

Build a culture of peace by changing the purpose of education

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The slaughter of 20 precious little children and 6 adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut is horrible evidence that we live in a culture of violence in our country. Other recent murders in Seattle, Colorado, Virginia and 29 violent deaths in Utah during 2012 all attest to how widespread violence is. Unfortunately, there are other examples of violence that are accepted and even rewarded in our society.

Why do so many people enjoy watching people hurt one another in the “sports” of boxing and pro wrestling? Or even hockey or football? When two people get in a fight at school, why does a circle of students quickly gather around to watch? If people didn’t like to watch human beings hurt one another, would there be a market for it on television or in other public venues?

What would our country be like if every child grew up aspiring to be a peaceful contributor, rather than a burden, to society? I work with a group of veteran teachers and parents who are developing a new system of education, “Educating for Human Greatness,” that is based on this major purpose: Help each student find and develop his or her reason for existing to be a special contributor to society.

Educating for Human Greatness, EfHG, calls for us to abandon the factory, assembly line model for student uniformity and start to help each child develop as an individual — help every child excel in something. If we continue down the path of standardizing students in a narrow, limited curriculum, the bullying, suicides and violence in our country will continue to increase.

Educating for Human Greatness does not teach subjects of the curriculum as separate and isolated “ends” in and of themselves, but it uses hundreds of subjects as a means of helping each student grow as a contributor. Parents and teachers unite to help students grow in seven powers of contributive behavior. You can begin to change your school and family to a peaceful culture by assessing how well your home or school is doing each of the following as a form of shared accountability.

Ask yourself, on a scale of zero to 10, how well your school and/or family are doing in developing each of these fundamental powers:

1 — The power of identity: To what degree does your school/home help students know who they are, see their great potential as contributors, and develop their unique talents, gifts,

interests and abilities?

2 — The power of inquiry: To what degree is your school/home nurturing curiosity and helping students learn how to ask good questions? Do teachers and parents set an example of a curious, inquiring attitude?

3 — The power of interaction: To what degree does my school/home promote respect, courtesy, caring, communication, and cooperation?

4 — The power of initiative: How much does this school/home foster self-directed learning, self-reliance, will power and self-evaluation?

5 — The power of imagination: How much does this school/home nurture creativity and creative expression?

6 — The power of intuition: How much does this school/home help students discover truth with their hearts as well as with their minds?

7 — The power of integrity: To what degree does this school/home develop honesty, character, morality and responsibility for self?

8 — The power of partnership: To what degree do teachers and parents work as full partners to help students grow as contributors to the school, home and community?

If we change the main purpose of education, to help children aspire to be contributors to society, think of the good it could do. While I was principal of three different elementary schools in Davis School District, our county built two jails, one of them a monster with hundreds of cells and beds. The teachers were appalled at how much money was being spent on incarceration of lawbreakers that could have been spent on education.

Teachers and parents decided it would be better to help students see the value of contributing over the disadvantages of showing burdensome behavior. They found that even very young children could recognize and experience the good feelings they got whenever they were “contributors” in school compared with the feelings they had when they were not contributing.

The teachers and parents in the Educating for Greatness Alliance believe it is entirely possible to change the main purpose of education. We can help each student find and develop his or her reason for existing to be a special contributor to society.

All it will take is a steady concentration on this purpose by students, parents and teachers. Over time, if we are persistent, we will begin to see a culture of violence replaced by a culture of peace.

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