

Redefining Success: Public Education in the 21st Century

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A version of this paper was delivered by Dr. Katz on October 23, 1991, at the annual meeting of the National Council on Community Services and Continuing Education in Corpus Christi, Texas.

The Harlandale School District has 15,200 students, 93% of whom are Hispanic. There are over 2,000 employees at 24 campuses. The budget of \$71 million represents an annual investment of \$4,300 per student. The local property tax rate is \$1.32. It is one of the plaintiffs in the suit to equalize school finance in Texas. This year, Harlandale--"The Pride of the Southside"--celebrates its 100th anniversary.

Those of us who manage public school systems have, to a great extent, different responsibilities, different clients, and different political constituents from those of you working in continuing education in community colleges. Our own district coordinates some of our student programs with Palo Alto College, for example. Our continuing education and evening high school programs complement our Alamo Community College System. More importantly, your institutions and ours all grew out of the same American tradition of community-based education, accessible to everyone. So although these remarks are about public schools, they really relate to the future of the tradition itself, and the prospects for any enterprise dedicated to universal education, as we move into the next century.

Predicate: The Context of Change

More than 200 years ago the French philosopher Rousseau told us that "there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things." Where change is concerned, attitude is important. If we are to project ourselves into the future so that we can anticipate and plan for change, we must first understand the context in which schools presently operate. There are at least two major forces now working to create an identity crisis for public education. The first is the widely perceived failure of American public education. The American

standard of living is declining in relation to other industrial nations. That decline is blamed on the fact that our students score lower than Japanese and European students on many standardized tests. Those low scores, in turn, are blamed on the schools. The result has been a kind of creeping hysteria. It reminds us of what happened after the Russians beat us into space in 1957. One example of this hysteria is the current interest in the voucher system. Our dilemma is this: we can't afford to keep shifting gears and changing direction with every so-called reform that's imposed on us. We must somehow regain ownership of our mission, our goals, and the standards by which we are judged.

The second force pushing us toward an identity crisis is much more powerful than politics, and not at all transitory. It's called the Information Revolution. We live in an age in which wars and coups are played out on worldwide television. The Second Russian Revolution was achieved not with tanks and rifles, but with telephones and fax machines. Within our lifetimes, each of us will have access to virtually unlimited resources for computing and communicating. Alan Kay is the personal computer pioneer who helped design the user-friendly graphical interface for personal computers. He says that in the near future, all of the representations of human ideas ever created--fiction, nonfiction, photographs, movies, art, architecture--will be instantly accessible anywhere in the world on notebook-size computers (Kay, 1991). The world is already awash in information of all kinds, and it keeps raining down on us in buckets.

This Information Revolution presents a tremendous challenge to education on several levels. For example, educators are supposed to help students get an intellectual handle on the world. How do we do that when the world has become so complex and is changing so fast? In addition, we're expected to prepare our young people to enter the economy as productive citizens. What skills can we teach them that will still be valuable when they graduate? Even if we buy the latest computer technology for them to work with, it will likely be obsolete before they finish school.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to schools from the information explosion has to do with our role as the transmitters of the culture. Does anyone these days seriously think that schools have more of an impact on students' values than television or popular music? Schools have in effect gone from being the only TV station in town to the equivalent of C-SPAN. The advent of multimedia computers threatens to make matters worse. As Alan Kay (1991) suggests, computers will soon emulate, enhance, and perhaps eventually replace all other media, including TV, books, lectures, and audio recordings. They will be wonderful learning tools, but that use won't be restricted to school campuses. Computers will be

universal appliances, like the telephone and the television are today. In some sense, this is already happening. Seventy percent of American households with pre-teenage children have a Nintendo game. In the long run, information technology may only aggravate the question of why students should tune into the "school channel" at all.

What Do We Do?

The challenge, then, is this: How do we in public education maintain our role as a central institution of democracy in the face of the Information Revolution? Once we've answered that question for ourselves, how do we project to others a positive vision of who we are and what we do?

Let's turn those questions around and approach this as a marketing problem. Most business people don't fill up a warehouse with an arbitrary product and then try to figure out how to sell it. They first ask themselves what they can do, what they can offer, that will be perceived as unique and valuable. Creating and maintaining this identity in the mind of the consumer is called "positioning." One of the basic maxims of marketing is that once a company or a product occupies a "position" or niche in the public's mind, it's hard for that company to move over and occupy a different niche. It's also hard for a competing product or company to replace them. The classic example is Coca-Cola: they're No. 1, no matter how much Pepsi spends on advertising. Public education is not exactly a new company. Setting aside for a moment the current disenchantment of our customers, what's our marketing position? What niche do we now occupy?

First, part of our identity is that we are a community institution, accessible to all. That's the "public" part of the term "public education." Now let's look at the "education" part. We propose that the key to this feature of our identity is this: we offer something of lasting value. Money that goes for education isn't spent; it's *invested*. Isn't that it? Students who come to our schools to get an education are *investing* their time and energy in their own futures.

So perhaps our marketing job is not impossible after all, merely difficult. At least the part of our identity just described is very positive. All we have to do is maintain and enhance that identity. We might say that some of our critics would like to see us roll out the "new Coca-Cola," when what's really needed is to rediscover the virtues of Classic Coke. In other words, if we want others to see us as a community institution, accessible to all, offering something of lasting value, then we must be sure we define ourselves that way.

Let's talk about "lasting value" first, because that's the

part of our identity that's under assault by the Information Revolution. We must enable our young people to enter the job force, to be productive, to expand their standard of living. Robert Reich (1991), a Harvard economist, has written a book called *The Work of Nations*. In it he makes the point that Americans who can work as symbol processors can expect to be paid well, but most of those who process *things* will find themselves competing with cheap labor in underdeveloped countries. According to Reich, only 20% of Americans are symbol processors. The other 80% are at grave risk of experiencing a lower standard of living than their parents. Reich charges the educational system with the responsibility of turning those numbers around. Certainly we cannot pretend to have prepared someone to participate in our economy if they are qualified only for jobs that are being exported.

As educators, we know that we are all symbol processors. The differences lie in the breadth of our symbolic vocabulary, the level of abstraction at which we can find meaning, and our ability to create new meaning. Those of us who can produce vision and understanding and new ideas will earn more than those who can't. What Reich is saying is that those who cannot operate at higher levels of abstraction will earn a lot less than they used to because of global competition.

It seems that we must aim to empower our students with a higher and broader literacy than the kind we have in the past been satisfied to give them. Empowerment through literacy is not a new idea. It was originated by John Dewey and other pioneers of the universal education movement. But information technology is redefining the parameters of empowerment. In Dewey's time, for example, political campaigns were carried on in the newspapers. That's also where most products and services were advertised; you may remember the 19th century ads on tabletops in Wendy's restaurants. Today politics and commercial advertising have both moved to television, and the images are at least as important as the words.

Educated men in the Middle Ages operated at what we now consider a very low level of abstraction. They were mostly what you could call "writing technologists," copying text from one piece of parchment to another. Many of the tasks we now view as highly skilled will seem similarly quaint before we are very far into the next century. Already in the last 25 years, computers have replaced tens of thousands of symbol processors--otherwise known as clerks--in the back offices of banks and insurance companies across the country. What once passed for literacy won't get you very far anymore.

Expanded Literacy

An expanded concept of literacy is essential. In addition to the three Rs, the three Cs--the literacy of connectedness, the literacy of creativity, and the literacy of choice--are needed.

Connectedness

What do I mean by a literacy of "connectedness"? It means very simply the ability to connect and derive meaning from different kinds of symbols, not just words and numbers on paper. As important as it is to be able to read and write, we don't go through life passing notes back and forth to each other. Some of you in the educational bureaucracy may quarrel with that, but there are other ways to communicate. Images really are more powerful than words, for example. You can often turn off the sound on your TV set and still get 90% of the message.

This power of visual communication is, in a way, rather sneaky. Why? Because we don't need to understand the language of pictures to get the message. Without having to be processed by our intellects, images operate directly on our drives and emotions. What that means is that if we're visually illiterate, if we don't understand how the language of pictures works, the people who make the pictures can manipulate our thoughts and feelings without our being aware of how it's happening, or even that we're being manipulated at all. So we need to do something about visual literacy.

There's at least one other reason we need to help students connect symbols of different kinds. A big topic in education these days is higher-order thinking skills, sometimes called "HOTS." Where in popular culture do we find abstractions and generalizations of how the world works? In the Arts. Before there was literature and science and math, there was painting and music and dance. Visual images, sounds, and kinesthetic sensations communicate with us at very powerful levels. We must bring the communicative power of the Arts to bear on the whole enterprise of education.

A literacy of connectedness also includes the ability to communicate and cooperate effectively with others, whether one is trying to learn about the world or meet a production deadline. The magazine *Scientific American* has just published a special issue on computer networks, and in one of the articles two researchers at MIT point out that this emerging technology--again, part of the Information Revolution--will make *coordination* and *communication* the keys to the success of any business enterprise (Malone & Rockhart, 1991). Can you see the paradox here? Just as nations are learning that they must cooperate to survive, companies are doing the same thing to effectively compete in the marketplace. If our graduates are going to be competitive in the best sense of that

word, they must know how to *communicate*, *cooperate*, and *collaborate*. When you think about it, business has never come to us and said, "we want people who are going to tromp over everyone else in the organization to get to the top. We want all the loners and backstabbers you can turn out." They never said that. Employers want graduates whose skills include people skills. They want their employees to be able to work together to solve problems and advance the mission of the enterprise. They know that cooperative values and skills are essential to their competitiveness and their success in a modern economy.

It's important for us as educators to understand the implications of an enlightened definition of "competitiveness" on some of the traditional practices of schools. For example, what's the message inherent in grading on the curve? That life is a zero-sum game. That no matter how big the pie is, somebody isn't going to get any. You may remember the movie *Flatliners* with Kiefer Sutherland and Julia Roberts. It's a film about medical students who put themselves through near-death experiences. In one scene, the med school professor walks into her anatomy class and announces, "This will be a scaled exam. There will be 3 As, 4 Bs, 6 Cs, and the rest Ds and Fs. Just like in real life, you will be competing not with the subject or with yourself, but with each other." The problem is, that's *not* real life. It's *not* a zero-sum game. Our students should emerge from their school experience with the sense not only that anyone can succeed, but also that success does *not* have to come at the expense of someone else's failure.

This will not be an easy task. American public education has allowed itself to be identified with another institution that by definition has at least as many losers as winners. When it comes to school sports, nobody believes the old saying that it's how you play the game that counts. The chief prophet of football, you may remember, is the late Vince Lombardi, who said that winning isn't the main thing, it's the only thing. The sports metaphor is difficult to keep out of the classroom. Students and parents assume that some will make As, and some will make Fs, and the others will fall in the middle. We're locked into a system of evaluation and feedback that expects failure, and virtually requires mediocrity. What parent or principal would give any credibility to a gradebook with all As?

The issue of how we assess student progress should not be ignored. We know that we can't afford a nation where, as in sports, only some succeed. But neither can we afford schools in which *any* students fail. We must realize that whenever we require students to play in a game in which not everyone can win, we in effect invite some of them to opt out of the game.

The literacy of connectedness in a broader sense means to

understand how we are part of a community that includes a tremendous amount of diversity. One of the fears about the breakup of the Soviet Union is that this sense of community never had a chance to evolve in that country because the togetherness was achieved by force, from the top down. It was, in effect, a shotgun marriage of dozens of ethnic groups. We don't need to look abroad to know the importance of an expanded sense of belonging. All we have to do is to look at the equivalent tensions and violence in our own neighborhoods. Gang violence--which is just another name for factional warfare--is a big part of it, but we have also seen a surprising increase in racial violence in this country.

Creativity

The second of the three Cs is the literacy of creativity. We know that technology is taking over more and more of the uncreative work in this country. We know that creativity and originality are valuable talents beyond the world of art and invention, and that their value and importance can only increase. We also know that children are naturally creative and explorative. So how can we nurture that creative spark as they pass through our schools?

First, we must acknowledge the importance of creativity in the curriculum. Certainly students must be able to derive meaning from the work of others, but they must also be able to create new meaning, to make new connections between concepts or symbols, and to invent new concepts. To the extent that creative thinking skills can be taught, and I believe that they can, we must teach them in as many contexts as possible.

Second, we must provide a learning climate that encourages original and even offbeat thinking. This will be hard if only because creative products don't fit well into traditional instruction. Alternative responses can be disruptive to a well-planned lesson. Tests are harder to grade when more than one answer can be correct. Standardized tests require that the student *not* be creative to get a good score. Our whole system rewards convergent thinking instead of the divergent processes important to creativity; thus we have a lot of work to do in this area.

Choice

The third of our three Cs is the literacy of choice. What do I mean by that? Let's start with something obvious, and if there's anything that's obvious about the Information Revolution, it's the pure glut of it. There's absolutely no way to watch all the programs, see all the movies, read all the books, or take all the courses. Knowing how to choose means being able to navigate through the sea of information to find the islands of value.

Here's another way of looking at it. We live in a culture that offers a wide array of alternatives. It's not a global village so much as lots of little villages connected across space and time, but it's important to be able to take advantage of this diversity and not to be overwhelmed by it. If we don't give students the emotional power to choose, they will simply be carried along in an avalanche of transactions, forever flipping through life's channels. An ability to choose implies a willingness to take risks. Frederick Wilcox once pointed out that "progress always involves risk: you can't steal second base with your foot on first!" I believe there's a serious question whether our traditional methods and curricula truly encourage students to take risks in the classroom.

We must go beyond helping students achieve the emotional power to choose. The last Indiana Jones movie involves a search for the Holy Grail. As usual, Indiana was racing the Nazis for the treasure. Everyone winds up in the secret chamber inside the mountain, guarded by a knight from the Crusades made immortal by drinking from the Grail. There are dozens of grails to choose from; the villain, of course, picks the wrong one and dies a horrible death. The knight's comment was, "He did not choose wisely."

How can we help students learn to choose wisely? If wisdom comes from experience, then they must have the experience of making choices as part of their education. It's also important for us to realize that to cultivate the science and art of choosing means to develop one's value system; values are nothing more or less than a basis for choice.

There are schools where this approach is being tried. The Wilhelm Schole, a private school in Houston, is perhaps best known for integrating fine arts and values themes into the academic curriculum. Values are taught through a "science of choice" in which *asking the right questions becomes more important than knowing correct answers*. Students are grouped by competence, not age. The school emphasizes cooperation instead of competition, and students engage in cooperative learning and peer tutoring.

Technology will free teachers from being brokers of information. Their main task will be to help students learn the science of choice, which is based on values. Those values must be modeled in the classroom and experienced by students in their transactions with the teacher and with each other. We can thus renew the schools' traditional role of transmitting and reinforcing the shared, core elements of our culture.

Computer Literacy

There is another "literacy" that starts with a "C." We hear a lot about how important it is for students (as well as teachers

and administrators) to be "computer literate." There's no question that the multimedia networked computer of the near future will be a powerful interactive medium for learning, a window on the world that was unimaginable a generation ago. It will offer students multiple paths to knowledge, based on their individual learning styles and interests. However, we must remember three things about computers.

First, computers are not people. Transactions with machines don't offer much richness or subtlety. They cannot serve as role models or give us inspiration and emotional support. They could probably be programmed to flash messages of unconditional positive regard, but nobody would believe them. Schools must remain a place where students interact with teachers and each other, and not primarily with machines.

There is the story of the little girl who liked her father to read to her before she went to sleep at night. Her favorite story was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. After reading the story over and over for several weeks, her father decided to put it on a tape recorder. Then one night he said to her, "Now you don't need me here. All you have to do is turn on the tape recorder." She tried it one night, but the next night she was tearful when she asked her father to read the story to her. "Can't you turn on the tape recorder?" he asked. "Yes," she said as she gave him a big hug, "but it can't hold me in its lap."

The second thing to remember about computers is that they are still subject to the rule of "garbage in, garbage out." That means we have to beware of junk learning masquerading as the latest technology. The last thing we need is an "algebra Nintendo" where women are portrayed as victims and violence is depicted as the most effective problem-solving strategy.

Third, computer literacy has very little to do with knowing how to manipulate a keyboard or mouse. Kids are little technowizards. If they can figure out how to work the VCR, they'll be able to operate a computer. Eventually this will cease to be an issue at all. The computer medium is evolving so that its complexity will become transparent to the user. We won't worry about knowing how to use one any more than we worry about how to use the telephone.

You begin to understand what computer literacy *really* means when you buy a truckload of expensive machines for administrators and nothing much changes. The problem isn't knowing how to drive the machines; it's knowing where to go. It's having a conceptual understanding of the kinds of problems computers can help solve. It's realizing, for example, that we can get student test results in computer form, add that to our own student-teacher database, and

then extract information about teacher strengths and weaknesses based on student performance. Writing or buying a computer program to answer a question like that is not the hurdle. Getting someone to think up the problem in the first place, to ask the right questions, is the difficulty.

For students of the 21st century, with their notebook-size computer tapped into all the world's knowledge, computer literacy will mean the same thing: knowing how to ask the right questions. As they learn to derive meaning from words and images and sounds, to make connections between all the different aspects of this world, to create new concepts and new connections, and to choose wisely, *only then* will they turn this appliance into a powerful extension of their minds.

"Public" Education

Now let's address the "public" part of "public education." Remember this part of our marketing identity? "A community institution, accessible to all." Consider for a moment the issue of access. Schools should not be Darwinian institutions. We must make sure we provide equal access to the empowerment of education. This means more resources to those students who need more help to succeed, not the other way around. For example: The College Board tells us that there's a linear relationship between income and SAT scores. Students whose families make less than \$20,000 a year score about 200 points lower than those with family incomes of \$70,000 or more (The College Board, 1991). We *know* that God didn't put all the bright kids in the rich neighborhoods. Native intelligence is equally distributed. Schools must make sure they're not part of the problem. We can't afford to spend *less* on schools in poor neighborhoods. More than that, schools have to be part of the solution. We must invest the extra effort and money required to help students overcome their economic circumstances.

Many of those who talk about reinventing public schools are simply unwilling to face up to that issue. They keep saying things like "money isn't the problem." These are the folks who keep trotting out that old remedy, the voucher system. They call it a new idea, but it's a broken record. They want parents to buy their child's schooling on the open market like any other commodity. Schools will be viewed as producing entities, and their output will be measured by test scores. The law of supply and demand will, as if by magic, motivate some creative group of educators to think up a miracle curriculum. They can then franchise the system nationwide and get richer than Colonel Sanders.

We don't share that vision, because voucher education is unequal education. It's like giving food stamps to everyone, rich

and poor, and expecting them to all eat equally well. It just won't happen. George Lorimer, the author, reminds us that everyone knows money talks. Poverty talks, too, but nobody wants to hear what it has to say. Texas had a problem with school finance for a long time. The problem wasn't wasted tax money. It was underinvestment in our children in all but the wealthiest school districts in this state. As a result of a long and difficult process, initiated by the Harlandale district and several others, we're beginning to fix the school finance system. We surely don't want the voucher people to come in and break it again.

Community Issues

Now, what about our connection to the community? This is one area where we can build from strength. Most neighborhoods identify strongly with schools, especially elementary schools, but there are some steps we can take to enhance that identity. There are three major community issues not usually associated with education that in fact have an impact on how well we as educators can accomplish our mission.

Health

The first is health. The fact is that sick children don't learn very well. We can do some things directly to improve student health. For example, it was recently reported that tooth decay could be reduced by simply replacing standard classroom fluorescent bulbs with broad-spectrum bulbs. Also, we need to take a closer look at the quality of school lunches.

American access to health care is the big issue. A recent report to Congress by the General Accounting Office analyzes the availability of health insurance, or a substitute such as Medicaid, for different groups of Americans. Thirteen percent of Anglo families don't have any coverage. The percentage goes to 19% for Blacks. Of Hispanic families, however, fully 33% have no medical insurance or government-funded care. We *cannot* ignore the impact of this gap on children and, therefore, on our ability to accomplish our mission in public education. Schools should work with all appropriate agencies to break down those barriers to health before they become obstacles to learning.

Not long ago one of the network news programs ran a story about an experimental project in Washington, DC. It's called "Health Corners." A preventative health clinic is located in a housing project. It's staffed by nurses and other paramedics, and provides such services as inoculations, blood pressure screenings, and cholesterol and blood sugar tests. Congress has allocated \$6 million to test the idea in other cities. Schools would be ideal places to bring health care into the community. It would help us

drive home the connection between children's health and their education, and it would expand the school's identity as a caring institution.

Jobs

The second community issue that affects us is jobs. Another recent study demonstrates the connection. This one was done by a women's advocacy group called Wider Opportunities for Women. It showed that when mothers of school-age children enrolled in literacy or employment programs, the children made better grades and liked school better. Working mothers read more to their children and helped them with homework more often than before they went to work (Wider Opportunities for Women, 1991). Again, we should explore ways to cooperate with other agencies providing services in this area.

Neighborhood Safety

The third issue is neighborhood safety. This is important not only for the physical safety of children, but also because of the emotional impact of drugs, violence, or even latchkey situations. A school can and should be an oasis, a refuge, in neighborhoods where these problems exist. One way we can expand the scope of our service to the community is by keeping school facilities open longer each day, all year. In the Harlandale district, for example, we have a program called Prime Time that gives many students a safe place to stay after school. We're also experimenting with year-round education that, in addition to its other benefits, will keep us from disconnecting from the neighborhoods every summer.

Projecting the Vision

If we enhance our ties to the community, if we strive to provide equal access to empowerment, how do we let others know that's what we're about? How do we project that vision? First, we have to be sure we spread it within our own ranks. Staff development will be crucial, and traditional methods of inservice may not suffice. We may have to find new ways to leverage the creativity and expertise that we already have. For example, computer networks and electronic mail can lower the transaction cost of sharing ideas and allow us to build a knowledge base of institutional expertise on which to draw. Because they enable us to filter and prioritize information, these systems can help us reduce cognitive and transaction overload.

In addition, we must encourage our professional employees to share their experiences and exchange their ideas with others. This means allowing them the opportunity to publish papers, attend conferences, and make presentations. The challenge we face is that

we ourselves must move up the abstraction ladder, because computers will displace us as brokers of information. We must extract ourselves as educators from the information swamp of the late 20th century and renew our vision of ourselves as transmitters of culture. We must help students decide what information is important, and understand how they relate to the world, to the community, to others, and to themselves. We must model styles of interaction that do not depend on confrontation and the exercise of power.

The computer will liberate the teacher to guide students to a higher literacy, but we need to be sure that our teachers are prepared to assume this task. The mythology of teaching tells us that we used to do this when the world was less complicated, when there was less information to master, and when there were fewer transactions to clutter our lives. If we do not rediscover and accept that responsibility, if we do not renew our vision of ourselves, we will find that the public and the politicians will continue to discount our role as professionals, judge us with inappropriate measures, and try to impose solutions for the wrong problems. They may do it anyway if we can't communicate our vision beyond our own doors.

Who do we communicate with? First, our students' parents. They need to understand our mission of empowering their children. We should try to help them have an enlightened understanding of their important role of providing the child's basic physical needs and emotional support, while allowing the child to own his or her own accomplishments.

Second, we must communicate our vision to the taxpayers. To go back to the marketing analogy again: we need to advertise. Of course, we do it in ways that are appropriate for public institutions, and we call it "public relations." How do you show value to the taxpayer? With a winning football team? Above-average scores on standardized tests? Shall we let others control the agenda by letting them decide what's important to publicize? Or do we become proactive and show what we are accomplishing? We must aggressively aim to shift the public's view of schools, what our mission is, and how successful we are. For example, when we know what lasting value is, we need to develop or adopt assessments that show how well we provide it to our students. We need to be able to measure such things as critical thinking, creativity, visual literacy, and the ability to choose.

Third, since we are under the control of legislative bodies, we also have to do what successful companies find themselves doing when threatened by legislation: lobbying. In its respectable and legitimate form, lobbying means educating those who have power over us about our mission, our goals, and the conditions under which we

can succeed.

Finally, let's not forget the students. How do we let *them* know what our vision is? What is that vision? Empowerment that lasts a lifetime. So do we stand up in front of them and announce that we will make them powerful? What we must do is see that every student who comes into our schools *experiences* empowerment every day they're in the classroom.

Conclusion

A forest ecosystem is not merely a collection of trees, and an education is not merely the assimilation of facts and skills. The enterprise of learning, after all, does not have as its objective the collection of trophies, or "A" papers, or gold stars, or grades, or test scores. It is nothing less than the building of the self, including the development of the habits, values, temperament, and vision one needs to experience life, liberty, and happiness. These elements of an empowered self cannot be obtained by tapping into an information utility company, or by purchasing high achievement-test performance with a money-back guarantee. A child who would be free must have unconditional positive regard, inspiring role models, and experiences that build self-worth. Every child who would be free must be shown a path to the higher literacies of connectedness, creativity, and choice.

The German poet Goethe observed, "If you treat a person as he is, he will stay as he is; but if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will *become* what he ought to be and could be." We as educators must distinguish ourselves and our organizations based not in terms of the technology we use, nor in terms of narrow measures of student achievement, but on how well we fulfill this mission of empowerment. Coca-Cola almost made a fatal mistake when they tried to define success as tasting like Pepsi, only better. We in public schools cannot let others define what it means for us to succeed. We must measure ourselves, and insist that others measure us, in terms of how well we serve our communities by providing equal access to something of lasting value.

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