The Bridge: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Legal & Social Policy

Volume 1 *Spring 2011* Article 4

2011

In Support of Reasonable Humanistic Education

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Paradigm shift please. We are at the precipice of the second decade in the new millennium. We know that strong families build a strong nation. We acknowledge that the ruin of a nation begins in the houses of its people. We embrace being mindful of what this nation will accomplish, articulate, imagine, value, and is accountable to, for children were born in the village today. These new millennium village sojourners must have the opportunity to develop partnerships that enable them to become emotionally, intellectually, physically, socially competent and humane global citizens. We must accept the responsibility to forge ahead disseminating and creating strong active partnerships in three fundamental skill sets. The purpose of this paper is to describe the role of the village in educating their children through four fundamental concepts: identifying principles of successful parental/familial relationships; elevating the intellect with progressive knowledge from reasonable humanistic teacher preparation experiences in addition to local, state, and federal support; and integrating successful community relationships. These concepts must be advanced by village stakeholders working in concert with each other. The successful advocacy and integration of these relationships include individuals who are willing to cultivate, shape, and share responsibility in the transmission of ideals to ensure that these newest villagers are competent to sit at the table of global citizenship.

The Impact of Successful Parental/Familial Relationships

If there is no struggle, there is no progress, (Douglass, 1857). Numerous studies have shown that students obtain better grades, have better attitudes toward school, and have higher aspirations if parents are aware of what is happening in school and encourage their children. What's more, research has found that parents themselves develop better attitudes toward their children's school when they get involved, and teachers work to improve their instruction when parents participate in the educational program. Education starts at home.

In 1903 W. E. B. DuBois said "the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men." Carter G. Woodson, (1933) in The Miseducation of the Negro provided a sharp and constructive critique of the educational system, with special reference to its blightening effects on the Negro. Amos Wilson (1993) penned that "the way to learn of our own creation, how we came to be what we are, is getting to know ourselves. It is through getting to

know the self intimately that we get to know the forces that shaped us as a self. Therefore knowing the self becomes knowledge of the world." Jawanzaa Kunjufu (1997) introduced the theory that self-esteem through culture leads to academic excellence (SETCLAE). It is an Afrocentric multicultural curriculum roadmap for building success. Urie Bronfenbrenner (2000) created an ecological model for success by identifying five systems and the conditions they (new villagers) must negotiate to create successful familial relationships, educational success and global village residency. The real question is: How do you encourage parents to stay involved throughout their children's school years? Successful strategies tend to fall into four categories: Increasing communication; Improving participation; Encouraging cooperation, and Developing partnerships.

Increasing communication requires both an internal and an external process. Assuming that children enter this world into a family of orientation, it is that family that provides a major influence on the child and her development. Thus, it is essential to address the young child's family of orientation to adopt reasonably effective communication and discipline strategies. The communication patterns within families may be described as any of the following: false, avoidance, superficial, non-communication, one-sided or open-honest-tactful. The open-honest-tactful communication pattern has proved most successful. Baumrind (1991) identified at least four discipline strategies to employ for best results: authoritarian, permissive, authoritative, and neglectful or uninvolved. The most successful parenting style is authoritative. Here, parents value the child's individuality, while providing appropriate restraints. Additionally, Nye (1974) suggests that for maximum results, families function best when roles are clearly defined and shared. According to Nye, eight major roles facilitate success within families: provider, housekeeper, child socialization, child care, sexual, recreational, and therapeutic. For best results, there should be a sharing of these roles in the family of orientation which make communication flow more easily within and outside the family.

Successful internal communication enhances effective external communication. If the parents successfully orient the child at home, she will be better prepared to communicate effectively at school. Reading to children, creating time and space for homework, and demonstrating through words and deeds that education is important are the key first building blocks for high educational achievement. It's unrealistic to expect to involve parents in all school activities, but effective schools involve parents as widely as possible. The more involved

parents become with their children's school, the more effective that school will be in educating the child. While schools are responsible for what children are taught, reinforcement at home is essential (Gordon, 2006).

The question posed by Asa Hilliard fifteen years ago resonates today, "[W]ith all we know about language and power, needs of our children, parents and society, do we have the will to educate all children" (1991)? If we embrace a will to excellence, we can deeply restructure education in ways that will enable the relationships between teachers, parents and pupils in curriculum development to release the full potential of children. Reasonable humanistic people embrace a will to excellence.

From the perspective of Huitt's (2009) systems framework of human behavior, the primary emphasis of humanistic education is on the regulatory system and the affective/emotional system. The regulatory system acts as a filter for connecting the environment and internal thoughts to other thoughts or feelings as well as connecting knowledge and feelings to action. The affective/emotional system colors, embellishes, diminishes or otherwise modifies information acquired through the regulatory system or sent from the cognitive system to action.

As described by Gage and Berliner (1991) there are five basic objectives of the humanistic view of education:

1. promote positive self-direction and independence (development of the regulatory system);
2. develop the ability to take responsibility for what is learned (regulatory and affective systems);
3. develop creativity (divergent thinking aspect of cognition);
4. curiosity (exploratory behavior, a function of imbalance or dissonance in any of the systems); and
5. an interest in the arts (primarily to develop the affective/emotional system).

The SCANS report (Whetzel, 1992) as well as Naisbitt (1982), Toffler (1970, 1981, 1990) and other authors (see Huitt, 1997) point to the importance of these objectives for success in the information age. It is important to realize that no other model or view of education places as much emphasis on these desired outcomes as does the humanistic approach.

According to Gage and Berliner (1991) some basic principles of the humanistic approach that were used to develop the objectives are:

1. Students will learn best what they want and need to know. That is, when they have developed the skills of analyzing what is important to them and why as well as the skills

of directing their behavior towards those wants and needs, they will learn more easily and quickly. Most educators and learning theorists would agree with this statement, although they might disagree on exactly what contributes to student motivation.

2. Knowing how to learn is more important than acquiring a lot of knowledge. In our present society where knowledge is changing rapidly, this view is shared by many educators, especially those from a cognitive perspective.
3. Self-evaluation is the only meaningful evaluation of a student's work. The emphasis here is on internal development and self-regulation. While most educators would likely agree that this is important, they would also advocate a need to develop a student's ability to meet external expectations. This meeting of external expectations runs counter to most humanistic theories.
4. Feelings are as important as facts. Much work from the humanistic view seems to validate this point and is one area where humanistically-oriented educators are making significant contributions to our knowledge base.
5. Students learn best in a non-threatening environment. This is one area where humanistic educators have had an impact on current educational practice. The orientation espoused today is that the environment should by psychologically and emotionally, as well as physically, non-threatening. However, there is some research that suggests that a neutral or even slightly cool environment is best for older, highly motivated students.

The Impact of Reasonable Humanistic Educationalists

Maximizing the impact of reasonable humanistic education involves practitioners, teacher preparation and the support provided by local, state, and federal governmental funding sources. My assumption is that professional knowledge is socially constructed by practitioners interacting within action context (Banks, 1993b; Schon, 1983; Tierney, 1989). Practitioners make sense of unique or complex situations by constructing “frames of meaning that they pay attention to” (Schon, 1983). Frames govern the process by which teacher educators and other professionals define decisions to be made, ends to be achieved, information to be collected, and courses of action to be taken (Schon, 1983). But we do not construct our frames from scratch in each unique or complex situation. Instead, each of us makes sense of a particular situation by seeing the familiar in the unfamiliar (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1987). We frame the situations as something already present in our repertoire (Schon, 1983).

The assumptions that teacher educators use to set the problems of change are referred to as theoretical frames (Argyris et a., 1987; Schon, 1983). Teacher educators’ theoretical frames are shaped by historical assumptions that are centered on a central purpose of teacher preparation and manifested through daily actions (Freiman-Nemser, 1990; Zeichner & Liston, 1990). When teacher educators, for example, set the problem of preparing teachers for diversity, framing

assumptions that are in "good currency" probably determine strategies for attending to the problem (Schon, 1983) and thereby set the direction in which teacher preparation will change (Zeichner, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1990).

Efforts to enhance teacher preparation have always reflected varying degrees of commitment to various theoretical frames. Many researchers have developed frameworks for examining mainstream teacher educators' traditional assumptions about what teachers should be prepared to do and how this preparation should be conducted. Traditional assumptions related to improving teacher preparation appear to cluster within the boundaries of technical, academic, and developmental frames. For these reasons, technical, academic, and developmental framing assumptions are termed traditional theoretical frames.

Since the 1960s, multicultural theorists have challenged traditional assumptions relative to what the purposes and meaning of public schooling and higher education ought to be (Banks, 1993). Multiculturalists have developed a pluralist ideology that propounds the belief that for people of color, women, and other oppressed groups to reap equal benefit from public schooling and higher education institutions within the dominant culture, alternative methods for teaching and learning are needed (Banks, 1991; 1993).

Multicultural researchers (Grant & Secada, 1990; Grant & Sleeter, 1985; Sleeter, 1991; Sleeter & Grant, 1988) have constructed a variety of frameworks that are useful in examining teacher educators' alternative assumptions about teaching and teacher preparation, single-group studies, multicultural education, and multicultural and social reconstruction framing assumptions which are termed alternative theoretical frames. All of these groups demanded fairness and justice within and throughout all of society's formal and informal structures (Grant, 1994).

Benson-Hale (1995) suggests the educator advocating liberation has parallel purposes for educating the oppressed: education for struggle and education for survival. She believes education for struggle has a consciousness-raising function, that requires the student to determine certain realities: who they are, who the enemy is, what the enemy is doing to them, what to struggle for and what form the struggle must take.

The Impact of Successful Community Relationships

The community is a necessary partner in the partnership forged between the family and the humanist teacher. The community helps the child envision possibilities; all communities have role models, but if we spend all our time studying the deviants, the abnormal, the

devastated, the destroyed, the destitute, the desecrated, then we will end up with the image of a destitute, destroyed human. Particularly for African American children, if we want them to know how to survive and prosper, they should be exposed to images of African Americans who did survive and prosper (Akbar, 2010). We must demand that local communities as well as the state and federal governments provide the resources to educate all children.

Recently, The National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI, 2010) focused on six areas of federal education policy that could better support children age 3 through 8 to best prepare them for college, careers and meaningful adult lives as global citizens. The NBCDI adds funding and accessible resources as elements to teacher preparedness. In a letter to The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman of the U. S. Senate Committee of Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and to The Honorable Mike Enzi, Ranking Member U. S. Senate Committee of Health, Education, Labor and Pensions , NCBDI identified six fundamental areas for success. Some of the highlights include:

1. **Funding**
    - Increase the federal investment in education
    - Ensure Title I funding set-asides do not supplant pre-k funding where it already exists
    - Encourage districts to embed high quality Pre-K-3rd strategies as one priority for turning around low-performing schools
    - Reward states for creating high-quality learning programs and aligned PreK-3rd systems
2. **Teacher and School Leader and Professional Development**
    - Explicitly include early childhood teachers in professional development programs.
    - Emphasize the need for more teacher training and professional development based on the most current research in child development
    - Strengthen professional development for elementary school leaders to assist them in designing and implementing comprehensive, aligned systems that include early childhood programs and extend through third grade.
3. **Longitudinal Data Collection**
    - Ensure that the collection of federal longitudinal data in K-12 is more fully integrated with data collection in programs that serve children before kindergarten entry.
    - Require districts to report how Title I funds are used for children under age 5.

4. **Accountability and assessment**
    - Ensure schools and districts are rewarded for creating and sustaining high-quality classroom experiences throughout the preschool years and early grades.
    - Spur the development of valid and reliable measurement tools that are appropriate for young children and the classroom in which they learn.
5. **Extended learning time**
    - Recognize high-quality early childhood programs as an eligible use of funds designed to extend learning time and
6. **Family engagement**
    - redefine "parental involvement" to reflect a shared responsibility of "family engagement"

The Center for Youth Development and Policy Research was established in 1990 at the Academy for Educational Development in response to growing concern about youth problems. It embraces the conviction that too many children are at risk of poor outcomes because services are too few, too fragmented, too problem-focused, and too distant from family and neighborhood. The goal is to transform concern about youth problems into public and private commitment to youth development. At the core of this framework are three basic tenets:

1. problem-free is not fully prepared. Preventing high risk behaviors is not enough. Our expectations for young people must be high and clear. Positive outcomes should be defined and monitored as carefully as negative behaviors.
2. academic skills are not enough. Young people are engaged in the development of a full range of competencies - personal, social, vocational, health, civic. Focusing only on academic competence skews discussions of resource allocations across systems and of teaching and learning methodologies within systems.
3. competence, in and of itself, is not enough. Skill building is best achieved when young people are confident of their abilities, contacts and resources and called upon by their communities to use their skills. Meeting youths' basic needs for safety, structure, relationships, membership, independence, and contributions is critical to the development of competencies. Attention must be paid to both the content of learning and the contexts in which learning occurs.

Adopting the healthy development of all youth as the over-arching goal for policies, programs, and practices across sectors and systems creates the possibility of a system of shared accountability. Every institution that touches young people's lives should be held accountable for providing, to the greatest extent possible, opportunities to meet needs and build

competencies. An old Ashanti Proverb says "when it is all said and done, it is all said. It is all done."

The framework for a Self-Concept Approach

1. Students need emotional intelligence (it could be more important than IQ)

Harrington-Lueker (1997) examined the Constellation Community Middle School, in Long Beach, California where 6th, 7th and 8th graders received regular reminders about the importance of personal responsibility and getting along with others. Every morning after the Pledge of Allegiance, the 130 students recited the school's five core principles:

a. We are each other's keepers.

b. I am responsible for my own actions.

c. I take pride in myself.

d. Leave it better than when you found it.

e. Anything that hurts another person is wrong.

2. Students need help with higher standards (make informed decisions on retention and its prevention). Recent national discussions with educators reveal a widespread, fast-growing recognition that social promotion is a big part of the problem. Failure to enforce meaningful standards has undermined confidence in public schools as test scores wavered, the international standing of our students dropped, and a small but significant number of students got high-school diplomas while reading, writing, and doing arithmetic at elementary levels (Grant & Johnson, 1997).

3. Students need pro-work values (we must stop training urban students to be quitters) Haberman (1997) wrote that urban schools struggle and fail at teaching basic skills, but are extremely effective at teaching skills that predispose young people to fail in the world of work. The urban school environment fosters behaviors and beliefs that enable youngsters to slip and slide through middle and high school that ultimately becomes the source of failure. This ideology is easily learned, readily implemented, rewarded by teachers and principals, and supported by school policies. Schools promulgate it because it is easier to accede to student's street values than try to change them.

Urban youth are not just poorly prepared for work but systematically and carefully trained to be quitters and failures. And the "successful" youngsters who graduate from urban schools are often the most seriously infected. They have been exposed to the ideology and practiced the anti-work behaviors for most of the time, and been rewarded the most for it. Jobs that "successful" graduates might land and keep involve many workers, all doing the same work, so individual absences would not matter. They would probably be part-time jobs, since workers come and go a lot and have trouble staying on task. They would not be very important jobs, since quality work is not a primary concern. They would probably be menial jobs, since they require no training. They wouldn't be jobs where organizational success is tied to worker effort.

4. Students need to value diversity (It is okay to be different)
5. Students need "reality checks" (undoing student's misconceptions of the world)
6. Students need to manage conflict (utilizing the Six Cs - **c**oncern, **c**onfer, **c**onsult, **c**onfront, **c**ombat, **c**onciliate).

This is a self-concept approach to teaching, learning, and democratic practice. Focusing on the quantity and quality of messages sent and received, it aims at analyzing, developing, and evaluating intentional and unintentional human signals systems that influence human interactions and development. The theory is centered on five interconnected assumptions about positive and negative signal systems in human experience that either summon forth the realization of human potential or defeat or destroy potential. These five assumptions are:

a. people are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly;

b. educating should be a collaborative, cooperative activity;

c. the process is the product in the making;

d. people possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor;

e. Human potential can best be realized be creating and maintaining places, policies, and programs designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally.

7. Students need media literacy (teaching media literacy based on four basic tenets):

* **Access:** the use of the full range of media and new technologies for receiving and sending information, through broadcast, cable, interactive, and other media forms.

* **Analysis:** the ability to decipher the elements of media messages and media systems – to understand their forms and functions, ownership and management structures, economic and

policy implications, content, intent, and effects; and decoding and recontextualizing their meanings.

*** Evaluation**: The ability to make judgments about media, assess and apply journalistic ethics, critique aesthetic elements, and compare and contrast the values of media messages and systems to those of other individual and community value systems.

*** Production**: The ability to create messages, in a variety of media, including text, video, and computer, with a view toward sharing the results of this production with the larger community.

8. Students need to learn about censorship.
9. Students need intergenerational connections.

Conclusion

The question posed by Asa Hilliard in 1991 remains a constant. With all we know about language and power, needs of our young villagers, youth, parents and society, do we have the will to educate all children?

Viewpoints of reasonable humanistic people who are willing to educate our children must embrace a will to excellence by decoding the fluidity of language. The true strength, though, may well be the bonds that develop between youth, adults and the community around them. Adults must expect youth to succeed. It is the responsibility of the entire village, the youth, their families, the educational system and the community at large to embrace the challenge to enrich the potential, possibilities and opportunities for all children to compete globally.

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