

YOUTH EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

This paper addresses the problem of irresponsible, unjust social behavior from the perspective of its origins in the prevailing model of public education, and also considers an alternative model. We first define socially responsible behavior in terms of five central issues of social justice, including redress of unjust: (1) distribution of goods and services; (2) oppression of women; (3) oppression of selected races and ethnicities; (4) exploitation of nature and destruction of human ecology; and (5) militarism and continuous warfare. We next assert, with others, that transformative remedies must arise from concrete (as well as simulated and virtual) collaboration between the victims of injustice and those who have the means to alter the educational models embedded in prevailing cultural, political, and policy structures. We claim that the dominating prevalence of the Prussian educational model is a major determinant of irresponsible social behavior, and we argue that it should be replaced by a Partnership model that teaches collaborative behavior. We elaborate the key dimensions of education that should be mediated by collaborative justice, with attention to the roles of access, rationality, technocracy, money, systems, the new sciences, and new discoveries concerning group intelligence. We conclude with a few suggestive ideas concerning structured educational experiments that could help in the transformation of the cultural, political, and policy structures that mediate youth education models. We also suggest an examination of several public education programs for fresh ideas, including Venezuela's *El Sistema*, which uses orchestral music to teach collaborative life skills.

Keywords: *group intelligence, social responsibility as rationality, money as the wrong educational goal, the power of new science systems, prussian vs. partnership education models.*

VZGOJA MLADIH ZA DRUŽBENO ODGOVORNOST

Povzetek: Prispevek se ukvarja s problemom neodgovornega in nepravičnega družbenega obnašanja z vidika, da izvira iz pretežnega modela javnega izobraževanja in vzgoje; obravnava tudi alternativen model. Najprej opredelimo družbeno odgovorno obnašanje v luči petih osrednji vprašanj družbene pravičnosti, vključno z nepravičnim (1) razdeljevanjem dobrin in storitev, (2) zatiranjem žensk, (3) zatiranjem nekaterih ras in narodnosti, (4) izkoriščanjem narave in uničevanjem človeškega okolja, (5) militarizmom in nenehnim vojskovanjem. Nadalje trdimo, skupaj z drugimi, da morajo zdravi priporočila, ki bi prakso spremenili, nastati iz konkretnega (pa tudi simuliranega in virtualnega) sodelovanja med žrtvami krivic in tistimi, ki imajo sredstva, da bi predrgačili izobraževalni model, ki je vkopan v prevladujoče kulturne, politične in izvedbene strukture. Dokazujemo, da močna prevlada pruskega izobraževalnega modela bistveno vpliva, da je družbeno obnašanje neodgovorno, in trdimo, da bi morali ta model nadomestiti z modelom partnerstva, ki usposablja za sodelovalno obnašanje. Nekoliko podrobneje se ukvarjamo s ključnimi vidiki vzgoje in izobraževanja, katere bi morala uveljavljati pravičnost pri sodelovanju, da bi omogočala pozornost do vlog dostopnosti, smiselnosti, tehnokracije, denarja, pripomočkov in ureditev, novih znanosti in novih odkritij glede skupinske inteligence. Končujemo z nekaj prepričljivimi predlogi, ki se tičejo strukturiranih vzgojno-izobraževalnih eksperimentov, ki bi najbrž pomagali prenoviti kulturne, politične in praktične smernice za strukture, ki prenašajo v prakso modele za vzgojo in izobraževanje mladih. Predlagamo tudi, da bi naj proučili več javnih vzgojno-izobraževalnih programov, ki podajajo sveže zamisli, vključno z venezuelskim *El Sistema*, ki uporablja orkestralno glasbo, da privzga sodelovalne spretnosti za življenje.

Ključne besede: skupinska inteligenca, družbena odgovornost kot racionalnost, denar kot napačen vzgojni cilj, moč novih sistemov znanosti, pruski ali pa partnerski vzgojno-izobraževalni sistem

1. Introduction: The Setting

This paper addresses the problem of irresponsible, unjust social behavior from the perspective of its origins in the prevailing model of public education, and also considers the alternatives. Socially responsible behavior is defined essentially by the central requirements of social justice, including redress of the following issues: (A) Unjust distribution of goods and services to the vast majority of the global population; (B) Oppression of women and those dependent upon them; (C) Repression of large populations based on racism and ethnicity; (D) Unjust exploitation of nature by industrial and technocratic production processes, resulting in the destruction of human ecology; and (E) The ever-growing

injustice of militarism and continuous warfare, used to defend non-egalitarian relationships, and supported by huge and growing expenditures completely disproportionate to the costs of prevention of death and disease and support of nutrition and other basic human needs, particularly among children and other huge low-income populations (Lamb, 1985).

Note that the setting described above, analogous with the scope of the *Global Problematique* (Dyck, Mulej, and Coauthors, 1998), is also the central focus of Liberation Theology in its various manifestations. Typical liberation remedies, in each issue category, are calculated to foster and support egalitarian communities that are committed to reversing each injustice. Proponents hope that these individual issue strategies will sum to a transformation of contemporary cultures, producing a new world order (Lamb, 1985). It is worth considering, in this context, that the US Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was never a powerful monolith, but was comprised of a wide range of different groups with different styles, and usually, similar goals (Shipp, 2010). Overall, the developmental justice approach is more realistic than the typical food aid or grant-in-aid approach, because charity rarely engenders structural change.

Liberation theologies represent the theological component of broader recognition that transformation comes from concrete, as well as simulated and virtual *collaboration* (Goerner, Dyck, and Lagerroos, 2008). Liberation theologies embrace collaboration in solidarity with the victims of both pre-modern *sacralist* and modern secularist cultures. In sacralist ideology, Christian symbols were used to lend legitimacy to imperialistic political domination, when Christianity became “Christendom” and the Roman Empire became the “Holy” Roman Empire. Protestant reformers attempted to reform sacralism by recovery of communal egalitarianism, but were thwarted by the emerging power politics of nation states, including their crusades, inquisitions, and pogroms. Later reform movements were frustrated by the transformation of the Enlightenment into modern secular bureaucratic authoritarianisms, which controlled both the social and natural environments through techno-centrism and militarism (Lamb, 1985, 7-12).

2. The Core Problem

The central educational issue is defined by Prussian vs. Partnership Education—narrow authoritarian training vs. collaborative development of interactive systems (Goerner, Dyck, & Lagerroos, 2008). In this dichotomy exists the potential for emergence of a dialectic informing a new educational strategy that could cut across the five issues identified above, based on redressing the common pattern of *domination* which denies or represses egalitarian relationships. Patterns of domination are imposed by the oligarchical imperative that education should be structured according to the technocratic needs of society and the individual’s competitive income-earning capacity, rather than by learning for its own sake. The consequence is that society has become characterized by divisions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and geography.

Prussia was the proving ground for what emerged as the “factory model” of schools. Ostensibly the goal was an industrial society run by the “best minds,” but issues of social control and economic power were paramount, in reality. Prussia organized the first compulsory public school system in 1819, drawing both from military training and conservative Pietist religious values, emphasizing austerity, the work ethic, and obedience to authoritarian hierarchy. Beginning about age twelve, children were set in competition with one another and ranked according to their graded accomplishments. Because the system transformed Prussia’s poor economy into industrial prowess in just 30 years, it became the model for public education throughout all western nations.

The tragedy is that factory schools destroy partnership webs. They do this by separating children from their communities, submitting them to strict control and conformity, encouraging self-interest, individualism, and aggression, and discouraging collaboration and fresh solutions to old and new problems. In this way, factory schools fail completely to help in development of a healthy human ecology, based on collaborative innovation.

In fact, the Enlightenment dream of a modern society built on liberty, equality, fraternity, and reason has been destroyed by the insidious oligarchy that has taken over governance, and its interactive relationships with globalized, neo-liberal economic power. The Prussian educational model has played a key determinative role in this development.

The heavily resourced American film, *Waiting for Superman* (2010), produced by David Guggenheim, who also produced *An Inconvenient Truth*, advances the argument that the solution to the “problem” of public education lies in

innovation that can be found *only* outside the public schools, in charter schools, which, of course, are supported but not controlled by the public sector. Rick Ayers (2010) offers an alternative vision. He argues that reform begins with *empowered* communities and Paulo Freire's *transformative* education, not top-down mandates; that children must be loved and cared for by their communities; that curricula must stimulate questioning, civic involvement, social ethics, fundamental involvement in math and science, and full engagement in music and the arts. Ayers also points out, correctly in my view, that scarce resources are not the real cause of our current short education budgets. The real problem lies in the trillions we waste on war and prisons.

3. Justice Issues

It is apparent that support for the Prussian model lives on in corporatist and other neo-liberal perspectives that support privatization of education in the name of efficiency, standardized regimentation (tests), and profits. This approach minimizes critical thinking, creative projects, and social transformation. It would destroy teachers unions and put teachers in competition with teachers, schools with other schools, and states with other states. It would also heighten competition among students, while minimizing opportunities for their collaboration. It would largely ignore the key dimensions of education that must be mediated by the issues of social justice outlined below:

- (A) Open and equal access to everyone, irrespective of income, class, race, gender, and geographic identity;
- (B) Freedom from technocratic determination of educational goals and methods by the prevailing cultures of neo-liberal and neo-conservative self-aggrandizement and domination;
- (C) Encouragement of creative, systemic exploration across traditional curricular and disciplinary boundaries, utilizing the methodologies of the new sciences, including non-linear mathematics (power laws, fractal geometries, systems, etc.);
- (D) Reframing education as a significantly *collaborative* process, in which shared insights are highly valued, rather than as a completely *individualistic* process (see Carolyn Y. Johnson, "Group IQ," *Boston Globe*, Dec. 19, 2010);
- (E) Social responsibility learned both as the guiding principle of social collaboration, and also as the outcome of social collaboration.

Restructuring public education as a collaborative process would revolutionize it in fundamental ways. It would challenge the basic premises, methods, and outcomes of the traditional Prussian model, as well as the prevailing theory of neo-liberal economics and militarism. It would say that there are better ways to organize the way the world operates. These ways would be more democratic, egalitarian, mutually supportive, and sustainable—both socially and environmentally.

Everyone would be more concerned with the impacts and interactions of everything that they do, because they would be more engaged with whole systems outcomes, not just with systems that advantage themselves personally. This awareness would lead to heightened valuation of non-linear systems, both in education and the world's other work. Contributions like Barabasi's *Linked: How Everything is Connected to Everything Else* (2002) and *Bursts: The Hidden Pattern Behind Everything That We Do* (2010) can help take the rather abstract mathematical theory of complex systems to the realm of widespread application in everyday life. Eventually, there will be widespread recognition that fractal intricacy, which organizes sustainable energy flows in Nature, also has the power to shape mutually beneficial energy, information, and money flows in urban and economic systems (Dyck, pending).

Rationality is defined by *caring* at least as much as by self-interest. There is new behavioral evidence that people everywhere are "hard-wired" for caring (Keltner 2009). People enjoy collaborating with others and expect to be treated as equals. Prevailing economic theory, on the other hand, assumes that rationality means *selfishness*, which inevitably leads to hierarchical divisions of power and wealth. We all have to be wary of institutions and people who are greedy, venal, and controlling, but these ugly parameters do not have to be enshrined as the basis of our economic and educational systems, unless we continue to endorse them. However, the prevalent linkage of rationality with selfishness suggests that many economists, business leaders, and elected politicians enjoy a special vested interest in the *status quo*, based on their individual advantage rather than the superior rationality of social advantage. Money has become the key to accessing the educational system, especially at the higher levels, and, in turn, can either facilitate or deny one's access to the larger economic system.

An important study by Thomas W. Malone, Director of MIT's Center for Collective Intelligence (2010), shows that more things are done by groups than by individuals in advanced societies, and also that teams of people exhibit collective intelligence that has surprisingly little to do either with the average intelligence of the teams' individual members, or of its smartest member. Groups with authoritarian leaders have been found not to do as well as participative groups, and the proportion of women in the groups has been found to be a predictor of the group's collective intelligence. Concrete steps can be taken to alter a group's collective intelligence, such as mixing newcomers into an established team. There also is growing evidence that people can self-organize, or be organized to bring out the best in each other.

These group research findings lend additional credence to educational and organizational strategies based on collaboration, mutual caring, and responsibility for one another.

4. Conclusions: National Strategies for Partnership Education

It is a truism that education is shaped both by culture and politics. Since we also are interested in the role of education in helping to transform dominating cultures, politics, and policies, we must look to structured social experimentation to guide achievement of our Partnership objectives. National and local grants, both public and private, should be awarded in support of the most collaborative curricula, teaching methods, and administrative approaches. Experiments should be conducted in a variety of geographic, socio-economic, and political settings. Emphasis should be given to experimentation in *public* schools, because public perceptions and benefits are paramount, although chartered schools also could be brought into the mix, to stimulate innovative variety. Teachers unions should be brought into the picture to share their experiences with both collaboration and confrontation as mechanisms for change. Communities that are learning to support their own economies by collaborative organization of their own business enterprises, should also explore collaborative education models. A range of new methods for engaging youth in the collaborative structuring of their own education should also be encouraged.

We also suggest an examination of public education programs, in countries that support just and collaborative international relations, for fresh approaches. The Scandinavian countries, which utilize notably collaborative educational models, including Study Circles, should certainly be included. In the United States, schools and colleges operated by the traditional Peace Churches, including The Society of Friends, Mennonites, and the Brethren, should be examined. Collaborative educational programs pioneered by Jane Addams (the first American woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for her settlement house work), Felix Adler's Society of Ethical Culture, Friedrich Froebel's kindergarten and learning blocks (used by Frank Lloyd Wright), Maria Montessori, Edouard Seguin, Rudolph Steiner's Waldorf Schools, and other Progressive school curricula should also be examined, as well as the role of American settlement house schools in just, responsible development of low-income urban communities.

While the above models have been around for quite a long time, there is another much newer model that probably has already surpassed the earlier ones in effectiveness, especially in low-income settings. I refer to *El Sistema*, a publicly financed voluntary sector music education program in Venezuela. Founded in 1975 as *Social Action for Music*, by the Venezuelan economist and musician Jose Antonio Abreu, the program provides "education for life" through the vehicle of instrumental training and participation in youth orchestras. Abreu is guided by his dream that an orchestra represents the ideal collaborative society. He believes that the sooner children are nurtured in such an environment, the better it will be for everyone. Some 250,000 children attend El Sistema music schools around the country, 90 percent of them from low-income socio-economic backgrounds. The project has been extended to the penal system, and also to the public school system, in which it aims to support half a million children, in every school in the nation, by 2015.

El Sistema is a state foundation that oversees Venezuela's 102 youth orchestras and 55 children's orchestras, involving about 100,000 students, and the instrumental programs that make them possible. It uses music to protect childhood through training and rehabilitation, and is known for rescuing children from the environment of drug abuse and crime to which they would otherwise be drawn.

The quality of the music produced by these children is remarkable. The Government of Venezuela began funding Abreu's orchestra after its brilliant success at an international competition in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1977. Since that time, Abreu has obtained financial support from ten different Venezuelan governments, including the current Chavez

government, which supports nearly the entire El Sistema operating budget as well as additional capital projects. In 2007, the Inter-American Development Bank provided a US\$150 million loan to construct seven regional El Sistema centers throughout Venezuela. IADB's analysts were at first skeptical that classical music could be transformative of poor communities. However, their evidence shows that every dollar invested in the program generates \$1.68 in social dividends, measured by decline of drop-out rates and decline of crime. Their evidence is drawn from the population of two million young people educated by El Sistema to date (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Sistema).

El Sistema has also educated superlative individual musicians. A number of participants in the program have established international careers in music. Most notable among these is Gustavo Dudamel, who was appointed in 2009 as Music Director and Conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, at age 26. In a full prime-time evening program on National Public Television, on Dec. 29, 2010, Dudamel was featured first in an hour-long interview on the Tavis Smiley show, in which he described his current personal commitment, not only to the Philharmonic, but also to implementing a community-based orchestral music education plan, based on Abreu's prototype, in the Los Angeles area. The interview was followed by a two-hour performance of the Philharmonic, led by Dudamel, in which his Peruvian friend, the renowned operatic tenor, Juan Diego Florez, also starred. Their combined performance drew several standing ovations at the Walt Disney concert Hall, and two rousing encores by Florez.

This kind of prime-time television exposure for classical music as a basis for collaboration, both in an orchestral setting, and in life as well, is exciting and encouraging. It occurs at a time when music and education in the arts has been cut back severely, or eliminated entirely, from many American public school curricula, because of budgetary shortfalls and cutbacks, but also for lack of vision.

The results of El Sistema in Venezuela have been profound, and the enthusiasm of Dudamel and his supporters for a similar program, in the Los Angeles area, can be expected to have a significant impact throughout the United States. Musical ensemble is an absolutely congenial, appropriate, and understandable context in which to teach the importance of collaboration!

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