priorities of the present; this is of course true not just of Canada but around the world, as the acrimonious American experience makes abundantly clear. As late as the 1960s, most Canadians (at least outside Quebec) believed history was about constitutional and political developments and a few wars in which non-francophone Canadians enthusiastically fought, about a small number of prominent men of European descent, and about the evolution of Canada, as virtually all textbooks put it, “from colony to nation”. That view was suddenly shattered in 1968 with Bernard Hodgetts What Culture? What Heritage?, a highly influential and devastating indictment of the outdated, smug and distorted way Canadians schools taught Canadian history:

We are teaching a bland, unrealistic consensus version of our past, a dry-as-dust chronological story of uninterrupted political and economic progress told without the controversy that is an inherent part of history.

In fact, it was a history that virtually ignored or demeaned the role of ordinary Canadians, of women, the labour movement, native peoples, ethnic groups, schools, social life, business, voluntary organizations, provincial and regional developments, the north, and just about anything else that didn't emerge out of the House of Commons. For those whose values include democracy, equity and the like, the new history is clearly a huge step forward. But a note of caution is necessary. First, teaching the new history is substantially more difficult than the far more straightforward, linear, unidimensional approach of the past. And secondly, sooner rather than later, a Bernie Hodgetts for the new millennium will emerge to inform us of the inadequacies of the present curriculum.

Of course history courses aren't the only way that citizenship and values can be communicated to students. Across Canada can be found Canadian Studies programs, interdisciplinary programs, social science courses that are crafted to the same ends. Following on Hodgetts' critique of conventionally taught history, values or moral education became common, a deliberate attempt to teach values, to connect them to citizenship, and to link it all to the existing subject matter of the curriculum. It's hardly insignificant that the issues raised have had continued salience over the decades: Quebec separatism, minorities in Canada, the status of native peoples, the stature of Louis Riel. Of course there is no such thing as the "right" answer to any question involving these issues. The objectives, as the well-known OISE Canadian Public Issues project put it, were twofold:

The first is to enable students to gain an understanding of the society in which they live through the active discussion of its major social conflicts. The second is to enable students to acquire those skills necessary for the analyzing, discussion and resolution of such conflicts or issues.

In other words, good democratic citizens need a certain amount of knowledge and certain intellectual skills, but may freely decide on the values that underly the controversial issues they are discussing. There is no such thing, implicitly, as the right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, value or ethical precept.

This approach reflected a sensitivity on the part of the project developers to three realities. First, without a societal consensus around values, it was foolhardy to think schools could impose any. Secondly, there may be limits to what schools can realistically be expected to convey to students, given the endless other sources of information and impressions young people had. And finally, there existed a palpable difference, perhaps indeed even a full-blown conflict, between the avowed purpose of schools and the functions they actually perform.

Here, then, is the elusive but unmistakable hidden curriculum of Canada's schools, and the twin dilemma it seems forever to pose. Since, first, schools are in practice highly undemocratic and since, secondly, they help perpetuate social inequality, how can they teach impressionable young Canadians about the virtues of democratic citizenship and the ethics of equity and justice?

Volumes have been written on these two subjects, not just in Canada but throughout the industrial world. But the Canadian story, as the small poem at the top of this essay indicates, begins literally at the beginning of public education in Upper Canada.

From the beginning, the instruments of this socialization were the hierarchical, authoritarian nature of school relationships combined with a pedagogy that called for omnipotent, omniscient teachers spoon-feeding the word from on high to silent, subordinate, docile, unquestioning student vessels. These relationships, and the pedagogy routinely used in most schools, deliver powerful messages about the kind of citizenship that is valued outside and certainly within the school system.

In other words, argues University of Manitoba professor of education Neil McDonald, the system of mass social control using schools created by Egerton Ryerson became the prototype followed by S.P. Robins in Protestant Quebec, David Goggin on the prairies, and John Jessop in BC. In Ken Osborne's view, "Schools would civilize potential trouble-makers and rebels and help the rich and powerful sleep soundly in their beds."

In many ways, according to some observers, little has changed. John Polanyi, Canada's Nobel Prize-winning scientist and social activist, argues that the lessons taught via the structures and practices of our education system are passivity and submission. Neil Postman agrees that schools exist to curb and control the natural exuberance and curiosity of children and teach them instead hierarchy, authority, discipline, conformity, uniformity, obedience, and submissiveness, not necessarily the qualities that characterize an actively engaged citizen.

In fact, it's surely invalid to generalize about all Canadian schools in this manner. Across the country, there are large numbers of schools and huge numbers of teachers where children are treated with respect and where independent thought and critical thinking is actively encouraged. Anyone educated before the 1970s can attest to the welcome winds of change that have blown through our education systems. Of course even in such schools, the few have final authority and the many have none, as both "sides" understand perfectly well. Moreover, the backlash against more relaxed and less authoritarian relationships between teachers and their students shouldn't be underestimated. There are powerful forces in the land that are aggressively lobbying for a return to the "good old days," where any sense of democracy and participation in schools were palpably unwelcome.

After all, for most of the history of this country, ending not that many decades ago, most children left school inculcated with an unexamined devotion to God, King/Queen, Country and the authorized version of Christianity, subjects that were never debated in their classrooms. From time immemorial, the key legislation governing education in Ontario has famously contained the following section describing the duties of a teacher:

to inculcate by precept and example respect for religion and the principles of Judaeo-Christian morality and the highest regard for truth, justice, loyalty, love of country, humanity, benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, purity, temperance and all other virtues.

Not the least interesting aspect of this section is that it remains on the statute books to this day, continuing to endure while section after section has been radically altered around it. No government, it seems, has ever believed that opening this Pandora's box was worth the political risk. This reflects the influence of those who believe our children have gotten out of control and our schools don't discipline them properly any longer. Such sentiments, of course, rather complicates the task of persuading students that an involved citizenship is an ideal Canadians take seriously.

The other key aspect of the hidden curriculum is the function of schools to judge, sort and slot students into winner and loser categories, based to a significant extent on the backgrounds of their families. In the telling words of educational sociologist R.W. Connell, an Australian who has also done research in the US and Canada and who is personally committed to the cause of social justice, "Statistically speaking, the best advice we can give to a poor child keen to get ahead through education is to choose richer parents." It's true there are countless examples of individual social mobility. But on the whole it remains true that those students who go on to university are far more likely to come from business and professional than from blue or white collar backgrounds. The notions that schools create a meritocracy unrelated to class, that they are and have been the great class equalizer among Canadians, is far more myth than reality. What message does that convey to students about their roles as citizens? What's the relationship between power and inequality? If there are different levels of wealth and privilege, are there also different prerogatives of citizenship?

These years, it's necessary to add to these realities the frenzy about the relation among schools, the economy, and employment opportunities. As for the first two, there is a widespread view that Canada's overall economic prosperity and its ability to compete in a ruthless global economy is directly related to our elementary and secondary education systems, especially how students fare in math and science. In fact there is little evidence to sustain this view, and reason to doubt it, as a new report by Britain's Institute of Public Policy Research has just reported. Nevertheless, this entirely utilitarian and instrumental notion of schooling does little to create an atmosphere in which good citizenship and humane values are in the ascendant.

Beyond that, in a world where job opportunities seem increasingly limited, in a school environment where the pressure to compete is intense, even raw, where university certification is the sine qua non of success yet entrance to universities has become more and more difficult, where tuition fees and loan burdens are becoming prohibitive for many, where marketplace values increasingly prevail, where students are transmogrified into clients, teachers into service providers and principals, once the lead teacher, is now the manager of an enterprise, where parents openly regard their children as "precious marketable commodities" ---in such a world, it's necessary to wonder what happens to the drive for democratic citizenship and the values that often accompany it.

What happens in practice, it sometimes appears, is an attempt to combine many worlds, to continue to demand of schools not only many purposes but possibly conflicting ones. Certainly the

conviction that schools have transcendent ethical responsibilities continues to be heard, as a 1988 report commissioned by the Manitoba government made clear:

In an era of interdependence, when the global community faces critical environmental concerns, a fragile international economy and the shadow of nuclear war, it is imperative that a high sense of ethics and social responsibility be instilled in those preparing to take their place as adults in society.

A year later, a BC Commission on Education noted that "We have long expected schools to serve as agencies for civic and democratic development and as places where our culture and values can be sustained and transmitted to the young." But the follow-up to that Commission is instructive. The minister of education of the then government unveiled a "mission statement," a single statement that was expected to drive the entire education system:

The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.

We can guess the drafters of this statement were confident they had covered all the bases. In fact, it was bitterly criticized by the BC Teachers Federation. From their point of view, the statement was all about individualism and market values, preparing young people to be workers, not citizens, and ignoring completely any idea of social responsibility. The Federation itself had recommended a vision of schools whose purpose was to enable students to develop as "self-reliant, socially responsible citizens and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to participate in a healthy, prosperous and democratic society". In the event, the government replaced "socially responsible" with "individual potential" and "democratic society" with "sustainable economy". When the opposition in the legislature offered an amendment to reintroduce the words "democratic society," a government minister accused his party of wanting to teach students about "socialist systems". The amendment failed, and, like Ontario, when the government changed, the mission statement was left intact.

Like their provincial counterparts, the Canadian Teachers Federation has long been interested in such questions. In one of a series of issue sheets dealing with "National issues in Education," the CTF looked at "Education in a Democratic society". Among the questions they raise for discussion is this one: "What is the role of public schools in helping to make Canada a more just and caring society?" It takes for granted, it appears, that a "just and caring society" is a goal Canadians can agree on. Yet the very proposition, that we should become MORE just and caring, implies some disagreements among Canadians. John Crispo, academic and outspoken free market advocate, believes we can have it both ways. He calls on his fellow citizens to develop "a competitive AND compassionate society", but doesn't explain how schools are to help students reconcile these goals, which in recent years have often seemed to be in conflict. Another academic, UBC political scientist Philip Resnick, wonders "how much attention citizens [are] prepared to give to public affairs...in a period when private pursuits seem to dominate?"

Canadians today self-evidently hold strongly divergent views on a large number of important subjects---Quebec, multiculturalism, globalization, the role of governments, the environment, the family, equity, religion, tradition. It's hardly too much to say that, without exception, on every issue that defines the nature of Canada there are major differences. The daily news makes this clear. But what we're also talking about here are core Canadian's values, where the lack of consensus was captured in a report prepared by Suzanne Peters of the Canadian Policy Research Network in 1995, Exploring Canadian Values: Foundations for Well-Being. The project explored Canadian values with respect to the 3 main components of the safety net--health, education and social supports. Peters began with some 50 different polls taken over the past 15 years and then organized 25 discussion groups in 8 cities "so that Canadians could talk to each other about their values, the changes they would like to see in social policy, and the principles that they believed should guide those changes."

The flavour of the findings can easily be conveyed through a series of statements:

Canadians demonstrate a profound belief in core values that sometimes lead to contradictory principles...Core values balance collective responsibility with individual self reliance, hardheadedness on the fiscal side with compassion....Canadians hold an idea of self-sufficient families but acknowledge...that changing times have diminished the range of broader family and community supports that families can rely upon...There was a hot debate about whether all Canadians, deserving or not, should have a minimum standard of living...However, there is consensus that a collective response is required for those disadvantaged by personal or situational factors and that no one should suffer as we get our fiscal house in order....On social issues affected by notions of equality, such as racism, multiculturalism and immigration, there is ambivalence and confusion. Ideas are often in direct contradiction and change during discussions about specific social problems.

"Ambivalence and confusion"---two good words to summarize Canadian's views on their deepest core values. As it happens, there's no particularly good reason to expect Canadians to have widely shared values, anymore than Americans do or Italians do or Chinese do. The problem only arises when something amorphous called "Canadian society" decides that schools must perform the impossible. It's a classic case of *deja vu* all over again. Once again, as has happened repeatedly over the decades, society at large has found itself unable to come to grips with an issue that's deemed to matter --what common values do Canadians share?--- and has passed it on to our schools. But to ask educators to prepare courses that instil certain values and not others in our children, to ask teachers to teach something on which so little national consensus exists, may be a recipe for trouble. The school system is entitled to reply: When the ambivalence and confusion end, please call us.

Notwithstanding all these significant constraints, however, jurisdictions across the country continue to experiment with ambitious and fascinating projects. To take only one, we can look at the relevant sections of the preliminary draft of the "Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum", which has not yet been given final approval by the four Atlantic education ministries. With designated outcomes at four different stages through one's school career, topics include "Citizenship, power and governance" ("Students will be expected to demonstrate an



understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship...."); "Stewardship" ("Students will be expected to demonstrate an appreciation of the environment and a disposition toward protection and wise use of resources so as to ensure a sustainable future"); and "Culture and cultural diversity."

These innocent and apparently unobjectionable concepts, of course, disguise a multitude of complexities for any given classroom. Any teacher who follows the day's news knows that environmental stewardship and sustainable development is everywhere in the world, not least in Canada, taking a back seat to economic development. What does such cognitive dissonance convey to their students? Under the citizenship rubric, students are to demonstrate that they understand such terms as freedom, justice and equality, as if there is a common understanding of these highly controversial concepts: Freedom for whom? Freedom to or freedom from? Equality of opportunity, moral equality, equality of condition? And what are students to believe about equality--that it is or isn't what Canadians value?

Of course exposing students to genuine, legitimate differences of opinion can be an exhilarating educational experience. By grade 12, under culture, students will be expected to "evaluate the policy of multiculturalism and its implication for cultural diversity and unity in Canada." This will be a fascinating challenge for teachers, but one probably shouldn't underestimate its complexity. But then, society is remarkably complex, ethical questions are complex, answers to complex questions are never simple (and if they are, they're probably wrong), and that in itself is a worthwhile lesson for schools to convey.

Indeed, there may never have been a better time to persuade students of the need for a participatory citizenship. There are so many issues on the public agenda, there are so many changes in the air, there is so much of the future still to be forged, that the moment could hardly be more propitious for a lesson that is all about us. Of course, as Ken Osborne and others argue passionately, it's in schools themselves that students must have the first taste of democratic citizenship, must feel that their views and their actions count, that they make a difference. When a member of the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning met to hear the views of a large group of grade 11 and 12 students, he learned many things; not least was that their session had been the first time during their entire school careers that those young people had been asked their opinions about their school. The "hidden curriculum" was not very well hidden from those students.

Osborne, among others, has ideas about how to transform the authoritarian nature of our schools. Doing so is probably the sine qua non of persuading students that they are genuine citizens of their schools, not merely temporary captives of them. From there, it's a logical progression to the larger proposition that a well-rounded Canadian is one who is active, involved, committed to the larger community and society around them. This should be seen as a desirable objective of our education system, and, if the preconditions are met, an eminently achievable one.

But no such achievement is remotely possible if the rest of the village leaves the job to schools alone. It takes an entire society to persuade young people that what they are taught in schools

actually matters. If the business community's increasing interest in the education system is overwhelmingly to enrich its large shareholders, it will be that much harder for students to take seriously admonitions that they should be active, involved citizens of their community and nation. If schools have the task of persuading children of the virtues of democratic citizenship largely because the rest of society has thrown in the towel, students will know that immediately. If schools attempt to do their work and pretend that a thousand counter-influences are not at work outside the school where students spend most of their waking hours, the effort is doomed to failure. If schools attempt to instil ideas that are contradicted by parents, or if parents are merely indifferent to those ideas, the job becomes many times more frustrating.

Several pronounced currents characterize today's education world, some of them quite contradictory. While rhetoric about partnerships is ubiquitous, the reality seems to apply mostly to the role of private commercial interests in schools. Community partnerships, whatever their advocates mean them to be, seem in practice mostly about a handful of parents having some say in the school's business. In fact as governments have cut funds to social services for children, the concept of the school as the hub of comprehensive community care for all children seems as distant as ever.

Some parents who favour a so-called back-to-basics agenda are finding sympathetic governments for their position, while those who believe schools should compensate children from disadvantaged backgrounds feel increasingly disenfranchised. While competence in information technology is widely believed to be a determinant of future career success, most poor families don't have computers at home and most schools have neither sufficient technology nor properly trained staff to help those children catch up. All of these currents impact on the credibility of the messages that our schools convey, explicitly or implicitly, to our children.

In the end, then, the task for those committed to imparting to students the virtues of a democratic citizenship, is fraught with obstacles. It's only by acknowledging and dealing with these obstacles, however, that it has any chance at all of success. Among the many questions that must be dealt with, the following are at the heart of the matter:

**DISCUSSION ISSUE #1. WHAT CAN SCHOOLS REALISTICALLY DO TO HELP PREPARE CHILDREN FOR LIFE AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP?**

**DISCUSSION ISSUE #2. ARE THERE IN FACT COMMONLY SHARED CANADIAN VALUES THAT SCHOOLS SHOULD BE TRYING TO TRANSMIT TO STUDENTS?**

**DISCUSSION ISSUE #3. WHAT IMPACT ARE BUSINESS VALUES AND PRIORITIES HAVING IN SHAPING THE OUTLOOK OF TODAY'S STUDENTS?**