

Reclaiming Our Humanity: Partnership Education

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Children are being given a false picture of what it means to be human. We tell them to be good and kind, nonviolent and giving. But on all sides they see and hear stories that portray us as bad, cruel, violent, and selfish. In the mass media, the focus of both action entertainment and news is on hurting and killing. Situation comedies make insensitivity, rudeness, and cruelty seem funny. Cartoons present violence as exciting, funny, and without real consequences.

All this holds up a distorted mirror of themselves to children. And rather than correcting this false image of what it means to be human, some aspects of our education reinforce it.

History curricula still emphasize battles and wars. Classics such as Homer's Iliad and Shakespeare's kings trilogy romanticize "heroic violence." Scientific stories tell children that we are the puppets of "selfish genes" ruthlessly competing on the evolutionary stage.

If we are inherently violent, bad, and selfish, we have to be strictly controlled. This is why stories that claim this is "human nature" are central to an education for what I call a dominator system of relations. They are, however, inappropriate if young people are to learn to live in democratic, peaceful, equitable, and Earth-honoring ways: the partnership ways urgently needed if today's and tomorrow's children are to have a better future- perhaps even a future at all.

Freeing Our Psyches

The tragedy, and irony, is that dominator socialization - and with this, the unconscious valuing of the kinds of undemocratic, abusive, and even violent relations that were considered normal and even moral in earlier more authoritarian times - has been unwittingly passed on from generation to generation. Psychologists have found that children who are dependent on abusive adults tend to replicate these behaviors with their children, having been taught to associate love with coercion and abuse. Often they learn to use psychological defense mechanisms of denial and to deflect repressed pain and anger onto those perceived as weak.

Teachers can help students experience partnership relations as a viable alternative. This is what partnership process and partnership structure, as two key elements of Partnership Education, are all about. But, as *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century* shows, partnership process and structure are not enough without partnership content: narratives that help young people better understand human possibilities. For example, narratives still taught in many schools and universities tell us that Darwin's scientific theories show that "natural selection," "random variation," and later ideas such as "kinship selection" and "parental investment" are the only principles in evolution. As David Loye shows in *Darwin's Lost Theory of Love*, actually Darwin did not share this view, emphasizing that, particularly as we move to

human evolution, other dynamics, including the evolution of what he called the "moral sense" come into play. Or, as Frans deWaal writes in *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*, the desire for a *modus vivendi* fair to everyone may be regarded as an evolutionary outgrowth of the need to get along and cooperate.

Partnership Education offers scientific narratives that focus not only on competition but also, following the new evolutionary scholarship, on cooperation. For example, young people learn how, by the grace of evolution, biochemicals called neuropeptides reward our species with sensations of pleasure, not only when we are cared for, but also when we care for others.

Awareness of the interconnected web of life that is our environment, which has largely been ignored in the traditional curriculum, leads to valuing of activities and policies that promote environmental sustainability: the new partnership ethic for human and ecological relations needed in our time.

Transforming Ourselves

Partnership Education is gender balanced, multicultural, and environmentally sensitive, not just through add-ons but throughout the entire curriculum. It offers empirical evidence that our human strivings for love, beauty, and justice are just as rooted in evolution as our capacity for violence and aggression. It does not leave young people with the sense that life is devoid of meaning or that humans are inherently violent and selfish - in which case, why bother trying to change anything!

The transformation of education is foundational to the movement toward a partnership way of living and working. In partnership-oriented schools, teachers inspire and facilitate learning and creativity, modeling caring and empathic behaviors. In corporations moving away from the top-down dominator model, managers are not "cops" or controllers who give orders that must be obeyed. They inspire productivity and empathically facilitate creative team work. Authoritarian families, which model inequality and replicate the unempathic childrearing required to mold a dominator psyche, are increasingly being replaced by democratic families that model empathy, gender-fairness, and respect for human rights, instilling democratic values on an experiential day-to-day level.

To accelerate this movement toward a partnership future, we need to nurture the wonderful range of human capacities still largely ignored in schools. - particularly our human capacities for caring and creativity. We can all join in this process by using Partnership Education in our own homes and communities in ways that highlight our enormous human potential to learn, to grow, to create, and to relate to one another in mutually supporting and caring ways.

RIANE EISLER is the author of *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century* (Westview Press, 2000). Her other books, also drawing from her research as a cultural historian and systems theorist, include the international bestseller *The Chalice and The Blade*, which has been translated into seventeen languages, as well as *Sacred Pleasure*, *The Partnership Way*, *Women, Men, and the Global Quality of*

Life, and the memoir of her years growing up in pre-Castro Cuba as a refugee from the Nazi Holocaust, *The Gate*. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Humanist Pioneer Award and the Alice Paul ERA Award, is a fellow of the World Business Academy and the World Academy of Art and Science, and serves on many scientific advisory councils, including the International Editorial Board of *The Encyclopedia of Conflict, Violence, and Peace*.

Dr. Eisler is President of the Center for Partnership Studies and keynotes conferences worldwide. She has addressed corporations such as DuPont and Microsoft and spoken at universities all over the world. She consults for educational institutions, businesses, and governments on applying the partnership model and cultural transformation theory to all aspects of life.