

Education Reform Will Reduce Crime

By Barrington H. Brennen, March 18, 2006

It is imperative to be reminded that basic education for all residents on planet earth, including The Bahamas, involves the “Three R’s” – reading, writing, and arithmetic--and the successful completion of Grade 12-level standard school work. It is not a choice. Unfortunately, too many parents and young people believe, based on what they have been told by so-called by responsible adults, that there are two kinds of basic education: academic and technical. They suggest that if the child is “academically inclined,” likes to read, write and do arithmetic, then that child can do “academic classes” and become a teacher, lawyer, doctor, etc. However, if the child is “not academically inclined,” has difficulty or shows little or no interest in learning how to read with comprehension and write expressively, then let the child learn carpentry, painting, plumbing, masonry, etc. How can one calculate the dimensions of a wall and the needed amount of cement and blocks required to build that wall if one cannot read or write? Reading, writing, and calculating are basic to everything we do.

I have heard some expressing themselves on the streets, in debating halls, and even on radio talk shows, that if someone is not “academically inclined” then let her go to technical school to acquire a skill.” What a dangerous misconception of education. This practice has actually turned our educational system into a giant crime generating mill. We now have a generation of young men and women who cannot articulate their feelings, read simple instructions, and respond wisely to moments of crisis. We have created an ugly, dangerous monster.

Promoting students to the next grade at the end of the school term when they are below the accepted grade point average for promotion (social promotion) has made a joke out of basic education in The Bahamas. It has created a disinterested approach to learning and has caused too many of our citizens to focus on surviving instead of on being significant. One would do anything to survive in a society where one perceives, based on one’s limited ability to reason, that no one understands or treats him fairly. When one is not equipped with the tools to reason, read with comprehension, write intelligently, or calculate, that person perceives that the world is his enemy and thinks he must do whatever it takes to get on top of those what are oppressing him. These individuals are responding to the world around them based on external stimuli (extrinsic values) and their response may include violence.

Being significant is a higher level of self-governance. It’s governing oneself based on reasonable internal values and sound ethical principles. It is the involvement of higher thinking level, reasoning, and decision making, which lead one to becoming a positive, significant entity in society. This can only be accomplished through the achievement of basic education. Our public educational system has implied that one can become significant without the successful completion of basic education. This is a lie. When people cannot read, critically evaluate, articulate their feelings or opinions, their self-worth is at a critical low.

Individuals who did not have an opportunity to learn how to read or write but still value the need for education, often regret that they did not have the opportunity to learn how to read or write and find ways to make up their deficiencies through an intelligent approach to life.

Our Young Men Need Help

It seems as though the mentality that thinks of education as an enemy and not a friend comes from a poverty mind-set. Economic deprivation is not just the difficulty or impossibility to acquire a good paying job (based on one's qualifications) to meet one's daily needs. It is also a mental attitude that robs one from looking beyond the pain and difficulty of a low-income job. These people are more likely to blame the system than qualify themselves for a brighter future. This attitude is perpetrated by parents and our men are being most affected by it. This is not unique to The Bahamas.

While living in Michigan, I worked at an agency as the Director on Psycho-education for Abusive Individuals. I got a call from the Oprah Winfrey show coordinators inviting me to come on the show with some of the teenage boys who were in my treatment program and who could share how they had changed from being violent to non-violent. They needed young men who could speak clearly, form complete sentences, and articulate their feelings well. They gave me three weeks to find such teenagers. Unfortunately, although there were young men who had been transformed through the program I conducted, I could not find any young man, in the short time they gave me, who was able to express himself in a clear and concise way on national television. There were young women but not young men.

I am told that many of our large institutions, in need of able-bodied men, have a great difficulty finding men who can read, write, comprehend, stick to the task, and without a police record. They can find the young women they want with much less difficulty. If these young men are employed, they have serious poor work ethics. They go to work late, perform their tasks inadequately, have a poor attitude, and are lazy. Eventually they are fired. These are the same ones who complain about hiring expatriates who want to do the tasks.

Involve Educators

Research indicates that educational reform does reduce crime. It is imperative to understand that a major component of education includes not only making students, but teachers and administrators accountable for success or failure. Teaching methodologies, principals' and teachers' attitudes and skills, are at the core to educational reform. When teachers and school principals are held accountable for the outcome of their students, I believe we will begin to see a difference in our community. The kind of accountability for school principals may include not increasing salary if a school receives a low grade rating and releasing a principal if a school has a low grade rating for more than three years. **Barrington H. Brennen is a marriage and family therapist. Send your comments or questions to P.O. Box N-896, Nassau The Bahamas, or call 242 323 8772, or email question@soencouragement.org or visit the website at www.soencouragement.org**