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OJJDP Update on Programs

Robert W. Sweet, Jr., Administrator

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Education in the Law: Promoting Citizenship in the Schools

A visitor in the hallways of a small, midwestern school may encounter students of all ages arguing vociferously in courtroom settings as they act as judges, lawyers, bailiffs, defendants, jurors, and court clerks. The visitor would hear middle and elementary school children using a legal vocabulary that many adult citizens never become familiar with, much less feel comfortable in using, and would witness high school students engaging younger students in lively debates about locker room searches for drugs or weapons or freedom of the press in student publications or conducting mock trials for drunk driving, theft, battery, and murder.

A program for teaching constitutional values

What's going on? The mock trials and free-ranging debates that would delight Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson,

and the other authors of the Constitution are the centerpiece of a national education program, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) since 1978, to prevent delinquency. OJJDP's approach was built on a belief that teaching students about the law through active, personal engagement could give them a deeper understanding. By bringing alive the concepts of statutes that often strike youth as arbitrary or merely prohibitive, OJJDP hoped to link legal and constitutional matters to everyday life. What makes the fireworks and dramatics work is OJJDP's Law-Related Education (LRE), a curriculum for elementary through high school students.

The setting for LRE programs may be Chicago, Illinois; Garner, North Carolina; Garden City, Kansas; Lansing, Michigan, or any number of towns and cities across the country. It can be an elementary, middle, or secondary

school; urban, suburban, or rural; a court-appointed classroom, probation camp, reform or training school; or any setting suitable for citizenship education in the law.

The settings vary, but the educational philosophy of LRE is the constant—that the best way to have youth understand the law is to involve them in a particular case or situation that affects the way they live their lives, that touches their personal decisions on drugs, driving, respect for property, and respect for life.

To create programs that both reach students at all levels and remain positively oriented toward the education of all citizens, OJJDP funds the National Training and Dissemination Program. Five organizations concerned with education in citizenship and the American legal system participate in the LRE program: the American Bar Association, the Center for Civic Education, the

From the Administrator

Helping young people recognize that they have a stake in their future is crucial if they are to become law-abiding, responsible citizens. Adults must help them to take responsibility for their future. This is especially true when it comes to illegal drug use. We have to stress to our young people that they are an integral part of the solution to rid our country of drugs. Unless they recognize that they have a stake in the war against drugs, the war will be lost.

One way to do this is to teach them about the law, the legal system, and their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Learning about the underlying principles of the legal system can help young people grasp the importance of laws and their relationship to everyday life.

Because we believe this is so important, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) supports Law-Related Education (LRE), a national program for students in elementary through secondary

school. LRE helps students understand why rules exist, and why it is important they are obeyed. It also teaches them how the courts work, and why citizens who break the law must be held accountable for their illegal activities. But more important, it stresses to them the importance of good citizenship and promotes respect for the law. Individuals who understand laws and their purpose are more likely to respect them and less likely to violate them.

Robert W. Sweet, Jr.
Administrator

Constitutional Rights Foundation, the National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law, and the Phi Alpha Delta Public Service Center [see box].

These organizations deliver LRE in many different creative programs; they devise and deliver the training, curriculums, teaching materials, and local contacts that help communities reach the common goal—the education of citizens who know how our government and legal system work, believe they have a responsibility to participate, and have the logical and verbal skills to do so effectively.

The dynamics of citizen education in the law

Creativity and adaptability are two distinguishing characteristics of LRE. No single format or lesson plan dominates the approach. LRE strategies may be inserted as a course, or as part of existing courses; as a full curriculum, kindergarten through 12th grade; as a special event for all students on a day set aside to study law and the Constitution; as a series of courses offering special opportunities for students interested in public service; or as a nonacademic program in training and reform school settings.

What makes all these expressions of LRE exciting for its creators, teachers, and students is the spark of recognition struck when students grasp key analogies, when they make the connection between fairness in a water-fountain line or the value of rules in sports with critical issues of equal opportunity and due process in the society at large.

LRE gives students a personal stake in learning and helps them see how elementary and high school issues are fundamentally the same as the legal issues of the court system and the constitutional conflicts occupying the front page of the newspaper.

LRE shows students how values—the legal, constitutional values of the society—develop from the conflicts

between personal freedom and the necessity for legal restraints in everyday life. The resulting insights may make for uncommon bedfellows. “Here is the neighborhood tough guy,” points out a social studies coordinator for K–12, “talking about rules of law and conduct in court.”

The educational focus of LRE is on civil, criminal, and constitutional themes as they revolve around familiar topics such as consumer protection, housing law, voting rights, child custody, spouse and child abuse, and traffic laws. LRE also fosters teaching scenarios on themes that may, at first, seem remote but were close and dear to the everyday lives of the authors of the Constitution—search and seizure, indentured servitude, political asylum, and freedom of speech, press, and religion. Finally, there are issues just as vital but which require careful application of the Constitution to new situations—drunk driving, drug testing on the job and in the schools, handgun registration, corporate takeovers, environmental issues, computer crime, and proprietary rights for computer programs.

What makes LRE exciting . . . is when students make the connection between fairness in a water-fountain line or the value of rules in sports with critical issues of equal opportunity and due process in the society at large.

LRE programs teach objective facts but communicate them through the immediacy of group process. Mock trials, role playing, debates, writing of persuasive briefs, police ride-alongs, home security audits, case studies, and legislative assemblies are just a few of the activities used to teach students about justice concepts. The retention rate may be tested objectively, depending on the context, but as with all good education, the less tangible byproducts may turn out to be the most cherished: a greater sense of civic virtue, an increased

understanding of the legal and constitutional struggles of others, increased respect for law officers and authority figures, the experience of resolving disputes, and an increase of law-abiding behavior.

Via teaching techniques that emphasize personal discovery through role playing and contact with criminal justice authorities, LRE students can realize that the American legal structure, rooted in personal rights, is fundamentally fair and that good citizens therefore obey the law from self-interest.

A few vignettes of the way LRE works throughout the country may exemplify the best of the program:

- One LRE program involved its students in the case ruled on by the Supreme Court in 1988, the Hazelwood decision involving student press rights. Trying to understand how the rule applied to their own school publications, students identified strongly with the pros and cons that motivated the parties in the case but found they had to analyze the legal reasoning and precedents to grasp the final ruling.

- In the San Juan Unified School District near Sacramento, California, LRE high school students conduct mock trials on underground newspapers, drug use, theft, and battery for students in grades K through 12.

- The University of San Francisco and several other Bay area law schools grant law students academic credit to teach practical law courses in high schools and middle schools and solicit community resource persons, such as San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos, to visit classrooms.

The Organizations That Make LRE Work in the Community

The American Bar Association's Special Committee on Youth Education for Citizenship (ABA/YEFC) serves as a national clearinghouse for information on LRE, including names of State and local contacts. ABA also produces for national distribution a wide variety of publications that provide resource materials, report on local developments and programs, and examine emerging trends in the LRE field. To get on the mailing list and obtain newsletters, write to Staff Director Mabel McKinney-Browning, ABA, 541 N. Fairbanks Court, Chicago, IL 60611-3314.

The Center for Civic Education's Law in a Free Society (CCE/LFS) has developed a K-12 LRE curriculum based on eight concepts: authority, diversity, freedom, justice, participation, privacy, property, and responsibility. The Center offers multimedia instructional units and teacher training. Contact Charles Quigley, Executive Director, CCE/LFS, 5146 Douglas Fir Road, Calabasas, CA 91302. Call 818-340-9320.

The Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) trains teachers to use LRE materials in a variety of youth programs. The organization offers texts and teaching aids on criminal and civil justice, international law, business ethics, basic legal concepts, and the Bill of Rights. Write to Carolyn Pereira, Project Director, CRF/Chicago Office, 407 South Dearborn, Suite 1700, Chicago, IL 60605. Call 312-663-9057.

The National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law (NICEL) trains teachers and other leaders in LRE, delinquency reduction, and fundraising, and offers teaching materials, including texts. It has tested and disseminated a variety of partnership programs, including those involving law schools, law firms, and juvenile courts. Contact Lee Arbetman, who also coordinates NTDP, at NICEL, 711 G Street SE., Washington, DC 20003, or telephone 202-546-6644.

Phi Alpha Delta's Public Service Center (PAD) administers an LRE program for the Law Fraternity, which acts as a resource base in thousands of communities. It has a domestic network of more than 350 law school, alumni, and prelaw chapters providing volunteer programs and training in LRE. It has now added a drug/alcohol education initiative for high school students, using its law school student members in 170 chartered law school chapters. Contact Robert E. Redding, Executive Vice President, Phi Alpha Delta Public Service Center, Suite 325E, 7315 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814. Phone 301-961-8985.

The Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse can provide access to the many informational materials on LRE in the NCJRS collection of more than 100,000 criminal and juvenile justice documents. Readers interested in obtaining more information on LRE or on the National Training and Dissemination Program should contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse by writing Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850 or calling 800-638-8736.

The program focuses on local issues such as the rights of the homeless, and features law awareness and crime prevention courses at the middle school level.

- A student court program at Rochester Adams High School in Oakland County, Michigan, requires students to pass an exam before they can practice as counsel on school discipline problems. Under the school's court constitution, a member of the Michigan Bar Association must be present at any session which may, for example, find a student guilty and sentence him or her to a fixed number of work hours or recommend suspension. Adams teacher Greg Clevenger (one of two outstanding secondary social studies teachers of the year in 1989) points to a zero recidivism rate for the student court and a general decline of vandalism as proof of the program's value. The program has spread to other parts of the State.

- Garner High School in Garner, North Carolina, immerses its seniors in an 18-week class in law and justice with the focus on constitutional law for the first 9 weeks. During the second half of the course, students hear guest criminal justice professionals do classroom presentations on police and courtroom methods.

- In two States, law students in Phi Alpha Delta (PAD) law fraternity developed successful LRE programs that the National Training and Dissemination Program promotes as nationwide models for teaching the legal dimension of drug and alcohol use. PAD law students at Texas Tech University started the program by experimenting with presentations that accentuate the legal consequences of arrest and conviction for a drug or alcohol offense. Then, approaching the problem with the same desire to help students see the consequences of their actions, PAD students at Hamline University in Minnesota initiated a mock trial program to expose secondary students to each phase of a drunk driving case.

To make this program usable for other fraternity chapters, PAD developed a

training and resource manual with discussion guides and sample mock trial sessions that help high school students identify their values, attitudes, and expectations, and determine their degree of personal risk in using drugs or alcohol. From these beginnings in Texas and Minnesota, the PAD program has spread to 40 of PAD's 170 chapters in 20 States. PAD's goal: a law student volunteer program in every community where PAD has a chapter.

The value of law-related education programs

The long-term effects of such broad and far-ranging programs, which sometimes occupy a full social studies curriculum and spill over into other courses, are not easy to measure quantitatively. Teacher estimates of a general reduction of vandalism or school disturbances are valuable, but not definitive. Much of what LRE does is aimed at improving general cognitive skills such as thinking and persuasion, consensus building, and human relations, and therefore its benefits are more likely to show up on apti-

tude and ability tests. Another benefit teachers observe in LRE students is pride in being in a high-profile, high-status curriculum, a general attitude that may affect citizen behavior positively but is not easily quantified.

Nevertheless, improvements in attitude and behavior are measurable to some extent. An early (1983) OJJDP-sponsored evaluation of LRE at a number of sites found that LRE inspired more understanding of the law and respect for it and that around half the students were less willing to resolve conflicts through violence or to associate with delinquent peers. Similarly, 12 eastern Colorado schools using LRE experienced an increase in law-abiding behavior—defined as behavior correlating with a belief in the fairness of the system—and a decrease in delinquent behavior.

During the 1988–1989 school year, the National Training and Dissemination Program conducted a special initiative to encourage LRE programs to focus on drug education. As part of this special initiative, CCE, CRF, and NICEL

developed and field-tested drug-focused LRE modules in middle and senior high schools in 20 States.

The modules require students to work together on a project calling for understanding of laws related to drug use. The classes prepared, respectively, a proposed drug policy for the school; a series of activities focusing on *California v. Greenwood*, a 1988 search and seizure case; and a draft of a local ordinance for driving under the influence of alcohol. The Social Science Education Consortium reviewed student evaluations of the three programs and found the students were very positive and interested, and recommended some slight adjustments and revisions for the 1989–1990 school year.

A growing program for the 1990's

In 1989–1990, LRE was active in 43 States. This illustrates the real strength of the program because LRE can be effective only where the local citizens and the criminal justice infrastructure are willing to work with the national office and do the groundwork. State LRE projects participate in the national effort by coordinating the local agencies, bar associations, and law enforcement groups. As the coordinator of curriculums, training, and technical assistance, the National Training and Dissemination Program (NTDP) must depend on local initiative.

Since 1984, this cooperation has helped NTDP foster programs in 670 school districts, training some 52,000 teachers and resource persons to reach an estimated 2.4 million students.

At the close of 1989, OJJDP's LRE programs are active and successful; OJJDP's goal for the 1990's is to make LRE as basic a requirement as reading, history, mathematics, and English in all public schools. Given the nurturing it has given thousands of students during the last decade, LRE will doubtless continue to form the minds of young citizens in the 1990's.

A Recipe for Citizenship...

Announced in the September/October 1989 issue of *NIJ Reports*, *Mobilizing Community Support for Law-Related Education* (NCJ 118217) was prepared by the Phi Alpha Delta Public Service Center—one of the five organizations participating in the LRE programs described in this *Update*.

Based on PAD's 10-year dedication to LRE, this OJJDP publication provides information and procedures for supporting teachers and students in school-based LRE programs.

The publication sketches the goals and rationale of LRE, the importance

of community support, and the nature of community support. It also explains how to lock in community participation through a Community Resource Board and how to train resource persons for their classroom roles.

Ten appendixes enrich the "how to" text, offering samples of materials successfully used in LRE programs throughout the country.

The whole package costs only \$9.75 and may be obtained from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850, 800-638-8736.

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