Memory and Responsibility (11)

Although the evils of the past continue to haunt us in the present, society is often unable — or unwilling — to deal with historical injustice. Thus, although specific incidents of invasion, slavery, apartheid and genocide may appear to be receding into the irretrievable past, they are never altogether absent from humankind's collective memories.

The function of collective memory should promote healing, to set up patterns of behavior that constructively parses history to avoid future problems and to teach each other through mistakes. The intent is not to blame or punish the descendants of people who perpetuated misdeeds but to encourage people to reason together and strive for reconciliation.

Written by Douglas Schuler

Back to the Roots (13)

“There are unanticipated benefits to collective and individual well-being with the reconnection to the natural world” (Barlett). Thinking holistically we can imagine and create new opportunities for reconnecting with our roots that have unexpected benefits: “a community garden in New York City may replace an abandoned lot and come to be a social focus for many who live nearby.” Barlett again, “Community gardens not only provide nutritious food and conviviality with neighbors, but can build a different sense of self through a new awareness of growing cycles, weather and human agency.” Although Back to the Roots will mean different things in different contexts, using the pattern has the potential to suggest deep and sustaining insights.

Written by Douglas Schuler

Education and Values (17)

Education promotes and replicates values. Even when not promoted deliberately, values are communicated. Yet, neither the conscious nor the implicit promulgation of values is typically designed with thought to the appropriateness of these values for the future. To address these issues, an approach to values education has been proposed that uses moral dilemmas for discussion and encourages participation.

Although education teaches knowledge and skills, it also promotes values. Values are involved in curriculum choices, how the material is presented, and the range of “correct” answers. Focusing on the history of one’s own country promotes the value of chauvinism. Placing emphasis on presidents, generals, wars, and victories promotes the values of authoritarianism and militarism. Presenting subject material using a lecture style, reinforces the value of authoritarianism as does evaluating student progress based primarily on the ability to recite facts.

Educational institutions, teachers, parents, concerned citizens and children themselves must work to uncover and understand the values that are being taught as well as to design the entire educational experience to foster those values that will help make for a sustainable and healthy future.

Written by John Thomas

Indicators (29)

When people in the community identify indicators that are important to them, the indicators are more likely to carry personal and operational meaning than when social scientists in an ivory tower identify theoretical constructs that are significant only to an academic community.

Virtually any area, conceptual or physical, could be a source of indicators. And in any area, it will be important to think of what possible actions would be possible if the indicators are adopted. What to do with information? Who could use the information? What resonance could the information have with various people and groups? Citizens need to construct community and civic indicators, publish them, discuss them, measure them, publicize them and develop policy and projects that address them.

Written by Douglas Schuler