

## Partnership Education for the 21st Century

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Young people often feel powerless to change the course of their lives, much less the course of the world around them. Many factors contribute to this. But there is one factor that can play a major role in providing young people with the understandings and skills to both live good lives and create a more sustainable, less violent, more equitable future: education.

For over two centuries, educational reformers such as Johann Pestalozzi, Maria Montessori, John Dewey, and Paolo Freire have called for an education that prepares us for democracy rather than authoritarianism and fosters ethical and caring relations.<sup>1</sup> Building on the work of these and other germinal educational thinkers, I propose an expanded approach to educational reform that can help young people meet the unprecedented challenges of a world in which technology can either destroy us or free us to actualize our unique human capacities for creativity and caring.

### *Partnership Education*

Partnership education is an education to help young people not only better navigate through our difficult times but also create a future orienting more to what in my study of cultural evolution I identified as a *partnership* rather than *dominator* model.<sup>2</sup>

We are all familiar with these two models from our own lives. We know the pain, fear, and tension of relations based on domination and

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submission, on coercion and accommodation, of jockeying for control, of trying to manipulate and cajole when we are unable to express our real feelings and needs, of the miserable, awkward tug of war for that illusory moment of power rather than powerlessness, of our unfulfilled yearning for caring and mutuality, of all the misery, suffering, and lost lives and potentials that come from these kinds of relations. Most of us also have, at least intermittently, experienced another way of being, one where we feel safe and seen for who we truly are, where our essential humanity and that of others shines through, perhaps only for a little while, lifting our hearts and spirits, enfolding us in a sense that the world can after all be right, that we are valued and valuable.

But the partnership and dominator models not only describe individual relationships. They describe systems of belief and social structures that either nurture and support - or inhibit and undermine - equitable, democratic, nonviolent, and caring relations. Without an understanding of these configurations - and the kind of education that creates and replicates each - unwittingly we reinforce structures and beliefs that maintain the inequitable, undemocratic, violent, and uncaring relations which breed pathologies that afflict and distort the human spirit and are today decimating our natural habitat.

Once we understand the partnership and dominator cultural, social, and personal configurations, we can more effectively develop the educational methods, materials, and institutions that foster a less violent, more equitable, democratic, and sustainable future. We can also more effectively sort out what in existing educational approaches we want to retain and strengthen or leave behind.

Partnership education offers the basic design for a new integrated primary and secondary education for the 21st century. This framework draws from my research over three decades, from my own teaching experiences, and from the work of educators at many levels.

Partnership education has three core interconnected components. These are partnership *process*, partnership *structure*, and partnership *content*.

Partnership process is about how we learn and teach. It applies the guiding template of the partnership model to educational *methods* and *techniques*. Are young people treated with caring and respect? Do teachers act as primarily lesson-dispensers and controllers, or more as mentors and facilitators? Are young people learning to work together or must they continuously compete with each other? Are they offered the opportunity for self-directed learning? In short, is education merely a mat-

ter of filling an “empty vessel” or are students and teachers partners in the adventure of learning?

Partnership structure is about *where* learning and teaching take place: what kind of *learning* environment we construct if we follow the partnership model. Is the structure of a school, classroom, and/or home school one of top-down authoritarian rankings, or is it a more democratic one? If it were diagramed as an organizational chart, would decisions flow only from the top down and accountability only from the bottom up, or would there be interactive feedback loops? Do students, teachers, and other staff participate in school decision-making and rule-setting? In short, is the learning environment organized in terms of hierarchies of domination ultimately backed up by fear, or is it a combination of horizontal linkings and hierarchies of actualization where power is not used to disempower others but rather to empower them?

Partnership content is *what* we learn and teach. It is the *educational curriculum*. Does the curriculum effectively teach students not only basic academic and vocational skills but also the life-skills they need to be competent and caring citizens, workers, parents, and community members? Are we telling young people to be responsible, kind, and nonviolent at the same time that the curriculum content still celebrates male violence and conveys environmentally unsustainable and socially irresponsible messages? Does it present science in holistic, relevant ways? Does what is taught as important knowledge and truth include - not just as an add-on, but as integral to what is learned - both the female and male halves of humanity as well as children of various races and ethnicities? Does it teach young people the difference between the partnership and dominator models as two basic human possibilities and the feasibility of creating a partnership way of life? Or, both overtly and covertly, is this presented as unrealistic in “the real world”? In short, what kind of view of ourselves, our world, and our roles and responsibilities in it are young people taking away from their schooling?

### *Our Present, Past, and Future*

Young people are being given a false picture of what it means to be human. We tell them to be good and kind, non-violent 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.

This holds up a distorted mirror of themselves to our youth. 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. Western 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 a dominator or control system of relations. They are, however, inappropriate if young people are to learn to live in a democratic, peaceful, equitable, and Earth-honoring way: the partnership way is urgently needed if today's and tomorrow's children are to have a better future - perhaps even a future at all.<sup>3</sup>

Youth futures are impoverished when their vision of the future comes out of a dominator worldview. This worldview is our heritage from earlier societies structured around rankings of "superiors" over "inferiors." In these societies, violence and abuse were required to maintain rigid rankings of domination - whether man over woman, man over man, nation over nation, race over race, or region over religion. Over the last several centuries we have seen many organized challenges to traditions of domination. These challenges are part of the movement toward a more equitable and caring partnership social structure worldwide.

Young people have often been involved in the movement toward partnership, as we see today in the environmental movement challenging the once hallowed conquest and domination of nature. But young people need a clearer understanding of history if they are to more effectively participate in creating the more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable future that cannot be constructed within the context of social arrangements based on domination and control.

The education described in my book *Tomorrow's Children* offers young people the new analytical lens of the partnership/dominator continuum. It also offers them a new, more accurate and more hopeful, understanding of our past, present, and the possibilities for our future. It shows that the struggle for our future is not between capitalism versus communism, right versus left, or religion versus secularism, but between a mounting movement toward partnership relations in all spheres of life and strong dominator systems resistance and periodic regressions.

Along with the massive technological upheavals of the last three hundred years has come a growing questioning of entrenched patterns of domination. In Europe, the rights of man movement of the late 17th and early 18th centuries eventually led to both the American and French Revolutions and to a gradual shift from monarchies to republics. Paralleling the challenge to the supposedly divinely ordained right of kings to rule over their "subjects" was the feminist movement of the 18th and 19th centuries challenging men's supposedly divinely ordained right to rule over women and children in the "castles" of their homes. At the same time that we see the movement to shift from authoritarian monarchies to more democratic republics and from authoritarian families to more democratic ones, we also begin to see a movement against slavery, culminating during both the 19th and 20th centuries in worldwide movements to shift from the colonization and exploitation of indigenous peoples to their independence from foreign rule. We also see global movements challenging economic exploitation and injustice, the rise of organized labor, and a gradual shift from unregulated robber-baron capitalism to government regulations, for example, anti-monopoly laws and economic safety nets such as Social Security and unemployment insurance. The 20th century civil rights and women's liberation and women's rights movements were part of the continuing challenge to traditions of domination. The 19th century pacifist movement, followed by the 20th century peace movement, expressed the first fully organized challenge to the violence of war as a means of resolving international conflicts. The 20th century family planning movement has been as a key to women's emancipation as well as to the alleviation of poverty and greater opportunities for children worldwide.

In basic respects, however, the dominator system remained firmly entrenched. Colonialism and the killing and exploitation of darker skinned peoples continued the tradition of conquest and domination on a global scale. Periodic backlashes - resurgences of racism and religious persecutions, renewed opposition to reproductive rights for women, repeal of laws providing economic safety nets, and periodic violence against those seeking greater rights - have resisted change.

We have also witnessed massive dominator regressions. In Europe, for example, we saw Hitler's Germany (from the early 1930's to the mid 1940's) and Stalin's Soviet Union (the 1920's to the 1950's), in which the ideals of a more just society were coopted into a "dictatorship of the proletariat," creating still another version of a brutal dominator model. And even after Western colonial regimes were overthrown in Africa and

Asia, we have seen the rise of authoritarian dictatorships by local elites over their own people, resulting in renewed repression and exploitation.

Although not everywhere as virulently, the last decades of the 20th century have been a period of regression. Under the guise of economic globalization, we have seen a recentralization of economic power worldwide.<sup>4</sup> Under pressure from major economic players, governments have cut social services and shredded economic safety-nets - an "economic restructuring" that is particularly hurtful to women and children worldwide.

The backlash against women's rights has been increasingly violent, as in the government supported violence against women in fundamentalist regimes such as those in Afghanistan and Iran. We have also seen ever more advanced technologies used to exploit, dominate, and kill - as well as to further "man's conquest of nature," wreaking ever more environmental damage.

However, there is at the same time a mounting challenge to traditions of domination. The environmental movement is growing worldwide. So also is the family planning movement as integral to environmental sustainability. Movements against the domination and exploitation of indigenous peoples; a growing challenge by peoples in the "developing world" to its domination by the "developed world," and thousands of grassroots organizations all over the world working toward political democracy, non-violent ways of living, and economic, racial, and gender equity are signs of the sustained vigor of the movement toward partnership.<sup>5</sup>

Significantly, we are also today seeing a much more organized challenge to traditions of domination and violence in intimate relations. Child abuse, rape, and wife-beating are increasingly prosecuted in some world regions. The United Nations has finally adopted conventions emphasizing children's and women's human rights. A global women's rights movement frontally challenges the domination of half of humanity by the other half, gaining impetus from women from all world regions.

This movement to shift from domination to partnership in how we structure relations between parents and children and women and men is foundational to the shift to a world of partnership rather than domination. This is because it is in these intimate relations that we first learn and continually practice either partnership or domination. While until now the primary focus of organized progressive movements has been on the top of the dominator pyramid - the relations in the so-called public sphere of economics and politics that were traditionally only relations between

men, since women and children had no say in that sphere - the base on which this pyramid rests are the foundational parent-child and man-woman relations where we first learn to either respect or violate human rights.

However, precisely because the movement toward partnership in these foundational relations is intensifying and deepening, the resistance to change is stiffening. There is continued, and in some places increasing, violence against women and children. Some of the statistical increases are because this violence was formerly unreported, as it was not prosecuted and was often instead blamed on the victims. But since violence is what ultimately maintains dominator relations, as women's and children's human rights are asserted, violence against them has also increased to beat them back into submission. In some countries, this violence is perpetrated by government officials; for example, in Afghanistan, Algeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran the stoning to death of women for any act perceived as countering male sexual and personal control - even a young woman exposing her ankles - is again being justified on "moral" grounds.<sup>6</sup>

There is also growing scapegoating of women (particularly single mothers living in poverty) and minorities, once again sometimes in the name of religious fundamentalism. And the mass media continually bombard us with stories and images focusing on the infliction and suffering of pain that ultimately maintain relations of domination and submission.

In sum, the outcome of the tension between the partnership and dominator models as two basic human possibilities is far from settled. And because this outcome will largely depend on what young people think and do, we urgently need a new approach to education.

### *Partnership Education and the Transformation of Society*

We need an education that counters 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. Some of the key elements of partnership education can be found in the box that concludes this chapter, which shows how we can through education accelerate the movement toward partnership not only as a vision but as a reality.

Partnership education includes education for partnership rather than dominator childrearing. 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. And often they learn to use psychological defense mechanisms of denial and to deflect repressed pain and anger onto those perceived as weak, in other words, in scapegoating, bullying, and on a larger scale in pogroms and ethnic cleansings.

In schools, teachers can help students experience partnership relations as a viable alternative though partnership process. And partnership structure provides the learning environment that young people need to develop their unique capacities.<sup>7</sup> But 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.

Because the social construction of the roles and relations of the female and male halves of humanity is central to either a partnership or dominator social configuration, unlike the traditional male-centered curricula, partnership education is gender-balanced. It integrates the history, needs, problems, and aspirations of *both* halves of humanity into what is taught as important knowledge and truth. Because in the partnership model difference is *not* automatically equated with inferiority or



superiority, partnership education is multicultural. It offers a pluralistic perspective that includes peoples of all races and a variety of backgrounds, as well as the real life drama of the animals and plants of the Earth we share. Since partnership education offers a systemic approach, environmental education is not an add-on but an integral part of the curriculum.

Partnership education 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!

Moreover, as the young people we have worked with through the Center for Partnership Studies' Partnership Education Program will attest, partnership education is much more interesting and exciting than the old curriculum. It offers many new perspectives - from partnership games, multicultural math, and a wealth of information about women worldwide to the opportunity to talk about issues that really engage young people to ideas, resources, and social actions that can accelerate the shift from domination to partnership worldwide.

This transformation of education is foundational to the movement toward a partnership way of living and working. Young people care about their future, and if we truly care about young people we will offer them the opportunity to be the best they can be. 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.

### Notes

1. Johann Pestalozzi, *Leonard and Gertrude* (New York: Gordon Press Publishers, 1976; originally published in 1781); John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1966; original 1916); Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973); Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964; original 1912). These works foreshadow much that is still today considered progressive education. Pestalozzi, for example, already in

the 18th century rejected the severe corporeal punishments and rote memorization methods prevalent in his time and instead used approaches geared to children's stages of development.

2. See Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987, 1988); Riane Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995, 1996); and Riane Eisler and David Loye, *The Partnership Way: New Tools for Living and Learning* (Brandon, Vermont: Holistic Education Press, 1998).
3. See Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987, 1988.
4. Some readings that contain materials that could be excerpted by teachers are Jerry Mander and Edwin Goldsmith, eds, *The Case Against the Global Economy and For a Turn Toward the Local* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996); Hazel Henderson, *Paradigms in Progress: Life Beyond Economics* (Indianapolis: Knowledge Systems, Inc., 1991); David Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler, 1995); Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan, *Global Gender Issues* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993); Riane Eisler, David Loye, and Kari Norgaard, *Women, Men, and the Global Quality of Life* (Pacific Grove, California: Center for Partnership Studies, 1995); *Human Development Report 1995*, published for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) by (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics* (New York: The United Nations, 1995). For a short piece that has some good statistics and could serve as a handout, see also David Korten, "A Market-Based Approach to Corporate Responsibility," *Perspectives on Business and Global Change* 11: 2 (June 1997): 45-55. See also the Center for Partnership Studies' website <http://www.partnershipway.org> to download "Changing the Rules of the Game: Work, Values, and Our Future," by Riane Eisler, 1997; as well as David Korten's website <http://iisd1.iisd.ca/pcdf> for additional materials.
5. For examples, see Riane Eisler, *Tomorrow's Children* and Riane Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure*.
6. Women Living Under Muslim Laws, an organization of Muslim women with offices in Pakistan and France, is an excellent source of information here. They can be reached at Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Boite Postale 23, 34790 Grables (Montpellier) - France. Another excellent source is the quarterly *Women's International Network News*, which can be subscribed to by writing to Women's Inter-

national Network News, 187 Grant Street, Lexington, MA 02173.

7. For a description of partnership process, structure, and content as the three interconnected elements of partnership education, see Riane Eisler, *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century*, Boulder: Colorado: Westview Press, 2000.

### Six Keys to Partnership Education

The Six Keys to Partnership Education summarized in the charts that follow are useful for opening minds to new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Students, teachers, parents, community activists, and other educational innovators can return to these charts as they develop lesson plans and curriculum modules for partnership education.

#### Six Keys to Partnership Education

| <u>TOOLS</u>   | <u>VALUES</u>   | <u>STRUCTURES</u>   |
|--|---|---|
| <p>In our rapidly changing world, we need new tools for thinking and acting. The partnership and dominator models are tools for more clearly understanding our world as it is - and how it can be if we more fully develop our personal and social potentials. The partnership and dominator continuum is an analytical lens that reveals patterns in what otherwise seems random and disconnected, helping us sort the information overload of our postmodern age. A related set of tools are partnership competences, ranging from emotional and parenting to scientific, environmental, and spiritual competence. Partnership education also offers the teaching tool of partnership process, which complements partnership content. It models partnership in action, helping to create a democratic, stimulating, and nurturing learning environment: a partnership structure where all students are valued and teachers, other staff, and students can relate in mutually respectful and caring ways.</p> | <p>Partnership education provides guidelines for living on this Earth in less destructive, more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable ways. Much in our culture focuses on acquiring material possessions rather than on living rich and meaningful lives. It presents violence as not only inevitable but manly. It also often gives the false impression that our only choices are between regressing to more authoritarian and less equitable ways of living or a total lack of standards. Rather than conditioning young people to live rudderless lives or to rely on external controls and fear of punishments, partnership education teaches young people values such as empathy and responsibility, showing that our actions have consequences. It empowers young people to think for themselves, develop standards for ethical and moral life choices, be better citizens, create more caring families and communities, preserve our natural habitat, and live more emotionally and spiritually satisfying lives.</p> | <p>To prepare young people to meet the challenges of the 21st century, partnership education grounds learning in an understanding of social, economic, and political structures. This makes it possible for students to see that neither personal choices nor social policies occur in a vacuum - that they are largely shaped by the constraints or opportunities of these structures. It highlights how partnership or dominator structures provide incentives and disincentives for different kinds of decisions and behaviors. It shows how all aspects of our lives - from our intimate relations to our relations with our natural habitat - are influenced by the degree to which social arrangements orient to either a partnership or dominator model. But it also highlights that we in turn can influence these social arrangements. It shows that social, economic, and political structures are human inventions - and hence can be changed to creatively meet the challenges of the 21st century.</p> |

## SCIENCE

A core component of education today is scientific information about our universe and our place and responsibilities in it. Partnership education explores the mysteries probed by science against the backdrop of a story that spans billions of years, from the first stars and planets to the appearance on our Earth of our unique human species. It highlights new scientific findings about human evolution, such as the great human capacity for pleasure from caring behaviors and the critical importance of the early years of a child's home and cultural environment. By highlighting our interconnection with our Mother Earth, it fosters ecological consciousness. It also shows that technological developments guided by a partnership ethos can be beneficial rather than destructive, and that at this critical junction in the history of our planet we humans must be conscious co-creators of our future - for our sake and for the sake of generations still to come.

## INTEGRATION

In the ever more complex, technologically interconnected, postindustrial world, young people need a new integrated approach to learning. Partnership education offers a systemic approach that weaves together materials from different subject areas, showing how they interrelate. It integrates cognitive and experiential learning, melds the theoretical and the practical, desegregates multicultural materials, and balances information about both the female and male halves of humanity. It validates the experiences of girls and boys of varying races and backgrounds. Grounded in a clearer understanding of both ancient and modern history, it offers a larger perspective on our human adventure. It both personalizes and universalizes what is taught as important knowledge and truth, helping young people envision a more equitable and peaceful world where the wonder of humanity and the richness of nature can be truly valued.

## INSPIRATION

Children need education that inspires them to be the best they can be. Much in our mass media presents a world of constant conflict, cruelty, and pain - whether in the news stories that get headlines or in the endless "entertainment" where violence and abuse are "fun." Partnership education counters this false picture of what is possible and desirable for human relations. It shows that, despite massive resistance and periodic regressions, there has during the last three hundred years been movement toward partnership rather than dominator relations in families, workplace, and governments. It highlights the inspiring stories of courageous women and men of all races and ethnic origins who have braved ridicule, censure, and violence to bring us greater freedom and equality. It shows that all of us can, through both individual and group action, through both consciousness and service, continue to strengthen this forward movement - and find real meaning and purpose in our lives.

*Additional Readings:*

- Eisler, Riane. 2000. *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century*. Boulder: Colorado.
- . 1987, 1988. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- . 1995, 1996. *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Eisler, Riane and David Loye. 1998. *The Partnership Way: New Tools for Living and Learning*. Brandon, VT: Holistic Education Press.
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