



Driving Education Forward



Driving Education Forward

B.E.E.P®, THE BLUEPRINT TO EDUCATION REFORM™

www.techbookonline.com/beep.html



Written by Flood the Drummer®

Evaluation of Education:

Education has long been held to be a means to realizing U.S. ideals of equal opportunity. The promise of education is to allow “natural” abilities to win out over the “artificial” inequalities of class, race, and sex. Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men; the balance wheel of the social machinery. It does better than disarm the poor of their hostility towards the rich; it prevents being poor. All children have the right to comprehensive and effective teaching in every content area and grade level. However; in most American public schools the level of teaching, learning, and interactivity does not meet student’s needs nor ensures student graduation, let alone postsecondary success. Furthermore; the values, structures and support that ARE displayed in the school systems, sadly are not reinforced within the home systems. Many analysts have pronounced the U.S educational system in crisis. But are schools to blame for the modest achievements of some children? Or does “socialization” have a greater impact on academic performance than the quality of our schools? For example; during the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, devastating political and economic circumstances forced many Vietnamese, Lao, and Chinese-Vietnamese families to seek a new life in the United States. This resettlement of boat people from Indochina offered a rare opportunity to examine the academic achievement of their children. Even though most of the Southeast Asian boat people were/are poor, have had limited exposure to Western culture, know virtually no English, and live in low-income metropolitan areas, their children are excelling in the U.S school system. This shocking fact raises the question(s), “What was/is the driving force promoting academic excellence in the refugee’s household? & Can the U.S education system truly succeed without the immediate restructuring and reshaping of our own (*individual*) internal and community (*family*) priorities, policies and structures.

Bridging the Gap between the Indochinese and their U.S counterparts: An “in-depth” look into the cultural and social similarities and differences; and how it relates to “Academic Excellence”:

As prior mentioned; thousands of Indochinese families were forced to relocate to the U.S via boat. The children had lost months, even years of formal schooling while living in relocation camps. Like their parents, they suffered disruption and trauma as they escaped from Southeast Asia. Despite their hardship, and with little knowledge of English, the children quickly adapted to their new schools and began to excel. In researching the economic and scholastic accomplishments refugee households made in the 1980’s, a group at the University of Michigan took 1,400 refugee households and studied the forces that shaped the performance of these children. Standard explanations for educational excellence included, parental encouragement and dedication to learning.

Evaluation of Education

Although some of the findings were culturally specific, others point overwhelmingly to the pivotal role of the family in the children's academic success. Because this characteristic extends beyond culture, it has implications for educators, social scientist and policymakers, as well as for the refugees themselves. It is clear that the U.S educational system can work, if the requisite familial and social supports are provided for the students outside the school.

The study encompassed many features of resettlement. Data was gathered on 6,750 persons in five urban areas, Orange County Calif., Seattle, Houston, Chicago, and Boston. Information regarding their background, home life, economic and demographic fact was also well documented. It was discovered that with regards to educational and social status, the refugees proved to be more ordinary that their predecessors who fled Vietnam in 1975 during the fall of Saigon. The newer displaced refugees had had limited exposure to Western culture and knew virtually no English when they arrived. From this larger group, 200 nuclear families and their 536 school-age children were chosen at random. Twenty-seven percent of the families had four or more children. During the time of this study, the young refugees had been in the U.S for an average of three and half years. The interview process, for both parent and child was conducted in their native language. The University also managed to gain access to school transcripts. All of the children attended schools in low-income, metropolitan areas and were evenly distributed throughout the school levels: Grades one through eleven each contained about 8 percent; kindergarten and twelfth grade each contained about 5 percent. The students' letter grades were converted into a numerical grade point average: An "A" became a four; and a "D" became a one. After calculations, it was shown that the children's mean GPA was 3.05, or a B average. Twenty-seven percent had an overall GPA in the A range, fifty-two percent in the B range and seventeen percent in the C range; only 4 percent had a GPA below a C grade. Even more striking than the overall GPAs were the students' math score. Almost half of the children earned A's in math; another third earned B's. Thus, four out of five students received either A's or B's. It came of no surprise that these students did better, seeing as how their minds could easily grasp disciplines in which English was not so crucial (i.e. Math, Physics, chemistry and science). However; as expected, their grades in Liberal arts were lower; in such area where extensive language skills were required, such as English, history or social studies the combined GPA was 2.64. To place the local finding in a national context, attention was turned to the California Achievement Test (CAT). The children's overall mean score was in the 54th percentile; meaning they out performed 54 percent of those taking the test; placing them slightly above the national average. Clearly, these accomplishments are fueled by influences powerful enough to override the impact of a host or geographic and demographic factors. So what was it? Using various statistical approaches I sought to understand the forces responsible for this performance. In the process, a unique finding caught my attention, namely, a positive relation between the number of siblings and the children's GPA.

Family Size has long been regarded as one of the most reliable predictors of poor achievement. Virtually all studies on the topic show an inverse relation: The greater the number of children in the family, the lower the mean GPA and other measures associated with scholastic performance. Typically, these reports document a 15 percent decline in GPA and other achievement-related scores with the addition of each child to the family. The interpretation of this finding has been subject to disagreement, but there is no conflict about its relation to achievement. So, for the Indochinese students, this apparent disadvantage was somehow neutralized or turned into an advantage. I took this finding as an important clue in elucidating the role of the family in academic performance. I assume that distinctive family characteristics would explain how these achievements took place so early in resettlement as well as how these children and their parents managed to overcome such adversities as poor English skills, poverty, and the often disruptive environment of urban schools. Because they were newcomers in a strange land, it was reasonable to expect that at least some of the reasons for the children's success rested on their cultural background. While not ignoring the structural forces present here in the United States; among them the opportunity for education and advancement; I believe that the values and traditions permeating the lives of these children in Southeast Asia (home) would guide their lives in this country. Knowledge of one's culture does not occur in a vacuum; it is transmitted through the family. Children often acquire a sense of their heritage as a result of deliberate and concentrated parental effort in the context of family life. This inculcation of values from one generation to another is a universal feature of the conversation of culture.

Nowhere is the family's commitment to accomplishment and education more evident than in time spent on homework. During high school, Indochinese students spend an average of three hours and ten minutes per day; in junior high, an average of two and a half hours; and in grade school, an average of two hours and 5 minutes; research in the United States shows that American students study about one and a half hours per day at the junior and senior high school levels. Among the refugee families, then, homework clearly dominates household activities during weeknights. Although the parents' lack of education and facility with English often prevents them from engaging in the content of the exercise; they set standards and goals for the evening and facilitate their children's studies by assuming responsibility for chores and other practical considerations. It is reasonable to assume that a great amount of learning goes on at these times, in terms of skills, habits, attitudes and expectations as well as the content of a subject. The younger children, in particular, are taught not only subject matter but how to learn. Such sibling involvement demonstrates how a large family can encourage and enhance academic success. The familial setting appears to make the children feel at home in school and, consequently, perform well there. This finding suggests that parental English literacy skills may not play a vital role in determining school performance. Rather, other aspects of the experience (i.e. emotional ties between parent and child, cultural validation and wisdom shared on stories read in the child's native language, or value placed on reading and learning, extend to schoolwork. Reading at home obscures the boundary between home and school. In this context, learning is perceived as normal, valuable and fun.

It seems to me that the sense of familial efficacy proved critical, as opposed to the more Western concept of personal efficacy. Outside school, the same sense of drive and achievement can be seen in the parents. Having a job and being able to provide for the family is integral to family pride. Shame is felt by Asian families on Welfare. Reflecting the same determination and energy that their children manifest in school, Indochinese parents have founded employment and climbed out of economic dependency and poverty without dispatch. American mores encourage independence and individual achievement, whereas Indochinese values foster interdependence and a family-based orientation to achievement. I believe, that the view of our schools, as failing to educate, stems from the unrealistic demands that the education system should deal with urgent social service needs. Citizens and politicians expect teachers and school to keep children off the streets and away from drugs, deal with teenage pregnancy, prevent violence in the schools, promote safe sex and perform a myriad of other task and responsibilities in addition to teaching traditional academic subjects. As the social service needs of our students have moved into the classroom, they have consumed the scarce resources allocated to education and compromised the schools' academic function. The primary role of teachers has become that of the parent by proxy; they are expected to transform the attitude and behavior of children, many of whom come to school ill prepared to learn.

If we are to deal effectively with the crisis in American education, we must start with an accurate definition of the problem. We must separate teachings and its academic purpose from in school social services. Only then can we assess the true ability of schools to accomplish these two, sometimes opposing, functions. I firmly believe that for American schools to succeed, parents and families must become more committed to the education of their children. They must instill a respect for education and create within the home an environment conducive to learning. They must also participate in the process so that their children feel comfortable learning and go to school willing and prepared to study. Yet we cannot expect the family to provide such support alone. Schools must reach out to families and engage them meaningfully in the education of their children. This involvement must go beyond annual teacher-parent meetings, must include, among other things, the identification of cultural elements that promote achievement. We can work to ensure that families believe in the value of an education and, like refugees, have rational expectations of future rewards for their efforts. Moreover, we can integrate components of the refugees' experience regarding the family's role in education. It is possible to identify culturally compatible values, behaviors and strategies for success that might enhance scholastic achievement. It is in this regard that the example of the Indochinese refugees; as well as the Japanese and Jewish immigrants before them; can shape our priorities, polices and structures.

Critical Thinking:

Q: So why was learning about the history of Indochinese refugees in America relevant to the need for current education reform in the U.S?

A: To show evidence that even with the negative elements associated with inner cities, a strong conviction for progressive personal and communal achievement, constant parental encouragement and a strong understanding of one's cultural background can motivate the child and parent alike to achieve both academic and financial success.

<u>Similarities between Indochinese refugees/students and American inner city students</u>	<u>Differences between Indochinese refugees/students and American inner city students</u>
Poverty/Low-income	Indochinese refugees/students believe that "the past is as important as the future. Wherein American inner city students aren't properly taught their past.
Displaced from their place of cultural origin	Although displaced from their place of origin; parents of Indochinese students strive to create an atmosphere conducive to cultural remembrance. Wherein American inner city students, again, aren't exposed to their culture.
Poor English skills	Indochinese students are usually fluent in their native language; and are progressively learning English as second language; wherein Inner city students, because of the lack of knowledge relating to their culture, know not of their native language; nor the proper use of the English.
Forced to learn in the disruptive environment of urban schools	Indochinese students are usually the target of teasing and bullying due to the lack of understanding from their peers regarding their culture. American inner city students usually fight among themselves (race) due to the lack of respect and understanding of their own culture.
Living in a household with multiple children (both peers and younger students)	Although Indochinese students live in a home with multiple siblings; the household is structured so that the younger sibling are being taught while learning how to learn. In an American inner city home students with multiple siblings usually don't get the personal attention they needed. Moreover, the oldest sibling usually assumes household responsibility (i.e. cooking, cleaning, etc) due to the high number of single parent households.

Savage Inequalities; Blatant discrimination: Children in U.S. Schools

In 1987, the average expenditures per pupil in the city of New York were \$5,550. In the highest spending suburbs of New York (Great Neck or Manhasset, for example on Long Island) funding levels rose above \$11,000, with the highest districts in the state at \$15,000. New York City's public schools are subdivided into thirty-two school districts. District 10 encompasses a large part of the Bronx but is, effectively, two separate districts. One of these districts, Riverdale, is in the northwest section of the Bronx. Some years ago, District 10 received an allocation for computers. The local board decided to give each elementary school an equal number of computers, even though the schools in Riverdale had smaller classes and far fewer students. When pointed out that schools in Riverdale, as a result, had twice the number of computers in proportion to their student populations as the schools in the poor neighborhoods, the chairman of the local board replied "What is fair is what is determined to be fair".

So it seems as if we are ready to move forward; as we have clearly identified the root causes elements impeding the process of education reform. To enumerate once again, we have:

- Lacking a strong sense of interdependence and family-based efficacy
- No concise understanding of one's culture
- Segregation/ Institutional discrimination

I don't want to move too fast when dissecting this problem, as prior programs, philanthropist and concerned parents have rushed to the aid without truly understanding the depth of the wound; and as a result; delivered a temporary fix. As easy as it would have been to progress forward with blame pointed to the aforementioned; it wouldn't be completed without a comprehensive look at teachers in America's inner cities. Edward Flaney, principal of a low-income school in NYC stated "These are kids most in need, and they get the worst teachers". In Philadelphia, this 2010 school year, 171 teachers were absent during the 1st day in school; even the more, 201 teachers were absent during the 2nd day of school. A total of 4,000 students did not have their regular teachers in a classroom. What are we doing to our children? What effect do you think this had on the children?

Are the teachers the problem? Or is it Teacher Education in America? Let's say, hypothetically, that it is "Teacher Education", what is wrong with Teacher Education in the United States? The short answer? I would say the curriculum that prospective teachers are put through. When you ask teachers for over two decades what do they really need to be better teachers, they do NOT say: Piaget, Erikson, Maslow, or the history/philosophy of education, nor even better methods courses for teaching, e.g., the Pythagorean Theorem.

Teachers say:

"We need help with classroom management: discipline problems, effective classroom rules, procedures, handling students who don't do the homework, who call out, curse, come in late, fight, throw things, and attack us."

1. The Annual Gallup Poll of Public Schools for the past 22 years reports "lack of discipline" is the most serious problem facing the nation's schools.
2. Classroom disruptions lead to nearly two million suspensions a year!
(Daniel Macallair, *Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice*, 2005).
3. We lose potentially "good" teachers every year: 50% quit the profession within five years because of classroom disruptive behavior
(Jean Johnson *Public Agenda* 2/14/05)
4. 8 out of 10 teachers report that their teaching would be more effective if they did not have to spend so much time handling disruptive behavior. (J. Johnson)

And, these classroom disruptions do not just hurt our schools. They also fuel truancy, youth crimes, gang recruitment, family dysfunction, drug abuse, teen pregnancy and suicide.

Because of the current education system in the U.S; the land of opportunity has become the land of the opportunist. The worth of our inner city kids are not judged based on their abilities to learn; but more so based on talent; and their ability to be exploited. To reinforce, again, the need for social reform in the United States let's look at the gross differences between "The Defense Budget" and "The Education Budget". For the 2010 fiscal year, the president's base budget of the Department of Defense rose to \$533.8 billion. Adding spending on "overseas contingency operations" brings the sum to \$663.8 billion. When the budget was signed into law on October 28, 2009, the final size of the Department of Defense's budget was \$680 billion, \$16 billion more than President Obama had requested. An additional \$37 billion supplemental bill to support the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was expected to pass in the spring of 2010, but has been delayed by the House of Representatives after passing the Senate. Defense-related expenditures outside of the Department of Defense constitute between \$216 billion and \$361 billion in additional spending, bringing the total for defense spending to between \$880 billion and \$1.03 trillion in fiscal year 2010. For 2006, the Educational Department discretionary budget was US\$56 billion and the mandatory budget contained \$23.4 billion. Currently, the budget is \$68.6 billion, according to the Dept. of Education website. WOW!! That's a big difference. Could part of the problem be that were spending more money on violence and war, than we are on education?

Conclusion

Much of the content of education over the past century and a half can only be construed as an unvarnished attempt to persuade the “many” to make the best of the inevitable. The unequal contest between social control and social justice is evident in the total functioning of U.S. education. The system, as it stands today, provides eloquent testimony to the ability of the well-to-do to perpetuate in the name of equality of opportunity; an arrangement which consistently yields to themselves disproportional advantages, while thwarting the aspirations and needs of the working people of the United States. For this reason, among many, B.E.E.P® channels its focus first, on social reform

Social reform, in the context of this document relates to the need for reexamining our lifestyle; and the repositioning and reevaluating our priorities. Furthermore, in order to accomplish both social and education reform these issues must be met at national and global levels, requiring not only cooperation but partnership between North and South. Responsibility for current and future health of the planet and its human/non-human inhabitants is shared equally between rich and poor countries, but if these problems are to be resolved, the two groups of nations will need to bring their respective strengths and capabilities to bear. This will require a new form of globalization, one that goes beyond trade links and capital flows to strengthened political and social ties between governments and civil society.

Now I may have some critics who don't believe that social reform is needed to achieve proper education reform; and that's fine. But the truth is that OUR morals, priorities and positions need not rearranging, but complete reconstruction collectively. To state that the goal is to “fix” the American education system, would imply that there are still strong and sturdy elements holding up the structure. In this case, our system has been destroyed, beyond repair. The only logical procession would be to layout a blueprint for social, global, environmental and education reform and unite to begin rebuilding. This process is very similar to the game of Chess. The first move of Chess is to find your opponent; in this case the opponent is failure. The next step is to set up the board, and naturally begin developing a strategy and learning your opponent. The next step is to start moving, strategically; with the end being a win.



The End

Driving Education Forward