

The Teaching of Community Civics Through Areas of Interest

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The status of community civics is at present one of instability and uncertainty. It is taught in all grades from the sixth through the tenth. Emphasis may be placed on social, economic, or political civics. Community civics is generally taught as a textbook course by the formal recitation method by teachers with no special preparation or training.

In developing a course in community civics, two criteria may be used. They are, first, does it attempt to meet the social needs of students, and, second, does it appeal to the interests of adolescent children?

The social needs may be stated as being somewhat as follows: first, the development of socially adjusted boys and girls who are capable of recognizing individual and group problems; who are able to see and judge the various ways of solving these problems; who are able to cooperate in group activity; who are considerate of other people's needs and opinions; who are able to plan, execute, and evaluate individual and group activities; and who may be depended upon to do a careful, honest, and workmanlike piece of work; second, the development of boys and girls who possess wide interests and the desire and ability to follow some of them through; and, third, the development of boys and girls who are able to appreciate the mental and physical work of others.

It will be seen that these social needs are stated not in the form of subject matter to be learned or materials to be covered, but in the shape of abilities, attitudes, and appreciations to be acquired.

When Arthur W. Dunn of Indianapolis developed the first course in community civics from 1907-10, he attempted to teach directly the social needs of the community such as those stated in his welfare list: health, protection of life and property, recreation, education, civic beauty, wealth, transportation, migration, charities, correction, and government. These objectives were to be met by the learning of facts, through study of textbooks, and to some extent, at least, through first hand study of community institutions. Abilities and appreciations were to be incidental acquisitions. In was hoped that they would be acquired vicariously through study about what adults were doing in meeting those social needs. Work was made somewhat interesting through imitative activities such as organizing "city councils," holding mock elections, and occasionally "running the city" for a few hours.

In following this procedure, it was assumed that adolescent interests paralleled adult interests, and if they didn't, it was the fault of the adolescents. Certainly all citizens, children and adults both, are dependent upon the efficient management of the city, and surely that *should* be one of their interests. But *is* that an adolescent interest? Is the city government one of his responsibilities? If it is not, then it certainly is not something that we can expect him to become greatly excited about.

What are the social interests of high school freshmen? An attempt was made to determine the interests of a group of over a hundred of this year's freshmen in the University High School in Normal. The major areas of interest revealed by this study were *sports and games, movies, travel, hobbies, vocations, social adjustments, school life orientation, club activities, and current events*. These may be legitimately considered as the basis for a course in community civics for these students, at least.

The nine areas of interest under consideration may be thought of as continuous participation types of activity. They are not things that can be "studied" for two weeks and then dropped while something else is studied for another period of time. Neither are they cloistered studies. They demand activity both within and without the classroom.

Let us briefly consider one of these areas of interest to see how a program of activities may be worked out. The hobby unit will consist, first, of about two weeks' study of the need and place of recreation in American life and of the part hobbies play in one's recreational program. During this time, a survey of hobbies already being carried on by the members of the class should be made. General hobby magazines and magazines related to special hobbies should be available for reading.

Students who do not have hobbies should be encouraged to adopt a hobby to follow for the remainder of the school year. People in the community who are engaged in similar hobbies should be contacted and their assistance solicited. A hobby survey of the community may also be made as a class project. Talks and exhibits by hobby enthusiasts in the community should be a part of the class work—as may also class or group visits to hobby shows.

After the preliminary study of hobbies has been made, the work should be carried on intermittently throughout the remainder of the year. Hobby projects will be reported on by some of the class. Special days may be given over to hobby reports and discussions. The work may easily be integrated with many other departments of the school in which special interests of students may develop into hobbies, such as science, industrial arts, home economics, physical education, etc. One or more hobby clubs may develop from the work in this unit, thus providing continuous mediums through which interest in hobbies may be expressed.

By way of summary, such a program worked out for each of the nine areas of interest has certain definite characteristics and advantages.

1. The program should develop an increased willingness and ability on the part of the students to participate actively in such community activities as adolescents normally engage in.

2. It is based on student interests, provides for individual differences, and makes individual purposing, planning, executing, and evaluating a prominent part of the work.

3. The program makes possible the acquiring of new and vital interests by the pupils.

4. It provides for integration of activity among the many different departments of the school and for active participation throughout the year in the various activities.

It is hoped that through a program such as this adolescents will learn to do better the things they are going to do anyway—through learning to do better many of the things they are *now doing*.